

SPORT



'Happy with Mushfiqur the keeper'

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Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim's performance behind the stumps has often come under scrutiny because of occasional lapses that cost the team, especially during this summer's World Cup in England.

Once again, there were questions about whether the 32-year-old should keep doing his duty behind the stumps or if he should hand over the gloves to Liton Das, the other wicketkeeper-batsman in the squad.

Interestingly, considerations of fielding utility was head coach Russell Domingo's reason for continuing with Mushfiqur in the role.

"We enjoy what Liton [Das] offers on the field. He is a fantastic fielder and a better fielder than Mushy. For me, having as many good fielders available to us is important. Those five or six runs saved by fielders like Liton, Afif [Hossain] and [Nazmul Hossain] Shanto are very important in short-format cricket," said Domingo in Mirpur yesterday.

Domingo, however, also mentioned that Mushfiqur offers more than just keeping and is happy with his performance.

"I am genuinely happy [with] the way Mushy keeps. He puts good energy behind the stumps; he is an experienced player and offers the captain advice. He has got a good view from behind the stumps, so there are lots of reasons to keep Mushfiqur the wicketkeeper."

In his first assignment as Bangladesh head coach, Russell Domingo (R) saw his team suffer a humiliating defeat against Afghanistan during their one-off Test earlier this month. However, the South African will now be looking to get his first major achievement -- winning the T20I tri-series trophy -- by defeating Afghanistan in the final in Mirpur today. He will be hoping for skipper Shakib Al Hasan to fire once again as he did in the Tigers' last game against Afghanistan in Chattogram on Saturday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Still seeking the perfect T20 game'

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Bangladesh are yet to come into their own as a settled unit in cricket's shortest format and one of the biggest barriers to achieving that is the absence of a power hitter.

The Tigers had to come up with different strategies to overcome this deficiency, at times taking unconventional approaches. Most recently, it was promoting a middle-order lynchpin like Mushfiqur Rahim to open the innings, which he did unsuccessfully in the Tigers' first league match against Afghanistan in the ongoing T20I tri-series on September 15.

With a well-drilled T20 batting method conspicuous by its absence in Bangladesh's play, head coach Russell Domingo seemed yesterday to move past funky remedies and opt for the more tried and tested method of keeping wickets in hand for a late charge

in the last five overs of today's final against Afghanistan.

The former South African head coach is in search of the perfect game that the Tigers, according to the South African, are yet to have played in T20Is. In the four matches of the ongoing tournament, Bangladesh went to the last five overs with scores of scores of 117 for six, 97 for six, 90 for three and 101 for five and has then averaged 9.21 runs per over in the last five overs.

"We have not played the perfect game of cricket yet. We have been good and bad in some areas and we are trying to find the perfect game. We have not got to the last five or six overs with only two or three wickets down. We lost one or two too many wickets in the first 10 overs. We want to get to over number 15 maybe with two wickets down, which will allow us to try and exploit the last five overs. That's one area that we will try to focus on... try to keep a few wickets in hand for the back-end overs," Domingo

We have not played the perfect game of cricket yet. We have been good and bad in some areas and we are trying to find the perfect game. We have not got to the last five or six overs with only two or three wickets down. We lost one or two too many wickets in the first 10 overs.

RUSSELL DOMINGO
BANGLADESH HEAD COACH

told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

With overcast conditions and the rain forecast today, the coach did say that they are going to add a fourth seamer in the twelve-member team and take a decision

on the final lineup before the game. Domingo has one eye on the World T20 in Australia next year and informed that playing with four seamers is an area that the team management would certainly consider.

"Winning now is important, but we also have to think of what is in the best interest of the team going forward. It is a fine line to balance it. It is always good to have a fast-bowling attack but I understand the culture, and the fact that the strength of the team lies in spin bowlers. I am trying to find the balance as a coach," he said.

Although young all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin said on Sunday that it would be enough for Bangladesh to win against Afghanistan by giving their 70 per cent, Domingo disagreed and said that the Tigers would have to raise their intensity if they really want to beat Afghanistan, a side ranked three places higher than the hosts in T20Is.



Bangladesh midfielder Mohammad Ridoy (C) vies for the ball with two India players during their final Group A fixture of the SAFF U-18 Championship in Kathmandu yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

U-23s lose 3rd one-dayer

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The Bangladesh U-23 team suffered a 49-run defeat (D/L method) at the hands of their Indian counterparts in the third of a five-match one-day series at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow yesterday.

The match was reduced to 22-overs a side due to rain interruptions.

After being asked to bat, India scored 114 without loss in 22 overs. Both Indian openers Yashasvi Bhusendra Jaiswal and Aryan Juyal remained unbeaten for 53 and 51 runs respectively.

Bangladesh were given a revised target of 174 in 22 overs. Bangladesh faltered to 124 all out in 21.4 overs with a team high of 50 coming from the bat of Mahidul Islam Ankon. For India, right-arm medium pacer Atit Sheth remained the pick of the bowlers, returning figures of three for 11 in his three overs.

Kohli receives demerit point

AGENCIES, Bangalore

Virat Kohli, the India skipper, has received an official warning on Monday while a demerit point has been added to his disciplinary record for "inappropriate physical contact" during the third T20I against South Africa in Bengaluru on Sunday.

The incident occurred during the fifth over when India were batting, with Kohli making shoulder contact with South Africa pacer Beuran Hendricks while taking a run.

Kohli was found guilty of a Level 1 breach of the Article 2.12 of the ICC code of conduct.

Will go for it even if I have a 10% chance: Rashid

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The biggest concern for Afghanistan ahead of today's T20I tri-series final against Bangladesh is the availability of talismanic skipper Rashid Khan after the leg-spinner suffered a hamstring injury during their last league game against the same opponents on Saturday.

The Afghanistan physio said yesterday that he was still fifty-fifty for the crucial encounter at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The team management will take the final call on the 21-year-old before the game today, but a determined Rashid was eager to take part in the all-important final.

"If I have 10 per cent chance of playing, I will go for it because I love



morale]... not at all. We have to focus on the next game tomorrow [Tuesday] since the group stage is gone. We need to do the basics right, which we have done positively in the first two games. The most important thing is we are in the final. The previous losses or wins are not an issue.

"I think the way we have been playing for the last three or four years, especially in T20Is, if we play our best cricket, we can beat any team in the world. I think we have the talent and the team. We just have to keep calm and perform," Rashid said.

There was talk of the home side possibly opting for a pace-friendly surface for the final to offset Afghanistan's strength in spin, but Rashid said that they were ready to adjust to whatever pitch they were faced with and apply themselves to the task.

Bangladesh secure semifinal spot

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Bangladesh moved into the SAFF U-18 Championship semifinals with a goalless draw against India in their final Group A fixture at the APF Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday. If it was merely a ploy to confirm a semifinal berth with a single point, Bangladesh executed their plans well.

Having registered a 3-0 win in their first match against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh required only a draw to progress. Bangladesh coach Andrew Peter Turner was glad that the team followed through on their plans and expressed satisfaction with their performance.

"I am pleased with the performance. India, before the play start, were favourites but we executed the plan extremely well," said Turner after the match.

Turner also highly praised how hard the defenders worked saying that, 'nothing goes through them', while adding that the midfielders were outstanding, especially when it came to one-on-one tackles.

Turner hoped that his charges could repeat the performance in the semifinal.

"You never know what could happen if we repeat this performance," he said.

Disaster struck early on for India as they lost first-choice goalkeeper Prabhukhan Gill to injury when he clashed heads with a Bangladesh player during a long throw-in in just the fifth minute.

The first half lacked goalmouth action, barring the 36th minute when India's Sumit Rathi came close to heading one in from a corner. In the second half, India started to create opportunities an could have taken the lead when Vikram Pratap Singh sent Ninthoingamba Meetei into the box with a long-ball in the 76th minute, however, Meetei was effectively closed down by a Bangladesh defender.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh only attempted a few aerial passes.

The semifinal will take place at the same venue on September 27 and the opponents will be decided through the last group match between India and Sri Lanka on Wednesday. The final is slated for September 29.



People gathered in huge numbers at the indoor stadium in Mirpur yesterday to buy tickets for today's T20I tri-series final between Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

PHOTO: STA