

Can Tigers carry lessons to perfection?

NABID YEASIN

From a potential batting collapse to winning the game by 155 runs, Bangladesh scripted an applaudable turnaround in the first ODI against Zimbabwe in Harare on Friday. To get the desired outcome, there were a number of boxes that the Tigers had to tick but a few others were still unmarked. Here, we look at both:

BOXES THEY TICKED

One of the top five scores big: "The message from the team management was that one of the top five batsmen needed to bat beyond 40 overs," Liton Das said after making that wish materialise by batting till the 42nd over en route his fourth ODI ton to seal Bangladesh's commanding victory.

Strong finish at the death: Failing to capitalise on a flying start due to a lack of firepower in the lower-order is a problem Bangladesh have been struggling with for years. However, after Liton's well-paced ton revived Bangladesh's innings, cameos from Afif Hossain and Mehedi Hasan Miraz ensured the Tigers posted a commendable total.

Getting early breakthroughs: Pacers Mohammad Saifuddin and Taskin Ahmed need to be credited for their aggression and accuracy on a pitch that had a green tinge and lots of purchase for fast bowlers. After the duo combined to remove Zimbabwe's openers inside five overs, young pacer Shoriful Islam left his mark by sending back Dion Myers in the 11th over.

The Shakib effect: Although there was no respite from his poor run of form with the willow, Bangladesh's premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan turned up with the ball in hand. The left-arterner was the epitome of how a spinner could use guile and precision to make an impact on a pace-friendly wicket. He ran through the Zimbabwe middle order, picking up the crucial wickets of Brendan Taylor and Regis Chakabva on way to his third five-wicket haul in ODIs.

BOXES THEY DID NOT TICK

Getting the toss right: Although the coin flip depends totally on luck, its importance in giving Zimbabwe the initial edge is undeniable. Understanding the pitch and taking the right decision is key and although Bangladesh lost the toss, they were certainly on the right track as Tamim had mentioned his intention to bowl first on a seaming wicket. Perhaps luck will be on his side in today's second ODI and the southpaw will again make the right call.

Instability in the middle-order: Had it not been for Liton's timely ton, the absence of batting mainstay Mushfiqur Rahim, may have cost the Tigers dearly. Shakib and Mohammad Mithun both got starts but threw their wickets away while Mosaddek Hossain hit a 15-ball five. With Nurul Hasan Sohan, who has vast experience in the domestic circuit, in the squad, the team management could opt for some slight tinkering to the middle-order to bring about greater stability.

Lacking the patience to stick around: This is something that the Tigers need to work on immensely. Even if Tamim's failure to curb his desire to cut a bouncing delivery that was way too close to his body can be excused, what Shakib and Mithun did were unpardonable. Both players seemed to be in a hurry to score quick runs and perished after playing rash, unnecessary shots. The agonising part for fans was that they once again failed to convert after a decent start.

Despite a few drawbacks, Bangladesh were able to stage a comeback and win comprehensively. But the truth is that a low-ranked Zimbabwe's lack of ability played a role in that outcome. The pertinent question now is how far Bangladesh can go in

regards to displaying a relatively flawless performance in their second game today.



Bangladesh's ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is congratulated by Zimbabwe captain Brendan Taylor on taking five wickets at the end of the first ODI at the Harare Sports Club on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP



BASHUNDHARA KINGS RETAIN TITLE

Bashundhara Kings players and officials celebrate their title triumph in Women's Football League at the Bishreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday. The defending champions thrashed Jamalpur Kacharipara Ekadosh 18-0 to confirm their second title on their second appearance in the league. They won all 13 of their matches so far having scored 107 goals and conceding only one. The two-time champions will look to cap off another remarkable campaign with a victory against Nasrin Sports Academy in their last match of the campaign tomorrow.

PHOTO: BFF

'Important to highlight small contributions'

Bangladesh's second ODI against Zimbabwe today

SPORTS REPORTER



Following a convincing win in the first ODI, Bangladesh will look to seal the three-match ODI series as Tamim Iqbal and his troops take on the host Zimbabwe in the second ODI in Harare today.

Liton Das showed great maturity, after Bangladesh lost four wickets upfront including skipper Tamim Iqbal and experienced Shakib Al Hasan, as the right-hander went on to smash his fourth hundred to help his side post a winning total of 276 for 9. Young Afif Hossain also chipped in with a quick 45 off 35 and Mehedi Hasan Miraz scored 26 as Bangladesh added 48 runs off the last five overs.

According to Tamim, the relatively younger players performing is a positive sign for the team in the upcoming days.

"We were in trouble at one stage and something that I always say is that the juniors will also have to perform with responsibility. Yesterday (Friday) was an ideal situation where Liton

played a very responsible knock.

"Afif's innings was crucial, as had he not played that knock in that situation we may have scored 30-40 runs short and wouldn't have reached 270 plus. Even Miraz's innings of 20 odd runs was also vital for us because if we had quickly lost one more wicket



after the departure of Mahmudullah Riyad bhai then we would've been in trouble. So I think it is equally important to highlight the small contributions as well," said Tamim ahead of the second ODI yesterday. Meanwhile, there were few injury

concerns in the side where Tamim is still carrying a knee injury while Liton had also hurt his wrist during the first ODI while batting. Left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman, who picked up an ankle injury during the two-day warm-up game ahead of the Test series and also missed the first ODI, is still doubtful for today's game.

"I am set to play the three ODIs with this injury but I think I will be able to manage it. As far as I know, Liton's condition is much better than before and will probably be available for tomorrow (today). Mustafizur is still 50-50 and we will be able to assess his condition properly by afternoon. Apart from that, everyone is fit in the team," he added.

Although Bangladesh won the first game with a huge margin of 155 runs, and yet, according to the 32-year-old there is still a lot of room for improvement with the bat, especially in the top-order. Tamim however, did express his satisfaction over the bowling department as they bundled out Zimbabwe within a small total of 121 runs where Shakib picked up his third five-wicket haul in ODIs.



Members of Australian contingent stretch as they wait to take the Covid-19 antigen test after arriving at Narita International Airport ahead of Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in Japan yesterday. Meanwhile, Tokyo Olympics organisers on Saturday reported the first case of Covid-19 at the athletes' village, along with 14 other new cases connected to the Games that begin next week, raising fresh doubts over promises of a "safe and secure" event. The latest cases were a blow to the local organisers and the International Olympic Committee, who have insisted the Games will not become a super-spreader event.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SL kick off series against India's newbies today

AGENCIES



A bunch of fresh faces will be desperate for a fair T20 World Cup audition when India's different-looking yet formidable white-ball squad face an under-fire Sri Lanka in the six-match limited overs contest, beginning with the first ODI at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today.

Sri Lanka are second to bottom with only one victory in nine matches and would be aiming to improve their standings on the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League points table.



The suspension of Kusal Mendis and Niroshan Dickwella due to bio-bubble breach in UK along with injury to former skipper Kusal Perera puts Sri Lanka in a tight spot. Newly-appointed skipper Dasun Shanaka will have the huge task on his hands of overturning the hosts'



poor form in the ODI format. India also have a squad brimming with new faces, as many of the big names are currently camped in England, preparing for the upcoming five-match Test series. Led by the vastly experienced Shikhar Dhawan, the visitors

still have ample quality in their ranks and the likes of Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Hardik Pandya, Yuzvendra Chahal, and Manish Pandey will have the responsibility of guiding the youngsters on the tour.

Winning any international series will be paramount but one can expect a few combinations being tried out during a series which got delayed by five days due to COVID-19 scare in the Sri Lankan camp. The series comprises three ODIs and as many T20s.

If Sri Lanka can manage to win the series, that will be an achievement in itself after a disastrous tour of England.

Mohammedan thrash Baridhara

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club consolidated fourth spot on the Bangladesh Premier League table with a 4-1 thrashing of Uttar Baridhara Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The win took the Black and Whites to 32 points from 18 matches, four clear of Chattogram Abahani while Baridhara remained in ninth position with 15 points from 17 matches.

Amir Hakim Bappi gave Mohammedan the lead in the 19th minute with a powerful left-footed shot from the top of the box after Souleymane Diabate's cross was only half-cleared by the Baridhara defence.

However, national team striker Sumon Reza equalised for Baridhara five minutes later -- his seventh of the campaign -- with a diagonal shot from inside the box as the Mohammedan defence was caught napping on Mostafa Karhaba's throw-in. Diabate restored Mohammedan's lead with a towering header on a corner from Rakib Khan Evan on 36 minutes before Anik Hossain's volley from the top of the box gave Mohammedan a 3-1 lead in the stoppage time of the first half.

Baridhara had several chances to reduce the arrears in the second half but Saiddoston Fozilov's failure from the spot and then a string of misses from Reza meant there was no coming back for Mahbulul Ali Manik's charges. They were instead punished for their profligacy by Yassan Ouatching in the 81st minute as Mohammedan ran out with a comfortable victory.

The second match of the day between Rahmatganj MFS and Bangladesh Police ended in a 1-1 draw.

Felix Chidi gave Rahmatganj a 13th-minute lead with a superb strike from the edge of the box but the lead was cancelled out by Christian Kouakou from the spot on 26 minutes.

The draw left Police in eighth position with 18 points from 17 matches while Rahmatganj remained in 10th position with 15 points from 18 matches.