

'Lessons to be learned from England loss'

AFP, Birmingham

Rohit Sharma admitted there were "lessons" to be learnt from England's bowlers after India suffered their first defeat of this World Cup against the hosts on Sunday.

Sharma hit 102 -- his third century of the tournament -- but India fell short of their 338-run target in 31-run loss at Edgbaston.

Jonny Bairstow led England's charge with his 111 off 109 balls to set up an England victory that got them a step closer to booking a semi-finals berth.

Bowlers led by Chris Woakes then bowled a disciplined line to choke India in the final overs despite a 138-run second-wicket stand between Sharma and skipper Virat Kohli.

"They played better cricket throughout this match. While batting they had not one but three partnerships. On the other side we had only one big partnership," Sharma told reporters after India's first loss in seven matches.

"They mixed the short ball and the slower ball and forced us to hit at the

longer boundaries which was a lesson for us for our next game."

India need to win one of their remaining two group matches to clinch their semi-final berth, with their next clash against Bangladesh slated for Tuesday back in Birmingham.

Virat Kohli's side looked capable of making a record World Cup run chase at 198 for two from 36 overs, only to lose the plot in the last 10 overs.

England paceman Liam Plunkett took three key wickets, including the prized scalp of Kohli for 66.

Woakes struck early to send back KL Rahul trudging back to the pavilion for nought and later cut short Sharma's innings in the 37th over.

"Losing an early wicket always puts you under pressure, and we lost KL right at the start, and they bowled pretty well in the first 10 overs," said Sharma.

- Boos and short boundaries - MS Dhoni and Kedar Jadhav were criticised for their lack of intent in the final five overs when the duo managed just 39 runs.

It is not the first time that Dhoni, who remained unbeaten on 42 off 31 deliveries, and Jadhav, who made 12 not out, have got flak for batting slowly.

But Sharma defended his batsmen while stressing the England bowlers made it hard for both Dhoni and Jadhav, who were both booed by a large Indian crowd in Birmingham.

"When MS and Kedar were batting, I think they were trying to hit, but they were not able to because of the slowness of the pitch," said the Indian vice-captain.

"You've got to give credit to English team because they used the conditions really well. They used the longer boundary really well."

But Kohli was not too pleased with the ground in Birmingham having a very short boundary on one side, saying the toss became crucial due to this factor.

"The toss was vital, especially since the boundary was that short. It is a coincidence that it just falls under the limitations of the shortest boundary you can have," Kohli said in the post-match presentation.



Sri Lanka batsman Avishka Fernando is delighted after scoring his maiden century in the World Cup against West Indies at the Riverside Ground in Chester-le-Street yesterday. Sri Lanka won the match by 23 runs. PHOTO: REUTERS

Fearless Tigers can unsettle mighty India

AL-AMIN

It has so far been a captivating World Cup for Bangladesh this England summer. Three wins against as many defeats and a disappointing washout fixture against Sri Lanka hardly reflect how fiercely they have fought in the showpiece event so far.

And more pressingly going into their penultimate league game against India at Edgbaston today, the Tigers will not go out there for just an academic interest but with a much bigger stake as far as the race for a slot in the last four is concerned.

India will also be under pressure in a game where their place in the semifinals might be put on the line in a topsy-turvy World Cup, which has so far guaranteed one semifinalist in defending champions Australia with one and a half rounds to go.

Some might argue against it, but it was the Tigers who provided the impetus in this World Cup with their fearless batting. South Africa came into this tournament as one of the favourites but were effectively derailed by the Tigers. They have chased down West Indies' 322 in some style. They might have lost against Australia and England but the way they set on chasing those massive targets before falling short were treat to watch. The Tigers lost a close game against New Zealand and, had the result gone in their favour, they could have been in pole position to make it into the last four.

True that Bangladesh are yet to win a game against India since their home series in 2015. But they were only to blame for losing a few close games, failing to hold their nerves when it mattered most.

If you consider the strength of the two

THIRD EYE

teams, India certainly hold a massive edge in two departments - bowling and fielding. But the Tigers have the potential to match the strong Indian batting line-up.

And today's game at Edgbaston will most probably be decided by bat rather than the ball, where Bangladesh will desperately look for their young opener Soumya Sarker to come to the party with all his poise and grace.

The left-hander has got starts but failed to make it big. India might have Rohit Sharma who has the ability to destroy an opponent bowling attack on his day. But Soumya can have a more devastating impact as an opener. The Tigers fans will desperately want that star to be aligned for Soumya to make a big statement in the biggest stage.

Soumya apart, the Tigers will also look for their young left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman to come out of his indifferent selves. He has so far been struggling with his line and length. He has also not been trying his yorkers, which has been the most effective weapon in this World Cup, due to lack of confidence. It is about time for Fizz to deliver what could possibly be a tailor-made wicket for his cutters to grip.

Bangladesh have so far tried in vain different options to make an impact with the new ball. This is something they will have to live with for not having a quick bowler of repute at their disposal. Against India, containment will be the obvious plan with a set of bowling attack that is more disciplined than attacking.

Despite that limitation, the Tigers fans will once again root for their beloved team that

has injected enough belief that they can still overcome their mighty neighbours in today's battle when India will be the team under pressure more than Bangladesh, who have nothing to lose but everything to achieve.

India under pressure? You don't need to research for that. Just recollect the Indian batting approach in the last five overs against England at the same venue on Sunday. With 71 runs needed to win, they conceded the defeat despite their finisher Mahendra Singh Dhoni still at the crease. Dhoni stroked singles and perhaps from the Indian point of view it was a pragmatic approach to keep their net run-rate healthy, which at the end of their defeat against England stood at plus one.

But in hindsight it also exposed that fear factor of losing their next two games -- the first being against Bangladesh.

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Finch hailed for backing his instinct in key moments

ICC

Australia assistant coach Ricky Ponting has lauded skipper Aaron Finch for his tactical acumen and positive approach in his team's success at the ICC World Cup 2019.

For the last two decades, Australia have been torch-bearers at the Cricket World Cup, having won four of the last five editions. The team currently leads the points table in this year's World Cup, with seven wins from eight games. Their success in this tournament has been powered by consistent performances from their key players, brought about by efficient captaincy from Aaron Finch. Ponting, a two-time World Cup-winning captain, recently hailed the 32-year-old's ability to back his instincts during key moments of the game.

"The way that Finchy is leading this team now right through this tournament has been outstanding," Ponting told cricket.com.au. "The way he's using his bowlers and not just using them at the moment, but he's thinking forward in the game as well. He's very in-tune,



but he's also very confident in believing in what he thinks is right and going with that."

Throughout the tournament, Australia have seized key moments in the game to dent their opponent's progress. Their 86-run victory over New Zealand, at Lord's, was no different.

"The big moments in every game, we've been winning, and that's the difference in tournament play," Ponting said. "Most games that we've played, there have been moments where the game has been slipping away and

we've had to dig really deep and claw our way back into the game, and today was another great example."

Against New Zealand, Finch used as many as eight bowlers, including himself, on a Lord's track that assisted spin. Steve Smith, who had made his Test debut as a leg-spinning all-rounder at the same venue nine years ago, dismissed Colin de Grandhomme on the first ball of his second spell.

"Justin (Langer) was actually behind one today, he was behind Smithy bowling to de Grandhomme when he first came out," said Ponting. "We were sitting on the balcony saying, 'if this comes off, this will be the biggest fluke of all-time.' Sure enough, the first ball he hit straight down long-off's throat. You could see he was pretty happy about that one."

Ponting also appreciated the positivity around the team, citing it as the reason for his team's success. "There's some really good vibes around the team. You put all those things in the mixing pot together, it's not rocket science -- you're going to get good results."

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