



If the fighting spirit Bangladesh have shown so far is anything to go by then the Tigers will look to finish their World Cup campaign with a win against Pakistan in London today. Fans will surely hope for star all-rounder Shikhar Al Hasan (L) to strut his stuff while the return of injured Mahmudullah Riyad would certainly bolster the side. PHOTO: BCB

'No such thing as a dead rubber'

SPORTS REPORTER from London

Bangladesh will have the honour of playing their last World Cup game against Pakistan at the prestigious Lord's Cricket Ground today, but taking some of the gloss off the occasion will be the fact that neither teams have a chance to make it to the semifinals, thus making the match an academic one.

Bangladesh's loss to India on Tuesday ruled them out of the semifinal race and although Pakistan have a theoretical chance, it is only theoretical. If they bat first and score 400, they will have to win by 316 runs, and lesser first-innings totals would require proportionately outrageous margins of victory for the 1992 champions to get to the semifinals. If they lost the toss and are asked to bowl first, then it is all over as they would have to make Bangladesh's total in one ball.

Despite the academic nature of the match, Bangladesh head coach Steve Rhodes insisted that there was a lot to play for, not least the opportunity to do something special

Uncertainty abounds around Mashrafe

SAKEB SUBHAN from London

In a World Cup campaign marred by injury scares, there was one certainty in the Bangladesh team -- that despite crippling injuries, skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza would play. After a 28-run defeat to India on Tuesday knocked Bangladesh out of the semifinals race, even that seemed to have become uncertain yesterday, ahead of today's final World Cup game against Pakistan at Lord's.

Having nursed a hamstring injury throughout the World Cup and not taking part in practice yesterday, there were questions over whether Mashrafe would play today's dead-rubber match -- which would be his last World Cup game. There has already been speculation about whether he would retire from cricket after the World Cup, and the whispers were given a fresh lease when the 35-year-old did not show up for the pre-match press conference at Lord's yesterday. It was instead Bangladesh coach Steve Rhodes who walked into the press conference room and soon enough, was fielding questions about Mashrafe's international future.

While the coach's words implied that Mashrafe would be playing today's match, they were uttered around eight hours before the team meeting that would help determine the playing eleven. Closer to that time, those close to or involved in the decision-making process could either not be reached or those who could be would not commit even off the record to saying that there was no doubt surrounding Mashrafe's participation in his last World Cup match.

"The one thing about Mashrafe with the players is that they respect him incredibly. I often use the word 'warrior... he goes to war for the team and people respect that, understand that, and they love him because of that," Rhodes said. "The players in the dressing room do love Mash, and this is -- he has said it's his last World Cup, and it will be emotional for him."

"Let's understand and respect Mash's situation regarding his last game in the World Cup but then concentrate on the

cricket. Hopefully, the boys will give him the right sort of respect playing his last game in the World Cup, but then most importantly, we'll concentrate on the match."

Mashrafe was quoted as saying, during the five-day break between the matches against Afghanistan and India, that he was not thinking of retirement and that he would not retire after the World Cup.

He then told The Daily Star that he would make a decision on retirement only after the World Cup ends. Muddying the waters further has been his meagre bowling returns in this World Cup. Hampered by a hamstring injury that he has been carrying throughout the event, Mashrafe has taken just one wicket from seven matches and has often struggled to complete his quota of 10 overs.

It could be that Mashrafe has been trying to avoid further questions about retirement, and so did not come to the press meet. However, it would only take a repetition of what he said earlier -- that he will decide only after the World Cup is done and once he is back home -- to

quash speculation for the time being.

There is precedent of him announcing retirement during a press conference, as he did when he called time on his T20 career in April 2017 in Sri Lanka. He however had told The Daily Star last week that since this announcement would end his cricket career as a whole, it could not be taken so hastily and would have to be taken after consultation with family back home.

Bangladesh are set to tour Sri Lanka for an ODI series after the World Cup, and the coach did not say anything definite about Mashrafe's involvement.

"He's our leader. If he's on that plane to Sri Lanka, fine. If he's decided different, then fine, we move on. I want to explain that. Bangladesh has to move on eventually without Mash, and whether it's after this tournament or whether it's in a year's time, at some stage Bangladesh has to move on and we have to do without. It can be a difficult void to fill."

Right now, it seems only Mashrafe knows what his future, immediate and long-term, holds.

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WI-AFG SCOREBOARD

WEST INDIES	R/B	4s/6s
Gayle c Ikram b Dawlat	7/18	1/0
Lewis c Nabi b Rashid	58/78	6/2
Hope c Rashid b Nabi	77/92	6/2
Hetmyer c sub (Noor Ali)		
b Dawlat	39/31	3/2
Pooran run out		
(Ikram/Shirzad)	58/43	6/1
Holder c Dawlat b Shirzad	45/34	1/4
Brathwaite not out	14/4	2/1
Allen not out	0/0	0/0
Extras: (lb-4, w-9)		13
Total: (For 6 wks in 50 overs)		311
Fall of wickets: 1-21, 2-109, 3-174, 4-192, 5-297, 6-297.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mujeeb	10	0	52	0
Dawlat	9	1	73	2
Shirzad	8	0	56	1
Gulbadin	3	0	18	0
Nabi	10	0	56	1
Rashid	10	0	52	1

AFGHANISTAN	R/B	4s/6s
Gulbadin c Lewis b Roach	5/6	1/0
Rahmat c Gayle		
b Brathwaite	62/78	10/0
Ikram lbw b Gayle	86/93	8/0
Najibullah run out		
(Hetmyer/Brathwaite)	31/38	1/1
Asghar c Holder		
b Brathwaite	40/32	4/1
Nabi c Allen b Roach	2/6	0/0
Samiullah c Hetmyer		
b Roach	6/9	0/0
Rashid c Holder		
b Brathwaite	9/16	0/1
Dawlat c Cottrell		
b Brathwaite	1/2	0/0
Shirzad c Allen b Thomas	25/17	2/2
Mujeeb not out	7/5	1/0
Extras: (lb-2, nb-2, w-10)		14
Total: (All out in 50 overs)		288
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-138, 3-189, 4-194, 5-201, 6-227, 7-244, 8-255, 9-260, 10-288.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Cottrell	7	0	43	0
Roach	10	2	37	3
Thomas	7	0	43	1
Holder	8	0	46	0
Allen	3	0	26	0
Brathwaite	9	0	63	4
Gayle	6	0	28	1

Result: West Indies won by 23 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Shai Hope

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We're keen to end on a high: Sarfaraz

AFP, London

Pakistan skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed admitted his team need a miracle to qualify for the World Cup semi-finals as they prepare for their final league game against Bangladesh at Lord's on Friday.

"Pakistan require an outlandishly big victory but if Bangladesh bat first, their chances of catching New Zealand will be gone."

"Obviously, we are here to win all the matches," said Sarfaraz, whose team have lost their past four one-day internationals against a fast-improving Bangladesh.

"We will do our best to win the last game as well to end on a high and we will do our best to achieve that but we need to be realistic, but if Allah helps then miracles can happen," he said.

"It's like you score 600, 500, 400 on a pitch then you think you can get the other team out for 50 and then win

by a 316-run margin. If you think realistically, then we can only try."

"But the first real thing will be to win the match."

Pakistan's highest total at the tournament is the 348-8 they made in their shock win over England. The host nation's 397-6 against Afghanistan is the best of the World Cup so far.

Sarfaraz said it had been tough to post big totals on the pitches being used in the tournament.

"If you look at the tournament then, realistically, the tournament is of 280-300 totals," said Sarfaraz.

"If you look at the pitches, they were not for free-scoring. They were tough for batting with spin and the ball was not coming onto the bat."

Pakistan were shot out for a paltry 105 in their first match, with the West Indies winning in just 13.4 overs, meaning they took a huge hit on run rate.

They won just one of their first five matches, coming back strongly to beat South Africa, New Zealand and Afghanistan to sit fifth in the 10-team table.

Tigers 'taking in' history

SPORTS REPORTER from Lord's

Dead rubber or not, if cricket is one's profession then not much motivation is needed to be pumped up about a match at the Lord's Cricket Ground. Bangladesh have been eliminated from the race to the 2019 World Cup semifinals, but from the expressions on the faces of the players standing on the iconic dressing room balcony at the Pavillion End of the hallowed ground, today's match against Pakistan would be made all the more special by the venue.

"Yeah, they really enjoyed the walk from the coach through the gates, the Grace Gates," Bangladesh coach Steve Rhodes said during the pre-match press conference yesterday. "As soon as they got in the pavilion, you could see them looking at the paintings along the walls of the staircase, and then heading into the changing rooms and looking at the boards with five-wicket hauls and Test match 100s."

Two Bangladeshis have their names on those boards. Opener Tamim Iqbal -- still a part of the team now -- had struck a phenomenal Test hundred in 2010 and in the same match pacer Shahadat Hossain had taken a five-wicket haul.

"A few of them went straight out onto the balcony and they were taking it all in. That's what you need to do at Lord's. You need to not let it overpower you, but take it all in because it's one of the best places to



The iconic Lord's Cricket Ground in London is a treasure trove of cricket memorabilia and so it was no surprise that the Bangladesh team drank it all in yesterday, ahead of their final match of the ongoing World Cup against Pakistan today. PHOTO: SAKEB SUBHAN

play cricket." To be at the ground is to walk amongst history -- a statue of WG Grace playing a flick off his pads has been placed without much ceremony opposite the inauspicious museum, which itself is a cricket-lover's treasure trove, full of memorabilia and images of legends past and present.

Dead rubber or not, Bangladesh will be a part of that history, and that should be enough motivation for them to give their last match

against Pakistan their best shot today.

"They probably thought that was it, and then as soon as they walked through the Long Room, there was more to see in the walk down to the ground. Hopefully, they'll have happy memories tomorrow. Nobody likes losing, so if you lose, often you're hopeful that you can try and forget it. Certainly, playing at Lord's really is something you should never forget as a person."

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