



**Shadman Islam has been working hard on facing spin bowlers and insists that the Tigers have no reason to fear Rashid Khan when Bangladesh and Afghanistan begin their one-off Test from Thursday.**

PHOTO: BCB

## Lemos still proud of Abahani

ANISUR RAHMAN

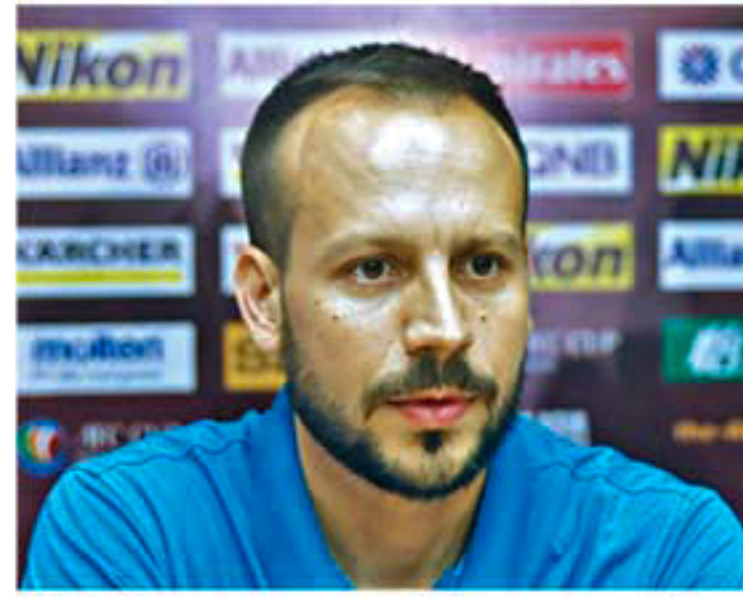


Portuguese coach Mario Lemos is still proud of Abahani although they failed to make it to the AFC Cup inter-zone final play-off following an 5-4 defeat on aggregate at the hands of North Korea's April 25 SC.

The Sky Blues suffered a 2-0 loss in the second-leg match of the inter-zone semifinal in Pyongyang on Wednesday.

"I am still proud of Abahani. There is no dissatisfaction over not making it into the inter-zone final because Abahani beat a good side like April 25 in the knockout stage [4-3 in the first leg] after emerging group champions with 13 points with four wins and one draw and loss each whereas they had finished the group stage of the AFC Cup with only four points in the previous two editions.

"I told the players they can now say that they beat a strong club like April 25 and gathered the experience of the kind of preparation they need to play against such a club, who are really the strongest side I have met in my coaching career," Lemos told The Daily Star over phone from



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**ABAHANI COACH MARIO LEMOS ON THE TEAM'S TRIP TO PYONGYANG**

China yesterday.

The coaches, players and officials were out of reach since Abahani entered North Korea on Monday

with hopes of getting a result that would see them make history by becoming the first Bangladeshi club to play the AFC Cup inter-zone final.

Lemos shared his experience of the trip to the world's most secretive state, where he spent three days in a hotel without internet or contact with the outside world.

"It felt weird as there was no internet; no communication with others. We could not make any contact on the first day but the players contacted their families the next day through phones and completed the conversations with hi and hello," Lemos recounted.

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"Even reporters looked afraid of asking the questions in the calm and quiet environment of press conferences."

It was also learnt that Lemos's laptop was checked and the books he had carried were scrutinised at immigration.

After the rigid checking at the airport, the Portuguese coach had a tough time on the artificial turf, where April 25 proved pacier than in the first game in Dhaka.

"It was a really tough match for us because they started strongly. We had also some scoring chances but could not avail those opportunities. Sunday [Chizoba] missed in a one-on-one situation with the goalkeeper and [Nabib Newaj] Jibon squandered one chance while another chance was created by a long throw-in from Raihan [Hasan] in the first half," the 32-year-old continued.

"We were on course at half-time as it was 0-0 but we conceded at the start of the second half. There was still a chance to come back but it was really tough when Mamun Mia was sent off with a second booking while attempting to foil a counter attack. We tried to equalise but conceded from the counter attack at the last moment.

"There were more spectators than in Dhaka in the gallery and they were loudly backing their club throughout the match," Lemos added, before reiterating that April 25 were the better side on the day and deserved a victory.

## 'No extra plan regarding Rashid'

SPORTS REPORTER

With Bangladesh set to take on Afghanistan in a one-off Test which begins on September 5, it is not surprising that the Tigers are more focused on finding ways to navigate the spin heavy Afghan bowling attack during their net sessions.

Bangladesh opener Shadman Islam, who will almost certainly play the opening role in the Test against Afghanistan, said that the Tigers are readying themselves for the upcoming challenge at home.

"We are planning a bit differently for the match against Afghanistan as they have a very good spin attack. We always work extra for facing pacers so we thought of putting in some extra work to play spin this time. Most of their players, like Rashid Khan or Mohammad Nabi, all bowl with variations. For that reason we are working on playing spin more as we usually work on playing pace," said Shadman after yesterday's practice session in Mirpur.

According to Shadman, even though the Tigers are going the extra mile to

face spin bowling, it does not mean they are intimidated by Rashid Khan, who is currently considered as one of the most lethal leg-spinners in the World. Shadman also mentioned that they do have any special plans to tackle the 20-year-old Afghanistan skipper.

"We do not have any extra plans regarding Rashid Khan since we will play a Test match and to bowl in shorter formats and in Tests are two different things. So we are not worried about him as we plan to play in the usual way we play against spinners. We play against some quality spinners in our country so I do not think that Rashid Khan can put us under extra pressure. Also the format is very different, it cannot be matched with T20s," concluded Shadman.

Bangladesh batsmen have struggled against Rashid in ODIs and T20s almost every time they faced Afghanistan in the two shorter formats. In addition, since this is the first time that the two nations will face each other in a Test, it remains to be seen how the Tigers will fare against a Rashid led Afghanistan side, who have four frontline spinners in their ranks.

## Rain mars third day

SPORTS REPORTER

The third day of the first four-day match between the Bangladesh High Performance (HP) team and their Sri Lankan counterparts was marred by rain at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday.

Although the hosts dominated the first two days, the match will most likely end in a draw as only 49 overs could be played yesterday due to rain.

After starting the day on 101 for four in 38 overs, the Sri Lanka HP team could add only 89 runs to their tally for the loss of two wickets.

Overnight batsman Promod Maduwantha was the first to fall after scoring a 136-ball 40 in the 60th over. However, Ashen Bandara remained unbeaten on 57 runs off 208 balls to help the visitors finish the day on 190 for six in 87 overs.

For Bangladesh HP, Shafiqul Islam and Tanvir Islam scalped a wicket each.



There were concerns as midfielder Masuk Mia Jonny fell to the ground after sustaining an injury to his calf muscle during the national team's preparation camp for the joint qualifiers of the World Cup and Asian Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Fortunately, it turned out to be nothing serious. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## FROM A LONG WINTER TO THE 'SUMMER OF STOKES'



SAMAMA RAHMAN

In September 2017, Ben Stokes's world came crashing down around him.

The then 26-year-old had become embroiled in a streetside brawl, landing punches that threw his entire career into question. He was stripped of vice-captaincy for the England Test team as proceedings against him began and was dropped from the squad for the Ashes -- which holders England would go on to lose by a comprehensive 4-0 margin.

However, that was not the first time Stokes was humiliated, even if it was the most impactful.

Three years ago, Stokes fell to the floor in agony after conceding 24 runs from the first four balls of the final over in the World T20 final. The pressure of the occasion, coupled with some ruthless flogs from Carlos Brathwaite, had snatched from England what looked a certain win.

The Christchurch native would go on to miss five months of international cricket before returning in February 2018. After he was cleared of the affray charges in August 2018, his lawyer had this to say: "This has been a very difficult period for Ben. He's had to maintain his silence at times when many on social media and certain parts of the press predetermined his guilt long before the trial began. Now that the trial is over, Ben is keen to get back to cricket being his sole focus."

The statement was certainly fair, with many claiming Stokes should have been banned for a year regardless of the verdict. However, the all-rounder never once brought up the issue or mentioned the histrionics of the English press. He was, as his lawyer said, focused on cricket.

From the time of return to cricket in February 2018 until the start of the World Cup, Stokes had averaged 28.92 with the bat in Test matches. His ODI batting average of 47.25 across that same period makes for good reading. He did impress with five half-centuries and was unbeaten during two of them. He finished not out three other times on 35, 26 and 20, which inflated the numbers. Of the five matches where he struck half-centuries, England lost three. In the bowling department, he had picked up just 10 wickets in the 19 ODIs where he bowled. He fared a lot better in Tests, getting 32 in 13

matches, but there was not, and perhaps it would be impossible for there to be, any sign of what was to come.

It would be remiss to not mention here the English side's brilliance over the past two years, which saw them become the best one-day team in the world. By the time the World Cup had made its way to the island's shores at the tail-end of May, they were labelled -- rightly as it turned out -- favourites.

It was not all easy sailing for Stokes or the hosts though. The 28-year-old did his best, but often it was not enough. He hit 89 in the opener in a win against South Africa but his battling unbeaten 82 was undone by Lasith Malinga rolling back the years to leave England needing to win at least two of their final three games. In the following game, Stokes hit 89 against Australia only to see his side lose and on the verge of exit. But, instead of being



deflated, he came back again with a 79 against India before the team fired in his stead -- he only made 11 -- against New Zealand to seal a place in the semifinal against Australia, where England cantered to a win without Stokes needing to bat.

Then, on July 14, Stokes had a career-defining innings. He came in with England on the brink of losing a World Cup final everyone expected them to win against the Kiwis. This time he would not let himself down. After soaking up the pressure for what seemed like ages as Jos Buttler attacked, he saw the side to the Super Over in dramatic fashion. But he wasn't done yet. Exhausted and red-faced, he walked back out and did just enough for England to raise their maiden World Cup trophy. This time, the pressure of the occasion didn't matter.

Less than a week ago, Ben Stokes was the only thing standing

between Australia and the Ashes. After England were bulldozed for 67 in their first innings, Stokes came in with England on 159 for three in chase of 359. That quickly became 159 for four before Stokes contributed 50 to an 86-run stand with Jonny Bairstow to take England to 245 for five.

Disastrously, Stokes then erred with his call and Jos Buttler paid the price, run out at the non-striker's end. That was enough to light a fire in the ambidextrous all-rounder's belly. However, the tail was exposed after Chris Woakes lasted eight balls and one run, and most of them had no interest in staying the course, let alone getting the runs.

The rest is history. Stokes did get the runs and he did take England to a win in a game that will be talked about whenever the merits of Test cricket are mentioned. But to say it was his finest innings would almost be an injustice; it was multiple innings rolled into one and played to near perfection.

At three stages of the game, Stokes paced himself exactly as the situation demanded. He scored three off his first 73 balls. He reached his fifty off 152 balls and, with the situation becoming desperate and his partners dropping like flies, he hammered 74 off 45 balls with the help of seven sixes to get England across the line.

The one delivery that should have seen him depart was wrongly adjudged not out by the umpire but Australia -- simply in their desperation to get the last wicket -- had used up their final review only moments earlier.

Two years ago, one would not face much opposition for calling Stokes self-indulgent. This week, after reaching a milestone hundred

in the Ashes, Stokes did not deign to celebrate. There was no jump, no roar, no celebration. He raised a hand to acknowledge the crowd and continued on a mission. For a minute it seemed there was only man who believed England could come away with a famous victory. Fortunately for the world champions, he was at the crease.

It was only his second century since August 2017 -- the prior one coming in the second Test of the same series -- but the 'Summer of Stokes' has instilled, and then refined, a desire to win that is insatiable.

It was only after ensuring the match was won that Stokes let out a roar matched by the crowd at Headingley, before crashing to his knees in a mixture of disbelief and fatigue. That expression continued into the locker room, where Stokes was pictured sitting in a chair and trying to take it all in -- much like the rest of the world was.

"I don't think it's completely sunk in; the main reason is we have two games to go," Stokes said to Sky Sports News after his epic. "If we don't get the Ashes back, what will it feel like? I will only take real satisfaction from the innings if we win back the Ashes."

As awe-inspiring and memorable as it has been, it did not begin in 2019. If the fire of Eden Gardens all those years ago was where Stokes had been tempered, the circus at the Bristol crown court was where this tremendous mental fortitude was forged. The sun may soon set on the 'Summer of Stokes' and the Ashes are not won yet, but his heroics -- which have led to clamours for a knighthood already -- will stand the test of time for all seasons to come.

