

Mosaddek seizes while Sabbir can't

SAKEB SUBHAN from Southampton

Just under five months ago, Sabbir Rahman was rushed back early into the Bangladesh squad through board-level tinkering with the Bangladesh Cricket Board's own six-month disciplinary ban. The argument for Sabbir's re-inclusion was that he would be vital at the number seven position for Bangladesh in the World Cup and so should go on the ODI tour of New Zealand in February. Sabbir repaid that faith by striking his first ODI century against the Kiwis in the third ODI.

Around about the same time, Mosaddek Hossain was not selected for the New Zealand tour and it seemed, to those few who paid attention to this cricketer whose first-class average is nearly 60, that a promising international start would peter out into oblivion. Yesterday, Mosaddek made his second valuable contribution to a late-overs surge for Bangladesh in the World Cup from

the demanding number seven spot. Meanwhile, Sabbir was cooling his heels in the dressing room, having gotten out for a golden duck in the one World Cup match -- the previous one against Australia -- he got to play in place of the injured Mosaddek.

With Mosaddek also taking a wicket with his part-time off-spin after a cameo of 24-ball 35 helped Bangladesh score 262 for seven, the place seems to be his to lose for the remainder of the group stage at least.

There was luck involved in Mosaddek's resurgence and Sabbir's fall, but it also had to do with seizing the moment -- a quality that Sabbir has lacked since the Ireland tri-series and one which Mosaddek has shared with Liton Das, the other player who made a comeback to the first eleven.

In Ireland, Sabbir played four of Bangladesh's five matches but did not get opportunities to play many deliveries in most of those matches as neither West Indies nor Ireland could

make inroads into Bangladesh's top order until the final. Mosaddek played two matches, and when West Indies did make inroads Sabbir, promoted to number three, fell for a second-ball duck. Mosaddek won a tough chase with an unbeaten 27-ball 52.

Mosaddek then hit a 21-ball 30 as Bangladesh plundered runs in their World Cup opening win against South Africa. Despite the Ireland heroics, Mosaddek may not have had the opportunity to play the opener had Mahmudullah Riyad's injured shoulder not stopped him from bowling his part-time off-spin.

Having gotten the luck, Mosaddek has continued to cash in with competent performances with the ball and, when needed yesterday, scoring 34 of the 55 runs Bangladesh scored in the last seven overs on a slow pitch. Sabbir's luck and his capitalisation of it, meanwhile, seemed to have been used up in the one-month reduction of his ban.

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I think the pressure is increasing on everyone. We have three games against three great sides. Teams will be pushing for that last couple of spots in the final four, whether you're in there at the moment or you're pushing hard to be that side; I think the pressure is on everyone.

Aaron Finch
Australia captain

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Distrust or dysfunction?

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It was a fixture Bangladesh were supposed to win in this World Cup. They won it quite convincingly in the end, disposing of Afghanistan by 62 runs in Southampton last night.

Going into the match, the task at hand for the Tigers was to thwart the Afghan spin threat. They were successful in patches, but it was still not as satisfying as their fans would have liked. They neutralised leg-spinner Rashid Khan, but still looked shaky against off-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman, who picked up three wickets

THIRD EYE

on-field umpire's soft signal, which was out.

There were two other decisions in Bangladesh's innings that went against them. Shakib was adjudged leg before early in his innings. He decided to review it. When replays showed the ball flew over the three stumps, it turned out to be a huge moment for the Tigers. Shakib went on to score a crucial 51 to salvage the Tigers from a precarious position



The Tigers passed the Afghan spin test, but Mujeeb Ur Rahman's three wickets meant they did not do so with flying colours. PHOTO: REUTERS

at crucial stages of the game.

The Tigers changed their batting order to counter Mujeeb. But the ploy of sending Liton Das to open the innings with Tamim Iqbal instead of Soumya Sarkar backfired.

Liton was dismissed early to Mujeeb and the sharp catch taken at short cover by Hasmatullah Shahidi created a storm on social media. Replays could not conclusively show whether the ball was taken cleanly, but third umpire Aleem Dar bore the brunt of the disapproval from loyal Tigers fans for complying with the

to a comfortable 262 on a slow and turning wicket, where India were restricted to a modest 218 against the same opposition the other day.

Coming in to bat at number five, Soumya was also adjudged leg-before on three. He also reviewed, but unsuccessfully. However, had the on-field umpire's call been not out, he would have survived because replays showed the ball had just brushed his leg stump.

Those were not contentious decisions. But you can debate those umpiring rulings as much

as you may contest Bangladesh's decision to change the batting order. If Bangladesh's decision was anything other than not trusting in the strengths that have so far been successful in the tournament, then not totally trusting technology when it comes to reviewing the on-field umpires' decision perhaps falls in the same category.

Soumya was dismissed by the same bowlers from whom the Bangladesh team management decided to hide him at the start of the innings. It was perhaps unfair to the left-hander if he had he not volunteered.

This World Cup has been tainted by some umpiring errors of judgement. But more than those, the double standards -- when dismissals hinge on the umpire's initial call as a ball missing by 50 per cent can go either way -- have come under fire. There is also a grey area where the batsman gets the benefit of the doubt when replays and technology prove inconclusive.

It is about time the game's ruling body brings uniformity in decision-making if they are to trust technology, which has certainly added value in correcting on-field umpiring errors.

Mistakes are part of the game. But some mistakes hurt you most. Thankfully, Bangladesh escaped unhurt against Afghans in what was a massive game for them to stay afloat in the last-four race.

The Tigers will take on India in their next World Cup fixture on July 2. India are one of the best teams in the World Cup and it would be a monumental task for the Tigers to win against them. They came tantalisingly close on a few occasions in recent years. Their fans blamed those defeats on luck more than their ability to hold their nerves when it mattered most.

Luck certainly has something to do with success. Shakib was lucky last night. The Tigers will need more of that if they are to keep on dreaming.

England still the team to beat: Langer

AFP, London

Australia coach Justin Langer says England are still the team to beat at the World Cup despite their surprise loss to Sri Lanka.

England's seemingly assured path to the semifinals now looks a lot less smooth after a 20-run reverse at Headingley followed an earlier group-stage defeat by Pakistan.

They next face Australia at Lord's today, with the reigning champions in fine form after winning five of their six games so far -- the only blot on their record a defeat by India.

But Langer said England fully deserved their place at the top of the ODI rankings. "They are the best team in the world. Just look at their team... nothing has changed in a week," Langer said on Sunday.

"I can't wait for Tuesday -- England at Lord's, World Cup. That is what we are thinking about," added the former Australia opening batsman.

Langer had a stint in the English domestic game with southwest side Somerset, where he first encountered a young Jos Buttler. The England vice-captain is now regarded as one of the quickest-scoring and most innovative batsmen in the game, with Langer nominating the wicketkeeper-batsman as the natural successor to veteran India great MS Dhoni.

"Jos is an unbelievable player. I love watching him bat. He is the new Dhoni of world cricket," said Langer.

"I hope he gets a duck in this (Tuesday's) game obviously, but I saw him at Somerset and he is an unbelievable athlete and an incredible finisher. They (England) have a very strong batting unit and we will have to be right on it."

But Australia have several in-form batsmen of their own, notably opener David Warner, who is the tournament's current leading run-scorer with 447 from six innings.

Both Warner and Steve Smith were roundly booed when they faced England in a World Cup warm-up match in Southampton. Langer, asked if he expected more of the same even from the traditionally polite spectators at Lord's, replied: "Yes, probably but that is OK."

"There is nothing we can do about the crowds or the opposition. We will just go about our business."

"His [Warner's] runs speak for themselves. He is smiling a lot. He is hungry. He is playing well."

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Williamson running risk of a ban

REUTERS, London

After being fined part of their match fee for a slow over rate against West Indies on Saturday, New Zealand will be keen to keep things ticking along with skipper Kane Williamson facing a one-match ban.

Williamson was fined 20 percent of his match fee and the rest of the team 10 percent for a slow over rate in their five-run victory.

As captain, Williamson would face suspension if the side are fined again, with New Zealand set to play Pakistan, Australia and England in their final three group stage games.

Unbeaten New Zealand top the table and look good for a semifinal spot but with three tight matches ahead the side will be keen not to lose such their talisman for the run-in.

Williamson has scored back-to-back centuries, the 28-year-old holding together New Zealand's chase against South Africa with 106 not out and then rescuing their innings with 148 against West Indies.

'Embarrassed, disappointed and baffled'

South Africans lament early World Cup exit

REUTERS, London

South Africa's players expressed bitter disappointment and even embarrassment after their elimination from the World Cup was ensured by their loss to Pakistan at Lord's on Sunday but they said they would learn lessons and return stronger.

The Proteas' chances of progressing in the tournament evaporated after they logged their fifth loss in seven matches, making it mathematically impossible for them to secure a top-four spot and a place in the semi-finals.

"It's becoming where it's a little bit embarrassing. We're trying, but it's just not good enough. Obviously I'm human as well so it will keep chipping away at me," captain Faf du Plessis told reporters after a 49-run defeat at Lord's.

"I'm a very proud player and captain, and playing for South Africa means a lot for me, and the fact (is) that the results we're dishing out at the moment - you know it's really, really tough," he said.

The headline bowler, pacer Kagiso Rabada, said the whole team felt like they had failed to play to their usual standard, both on Sunday and throughout the tournament.

"Pakistan turned up, and we didn't," he said. "We're very disappointed. We tried so hard at practices and we spoke about what we needed to do, but unfortunately we just couldn't bring it out into the field of play. And that's what you have to do in tournaments like this."

"We try to prepare, we do our analysis. We come in with a good mindset - it's just execution is one thing that's been a question mark for us," added Rabada.



It really has been difficult to watch. I try and consider the plans and thoughts but I'm baffled.

GRAEME SMITH
FORMER SOUTH AFRICA CAPTAIN

Du Plessis said the team had been running low on confidence as their losses piled up and turning that around rested mostly with each individual player.

"For me at the moment, it's a confidence thing. The guys are playing with low confidence and therefore making more mistakes," he said.

"The responsibility lies with every player to try and make sure that he comes to the park and gives everything, and if confidence is an issue, you need to sort it out yourself."

"You know, if I could I would get my wand out and get some runs on the table for our batters. But I can't, unfortunately."

Rabada and Du Plessis said the team had lessons to learn, and that they would be fighting to get things right next time.

"We'll definitely be back firing, looking to nail some of the things that we wanted to nail in this tournament," Rabada said.

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Off the first ball of the 18th over of the Bangladesh innings, leg-spinner Rashid Khan came to bowl his second over. Bangladesh had just lost Tamim Iqbal in the previous over and required some sort of stability. But they had a scare when Rashid's very first delivery to Shakib struck the left-hander's pad before the on-field umpire raised his finger. Shakib asked for a review, signalling that the ball had hit him high on his pads. The review showed the ball was indeed missing the stumps and Shakib continued with a smile.