



Ahead of their virtual World Cup knockout match on July 2, Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and India wicketkeeper-batsman MS Dhoni enjoyed a chat at the team hotel in Birmingham yesterday. Come Tuesday, the Tigers will surely look to break India's unbeaten run to make their case for a semifinal berth. PHOTO: BCB

Debate over Dhoni's scoring rate

AGENCIES, New Delhi

MS Dhoni has been criticised for his not-so-impressive strike rate in World Cup 2019.

Former India cricketers Sourav Ganguly and VVS Laxman were divided in their opinion on Dhoni's approach. While Laxman joined Sachin Tendulkar to criticize Dhoni for his lack of intent in the middle overs, Ganguly continued to back Dhoni.

"It's a one-off and I won't look too much into it. Yes, MS Dhoni has been in the situation in the past, last year when he came to England, we saw the same struggle with spin," Ganguly observed.

"He (Dhoni) needs someone to play with him, and if he bats with Virat Kohli at three, K L Rahul at 4 and he is at 5, or with the likes of Hardik Pandya, life becomes a lot easier for him because they keep hitting and he keeps rotating the strike," Ganguly added.

"No doubt Dhoni is having problems to rotate the strike in the middle overs. He appears to be fine against seamers but certainly not against the spinners. Now you have to ask the question is Dhoni showing the right intent? For me, he is perhaps not. You expect so much more from an experienced player like Dhoni, who has the ability to score quickly," Laxman explained.

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TIGERS' WHITE WHALE

SAKEB SUBHAN from Birmingham

Bangladesh have worse results against other teams. They won only one of 21 matches against Australia and against Pakistan, they have won just five of 36. However, India remain the White Whale for the Tigers, not just because of a 5-29 win-loss ratio, but because in recent times India have been the one fish -- or mammal -- that got away despite Bangladesh having them in their grasp.

The most recent such example was the teams' last encounter, in the Asia Cup final in Dubai, last September. Centurion Liton Das and surprise opener Mehedi Hasan Miraz had the Indians on the ropes with a 120-run opening stand, but then Bangladesh imploded to 222 all out. They still showed fight to take the match to the last over, but were heartbroken again, again at the hands of India in a crunch game.

Before that, Bangladesh lost the Nidahas Trophy T20 final against India in Colombo when Dinesh Karthik hit Soumya Sarkar over cover for six off the last ball of the match. The 2016 World Twenty20 is perhaps the harshest as Bangladesh were dumped out of the tournament after needing just two runs to win from three balls, only for the three wickets to fall without a score being added. They had also lost the 2017 Champions Trophy semifinal and the 2015 World Cup quarterfinal against India, and the

2016 T20 Asia Cup final to India. In the ongoing World Cup too, with Bangladesh in a position where they have to win their next two matches to stand a chance of qualifying for the semifinals, the Tigers are faced with their white whale.

Having run a fine, praiseworthy World Cup campaign so far, if Bangladesh are to stand a chance of upstaging the form team of the tournament and gaining arguably the team's most prized scalp, there are a few areas they could look to shore up on.

EARLY WICKETS, CALLING SOUMYA AND FIZZ

This works both ways. Only once in their six matches in the ongoing World Cup -- in the match against New Zealand on June 5 -- have Bangladesh taken more than one wicket in the first 10 overs. Against India that could well be costly, especially if the likes of Rohit Sharma are allowed to settle in. Bangladesh have some inspiration to draw on from the World Cup warm-up game against India on May 28. Mustafizur Rahman opened the bowling, got the wicket of the now-injured Shikhar Dhawan and consistently troubled Kohli and Sharma with his pace and swing. However, his consistency has been a concern in



TAMIM IQBAL

the tournament proper and, if he does open the bowling, any loose balls will be punished by Sharma and KL Rahul -- who scored a century in the warm-up.

While most of the onus will be on Bangladesh's misfiring bowling attack, the challenge of playing India now is that they also have arguably the best bowling attack. Bangladesh's batting is their strong suit, but with their style of play -- gradually building towards a sizeable total rather than rocketing to it -- it is imperative that openers Tamim Iqbal and Soumya Sarkar give them a big start. The duo have been performing well -- early wickets have not been a feature of Bangladesh's batting since the



SOUMYA SARKAR

tri-series in Ireland -- but with India's varied bowling attack, they have to absorb the pressure and put some of it back before passing the baton onto the in-form middle order headed by Shakib Al Hasan in red-hot form. While Tamim has not set the world alight, he still has 205 runs from six matches. It is Soumya, with 111 runs from six games, who has to step up next Monday.

BURST THROUGH FEAR OF FAILURE

After the Asia Cup final loss in 2018, skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza had said in an interview that there had to be improvements in mental strength. He talked about how, even when the



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

openers were building a strong stand, the fear of something bad happening was at the back of his mind. It can justifiably be said that if the mentally strong captain experienced this fear, then the rest of the team -- having gone through heartbreaks against India -- felt it too. He speculated that perhaps that fear was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The talk, on the record and off, has been to play the next two matches as one-offs and play the opponents as they come. If they can match up in skills with India on the day, it may well come down to staving off that fear when it comes to winning crunch moments.

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SRI LANKA	R/B	4s/6s		
Karunaratne c				
Plessis b Rabada	0/1	0/0		
Perera b Pretorius	30/34	4/0		
Fernando c du Plessis b Pretorius	30/29	4/0		
Mendis c Morris b Pretorius	23/51	2/0		
Mathews b Morris	11/29	1/0		
De Silva b Duminy	24/41	2/0		
Mendis c Pretorius b Morris	18/46	1/1		
Perera c Rabada				
b Phehlukwayo	21/25	0/0		
Udana c & b Rabada	17/32	1/0		
Lakmal not out	5/7	0/0		
Malinga c du Plessis b Morris	4/2	1/0		
Extras: (b-4, lb-3, w-13)	20			
Total: (All out in 49.3 overs)	203			
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-67, 3-72, 4-100, 5-111, 6-135, 7-163, 8-184, 9-197, 10-203.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Rabada	10	2	36	2
Morris	9.3	0	46	3
Pretorius	10	2	25	3
Phehlukwayo	8	0	38	1
Imran	10	0	36	0
Duminy	2	0	15	1
SOUTH AFRICA	R/B	4s/6s		
De Kock b Malinga	15/16	3/0		
Amla not out	80/105	5/0		
Du Plessis not out	96/103	10/1		
Extras: (lb-1, w-14)	15			
Total: (For 1 wkt in 37.2 overs)	206			
Did not bat: Van der Dussen, Markram, Duminy, Pretorius, Phehlukwayo, Morris, Rabada, Tahir.				
Fall of wickets: 1-31.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Malinga	10	1	47	1
De Silva	4	0	18	0
Lakmal	6	0	47	0
Perera	5.2	1	28	0
Mendis	7	0	36	0
Udana	5	0	29	0
Result: South Africa won by 9 wickets.				
Player-of-the-match: Dwaine Pretorius.				

Back in the era of fast bowlers

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

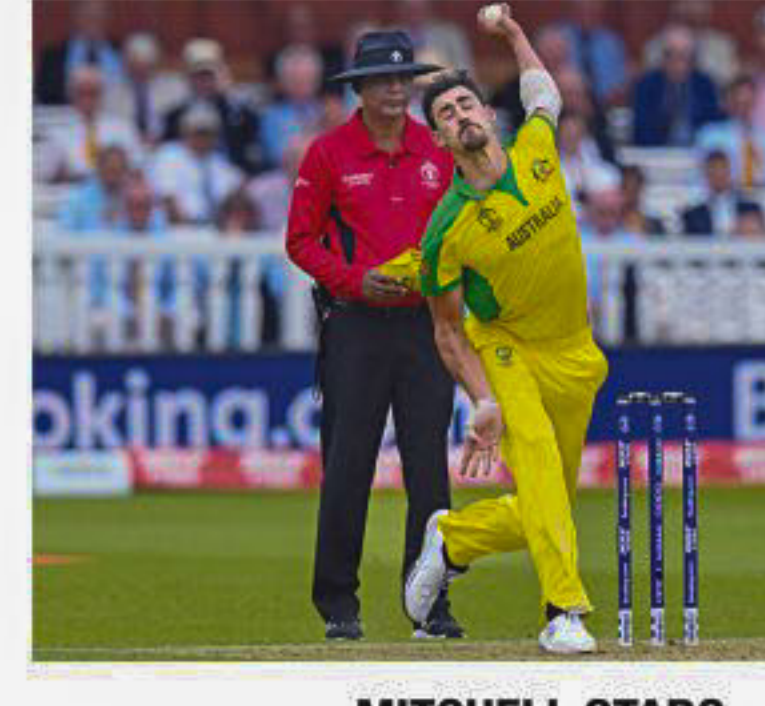
We were promised a World Cup of runs. Glittering and charismatic batsmen showing the full array of their shots on docile wickets where 350-400 totals were to be the norm. The bowlers just mere sheep to be reared; going in through one end and coming out empty; without lustre.

Things turned out to be very different indeed once the tournament started. It was time for the true catalysts of excitement to take over. They took over and how. From Lasith Malinga, Mitchell Starc, Jofra Archer to the likes of Trent Boult and Lockie Ferguson; we witnessed a different level of domination in an era where bowlers had previously been reduced to bowling machines.

The spinners? It was said that leg spinners would get purchase on these English wickets. That spinners would talk the talk when fast bowlers were being hit all over the park. How perceptions changed. While spinners added necessary variations, it was the fast bowlers who decided proceedings when it mattered most.

There is no sight better in world cricket than a fast bowler running in; chest heaving, about to bowl a delivery that is meant to change the fortunes of his team. The batsmen feeling the pace and aggression make a whole hearted impact. Not anymore.

The English conditions are generally conducive to seamers but recent series before the World Cup suggested that while true bounce will prevail, the pitches generally will not provide affection to the fast men.



MITCHELL STARC

However the summer rain brought a glitch to the proceedings at England. It is being argued whether the grounds men had enough time to prepare the solid batting pitches the ICC wanted. That is where the best among the crop rose up and what we are seeing now is the adventure that these bowlers are taking us on.

Mitchell Starc, the 'Grand old Duke of yorker' a writer from Cricinfo called him. Currently the leading wicket-taker at this World Cup, the 2015 edition's player of the series is having another outstanding tournament. Australia are an attacking side but Starc spearheads that Australian mentality of what attacking cricket has to be. He picks up wickets, early, then in the middle overs and the death overs. That white ball, old or new, is lethal in Starc's hand and he bowls them at a decent pace of 152kmph. The yorkers are a sight to behold. Swinging in from a very full length and tailing in; late and going through the batsmen's defences. That has been the trademark of Starc's World Cup so far. His delivery to knock back the off stump of Ben Stokes might have been the ball of the tournament.

Jofra Archer, the 'Barbadian traitor', induced much excitement ahead of the World Cup and he has lived up to the billing. Born in West



MOHAMMAD AMIR

Indies, Archer did not even feature in the initial England squad for the World Cup. His pace and bounce have worried batsmen to say the least. In the opening match, he hit Proteas opener Hashim Amla with a bouncer that rose viciously like a pouncing Tiger from a length and led to the batsman being retired hurt. Against Bangladesh, he went through the defences of Soumya Sarkar with a delivery that nipped back in and the ball went for six after clipping the off stump. Raw pace and scrambled seam at work.

Pakistan's Mohammad Amir came into this World Cup looking very uncertain about form and flow. He had been out of the Pakistan lineup for a while and perhaps looked to bowl within himself. His crazy talent though was exposed. Another exponent of the scrambled seam and the slower cutters, Amir's knowledge of the white ball has seen him become the most feared bowler in the World Cup. He dismantled Australia at Taunton; singlehandedly he thwarted the Aussies from getting to a 350-plus total with his wily movement and seam position. On his day, Amir is the one to watch out for.

Lasith Malinga is the old horse of this tournament. His former pace has passed him by and his pot belly now precedes him by a



MOHAMMAD AMIR

fraction as he runs onto the crease but what remains are the subtle variations and aggression. The importance of that aggression cannot be overly stated and England's formidable batting lineup wilted under it at Leeds as the Lankans caused an upset.

India's Jasprit Bumrah is not to be denied his place. Not known for either pace or vicious movement, the very nature of his deception is his most potent weapon. His arm often comes in at such an angle, that it would appear that there is a certain disability to target the stumps. But that is what he does. The yorkers are inch perfect and has troubled the best in the business. If you want to take him for runs, you better have some shots in your hand that others have not imagined yet.

The likes of Lockie Ferguson, Pat Cummins, Wahab Riaz and Mark Wood or Boult are not lagging behind. Together they have put on a fascinating show of fast bowling. We have not been treated to the excitement that was induced by a Shoaib Akhtar or a Brett Lee but the likes of Starc is now taking wickets at an average of 25.4, rivalling some of the best that have come before him. The fast bowlers have decided matches even amongst the run fests as we witness a short 'era' where they simply did not get erased. The spirit of the fast bowler lives on.

RAHIM STEEL

RAHIM STEEL
تیسواں
آل پاکستان

South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis led the side from the front with a brilliant unbeaten knock against Sri Lanka in their World Cup match yesterday. After restricting Sri Lanka to a modest 203-run total, Faf scored 92 not out to help set up an easy win for the Proteas.

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