



Bangladesh interim coach Khaled Mahmud (C) wore a distraught look upon the team's return yesterday from a tour of Sri Lanka, where the Tigers suffered a whitewash in a three-match ODI series against the hosts in Colombo. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

No point hiding from that: Shakib

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The Bangladesh cricket team arrived in Dhaka yesterday after their 3-0 whitewash by Sri Lanka in the ODI series. A few of the players looked understandably dejected or just lost in their own thoughts and neither interim manager Khaled Mahmud nor the players talked to the media upon arrival, keen to get away from the hustle and bustle at the airport.

While none of the players who toured Sri Lanka had much to say, one man who did not play the series but talks eloquently regarding most situations, had important things to say. Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan attended a program at Banani Bidyaniketan School & College and while he usually talks about having a 'bad series' when Tigers do not perform up to expectations, this time the disappointment factor was clear. He did not say much but indicated there were reasons behind the team's failures and that it did not happen out of the blue.

"It is disappointing of course. There's no point hiding from that," the all-rounder said.

Shakib, who had been in extraordinary form during the World Cup, reiterated that at times a lot of things are taken for granted in Bangladesh cricket.

"In the World Cup, when the match against Sri Lanka was rained off, everyone

assumed that there were two confirmed points there [that Bangladesh lost], but it was proved in this series that it was not confirmed. We could have won or lost," Shakib said, perhaps hinting that consistency was more important than just counting chickens before they are hatched and getting disappointed when things do not materialise as expected.

The Sri Lanka series proved that there was a lack of readiness and proper preparation after the conclusion of the World Cup in England -- where Bangladesh finished eighth in the ten-team table after harbouring hopes of making it to the semifinals -- and it was clear from Shakib's words that he feels now is the time to devote to finding out how to increase the level of the side.

If the recently-concluded World Cup and the Sri Lanka series are anything to go by, the team management have a lot to work out, show long-term vision and not fall back on short-term contingency plans that can stagnate Bangladesh cricket.

"It [the Sri Lanka series] was of course disappointing. Even having lost the series, if we could have won one match it would have been good for our confidence, but that did not happen. Maybe it is now time to think deeply and plan for the next three-four years," he said.

"I am sure that the responsible people

in the BCB (Bangladesh Cricket Board) are thinking of this, and we have also chosen two coaches. Maybe when we have a full coaching staff, they can present a plan to the board. If that is done then I think our cricket can progress from the point that we had advanced to in the last four or five years," he added.

Rumours surfaced about problems in the Tigers' squad following the World Cup with several media outlets reporting a conflict of opinions among seniors. Captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mahmudullah Riyad's fitness had been another issue during the World Cup. While it is true that bad times cultivate rumours and while Shakib did not want to divulge much, he indicated how to begin consolidating and fix issues.

"The reasons [behind the disappointing Sri Lanka tour]; I always say that I don't think they are things everyone should know. I think it is best to discuss it with those related with the team -- the coaching staff and players -- and solve the problems. I don't feel comfortable discussing these things out in the open."

With the team needing to find answers fast, Shakib's words hints at underlying issues and as a veteran of the side, the board perhaps would do well to heed what their best performer in the World Cup is saying.

'Resting players can also bolster pipeline'

SPORTS REPORTER



Shakib Al Hasan's performance in the World Cup was the sole aspect of Bangladesh's campaign that was consistently positive. Such was his impact on the tournament that despite the team finishing a lowly eighth, even neutral observers were left asking why he was not awarded the player-of-the-tournament award. It also showed the gap between the rest of the team and the world's best all-rounder.

Although he was not part of the side that abjectly lost the three-ODI series in Sri Lanka on Wednesday, his comments on the team's troubles revealed much about the mindset that Bangladesh cricket need to adopt to elevate itself from their current mid-table status.

The team currently operates in a culture where it almost becomes a state of emergency when one of the senior players get injured. Many players are coaxed by board high-ups to play with injury. Shakib had asked for a break after his World Cup heroics and when asked during an appearance at a dengue awareness event at a school in Banani whether his absence was the reason for the Tigers' 3-0 whitewash, he talked at length about how resting players can be beneficial to the team in the long run.

"It is my opinion, it could be right or wrong, that a player should only play when he is ready," Shakib said. "It becomes difficult when a player is not fit and yet playing. How fit or unfit you are plays a big role, be it mentally or physically, in performance. We have to understand this now because in the modern game there are so many matches that it is very important to manage these things. If you look at other teams, they have started to manage these things with discussions between coaching staff, physios and players because they know that it is not

possible for a player to keep playing continuously. "So, these breaks are important; it will also give other players an opportunity and I think that new players will be created in the pipeline. I think we have to plan these things in detail; I have just said it briefly here, and we will talk more about it when this is discussed."

Skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, whose career has been a study in injury management, played most of the World Cup with what he termed on record as a 'Grade 2' hamstring tear and was visibly struggling on the field. There were allegations against young all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin when he missed the World Cup game against Australia through injury to the effect that he did not want to play.

"I think it is the responsibility of both parties; when a player says that he needs a break or the coaching staff tells the player that he should take a break, the other should understand," Shakib, also the vice-captain of the ODI side, said. "Take India as an example. Over the last four years, their players have been injured the least and that is because they adopted a rotation policy. That created a lot of players and a lot of players got exposure. At the same time, when players returned they were fresh and performed well."

"So, we have to understand this and work on it. I think players, coaching staff and the board will have to be in close communication and on the same page about this. Otherwise, negative talk surrounding this will emerge if the information is not conveyed well."

He also weighed in on Tamim Iqbal's trouble with the bat. "Look, a player can go through such a patch. I think it is most important for him to have a good rest, recover and become fresh and come back strongly. I am sure he will do that."



SCAN THE QR CODE TO READ THE STORY



Bangladesh star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan (C) attends a namaz-e-janaza for Shamim Kabir, the first national team captain at international level, at the BCB Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Tanzid guides Bangladesh U-19s to final

SPORTS REPORTER

Opener Tanzid Hasan struck 113-ball 117 as Bangladesh Under-19s beat England Under-19s by 72 runs at the Toby Howe Cricket Ground in Billerica yesterday.

The victory saw Bangladesh Under-19s book a place in the final of the tri-nation series—featuring Under-19 team of Bangladesh, India and England.

The Young Tigers posted a challenging 224 total in 47.1 overs and dismissed their opponents for 152 runs in 39 overs.

Earlier, after being asked to bat, Bangladesh got a decent start following the early dismissal of Parvez Hossain in the third over, when the young Tigers were on 18. After that, opener Tanzid strung together a 108-run second-wicket stand with Mahmudul Hasan and another 78-run third-wicket partnership with Towhid Hridoy.

SCORES IN BRIEF BANGLADESH UNDER-19S: 224 all out in 47.1 overs (Tanzid 117, Mahmudul 41, Towhid 31; Kimber 5-38) ENGLAND UNDER-19S: 152 all out in 39 overs (Haynes 40, Bean 30; Tanzim 3-28, Rakibul 3-19, Shahin 2-29, Chowdhury 2-23) Result: Bangladesh Under-19s won by 72 runs.

Smith's masterful ton lifts Aussies

AFF, Birmingham



Steve Smith marked his return to Test cricket with a hundred before Australia were bowled out for 284 on the opening day of the Ashes series against England at Edgbaston yesterday.

The former captain was playing his first match at this level since completing a 12-month ban for his role in a ball-tampering scandal in South Africa last year.

Australia were struggling at 17-2 when Smith walked in to bat after current captain Tim Paine won the toss for the Ashes holders, looking to win their first Test series away to England in 18 years, and took the bold decision to bat first.

And they were in dire straits at 122-8. But their last two wickets more than doubled the score before Smith was last man out for 144 -- his 24th Test century.

Stuart Broad, who eventually bowled Smith, led England's attack with 5-86 in an innings in which 37-year-old spearhead James Anderson only managed four overs before leaving the field with a calf injury.

Earlier, Broad and Chris Woakes tore through Australia's batting line-up with Steve Smith fighting a lone battle to keep the rampant World Cup winners at bay.

The visitors were struggling at 154-8 at tea with Broad (4-38) and Woakes (3-35) sharing seven wickets between them.

England's performance was especially impressive given James Anderson, their all-time leading Test wicket-taker, bowled just four overs before going for a scan on a right calf injury.

A partisan crowd booed the visitors when they walked out for the pre-match anthem ceremony. David Warner and Smith at least knew what to expect, having been given similar rough treatment during the recent World Cup, which saw England beat defending champions Australia in an Edgbaston semi-final.

Dangerous left-handed opener Warner was lbw to Broad for two and did not bother with a review, even though technology suggested the

ball would have missed leg stump.

As the initial exultant cheers from the crowd at an early wicket died down, Warner was subjected to a prolonged chorus of boos on his walk back to the pavilion, with spectators in the Hollies Stand waving strips of sandpaper and shouting "cheerio".

Fellow opener Cameron Bancroft, who was banned along with Smith and Warner after he applied sandpaper to the ball during a Test in Cape Town last year, hit two boundaries but then edged a fine Broad delivery that bounced and cut away to England captain Root at first slip.

The combination of Bancroft departing and Smith walking in to bat prompted the loudest jeers of the morning.

Usman Khawaja then departed for 13 in an innings where the umpires had several decisions overturned, England needed a review to confirm a dismissal that left Australia 35-3.

Smith and Travis Head saw Australia to a lunch score of 83-3.

But a fourth-wicket stand of 64 ended when Head was lbw to Woakes for 35, with new batsman Matthew Wade falling in similar fashion to leave Australia 105-5.

Smith was in dire need of solid support and got it from Peter Siddler (44) to take away the initiatives from England.

The match is the first of the ICC's new World Test Championship, with players' names and squad numbers displayed on the backs of their shirts for the first time in 142 years of Test cricket.

SCORES IN BRIEF AUSTRALIA: 284 all out in 80.4 overs (Smith 144, Head 35, Siddler 44; Broad 5-86, Woakes 3-58, Stokes 1-77, Ali 1-42) ENGLAND: 10 for no loss in 2 overs (Burns 4 not out, Roy 6 not out)



Australia star batsman Steve Smith singlehandedly turned the tide against England with a sublime 144 on the opening day of the first Ashes Test in Birmingham yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Unsettled India start rebuilding in Florida

AFF, Lauderhill



India head into their all-format tour of the West Indies this weekend with more on their mind than simply winning a couple of T20s.

For Virat Kohli's side -- and indeed for the West Indies -- it is a chance to pick up the pieces after a disappointing one-day international (ODI) World Cup in England and put behind them the recent talk of splits in the camp.

Kohli's confidant Ravi Shastri is on borrowed time before the appointment of a new coach, former captain MS Dhoni has skipped the tour to do military service while Kohli this week has had to dismiss talk of a rift with prolific opening batsman Rohit Sharma.

"It baffles you as a leader, as a coach, and as a team when lies are being floated around," Kohli told reporters this week.

"And they are made to look believable. We have had no issues."

India, unexpectedly beaten by New Zealand in the World Cup semifinal last month, are likely to find plenty of support during the first two T20s on Saturday and Sunday with expatriate Indians expected to outnumber West Indian fans at the delightful Central Broward Stadium in Lauderhill, Florida.

The stadium hosted its first internationals back in 2010 when New Zealand played Sri Lanka in two T20s.

West Indies and India played a T20 there three years ago and produced real fireworks, with KL Rahul smashing a century off 46 balls and Evin Lewis responding for the West Indies with a ton off 49 balls. The Indians won by just one run.

Rahul will be hoping to replicate that form in Lauderhill and in the third T20 and ODI series in Guyana and Trinidad but the Indians will miss the experience of Dhoni as well as all-rounder Hardik Pandya, who has been rested, and fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah, who will join the squad for the tour-ending Test matches.

The Tests in Antigua and Jamaica will have a special significance as they will mark the first round of matches for each side in the new World Test Championship.