

Youngsters willing to take on THE MANTLE

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national cricket team's youngsters are eager to take responsibility in the series-deciding T20I against Zimbabwe in Harare despite the visitors struggling to balance the squad in the absence of key players.

ODI captain and opener Tamim Iqbal's struggles with his knee injury forced him to decide on a break after playing a major role in the ODI series against Zimbabwe, while pacer Mustafizur Rahman's ankle niggle ruled him out of the second T20I. Batsman Liton Das is battling a groin injury.

Earlier, Mushfiqur Rahim had to return to Dhaka following the one-off Test after his parents tested positive for Covid-19 while tragedy struck on Friday as youngster Aminul Islam Biplob father passed away and forced him to book a flight home.

Although Bangladesh have enjoyed some dominant performances on the Zimbabwe tour, those absences have been stumbling block in terms of balancing the squad.

However, for those young players who were not afforded as many chances in the past, this may be an opportune moment to take responsibility and rise to the



occasion. One such hopeful, 20-year-old pacer Shoriful Islam, was prepared to step into the Mustafizur's shoes: "It's added pressure for the team when he isn't playing, but I'm trying my best to take out the pressure."

Having picked up five wickets in the first two T20Is, Shoriful was appreciative of Mustafizur for his advice on and off the pitch.

"If I bowl a bad delivery, he points it out and pushes me to do better on the next one. And if I make a mistake

in practice in bowling or anything else, Mustafizur teaches me almost like a coach," a beaming Shoriful added.

The youngster was also excited by the addition of Shamim Hossain, who happens to be one of Shoriful's teammates from the U-19 World Cup-winning campaign.

"I've been playing with him for two years now. He is a very good fielder, a power-hitter and a good batsman. We would both like to serve the national team for a long time so that we can give something to Bangladesh cricket," he said.

In Bangladesh's loss to Zimbabwe in the 2nd T20I, Shamim Hossain showed that he could hit the ball hard by scoring a 13-ball 29 on debut. He hit three 4s and a couple of sixes, catching everyone's attention.

Shoriful Islam and Shamim Hossain could be great additions who have experience in a World Cup-winning team.

Shoriful said he was living the dream: "When I was younger, in class three or four, I saw Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad play. Now, playing alongside them feels like a dream. I'm grateful that I have a great relationship with them and we're together like a family."



Can Tigers end on a high note?

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Bangladesh will be aiming to rectify the mistakes from their second T20I performance as Mahmudullah Riyad and his troop look to wrap the tour on a high note when they take on

Zimbabwe in the series-deciding third and final game in Harare today.

Previously, the Tigers had won the lone Test followed by the three-match ODI series whitewash over the hosts before they faced their first defeat in the tour by 23 runs in the second T20I. A below-par fielding and catching followed by some poor batting display allowed the hosts to successfully defend a modest total of 166 runs.

"I don't think we were complacent. We probably lost the game for not executing our plans. We haven't become a bad side after this defeat. They played well and we didn't take the chances on the field. We have to avoid making these mistakes in the next game," said Mahmudullah after the defeat on Friday.

Bangladesh's batting approach was questioned where the Tigers repeatedly showed the tendency to go after the Zimbabwean bowlers even when they kept losing wickets at regular intervals before being eventually bundled out for 143 runs.

"I am not disappointed with my batting approach. We needed to take risks upfront but were under pressure after losing early wickets upfront. A 30 or 50-run partnership was needed to lay the foundation, and that would have gotten us closer to the target," Mahmudullah added.

Despite the defeat, the silver lining from the second T20I was the performance of Shamim Hossain who showed his big-hitting ability on debut and scored a blistering knock of 29 runs off 13 balls, laced with two sixes and three fours. Another young left-arm seamer Shoriful Islam also maintained his consistency with the ball and bagged five wickets in the two T20Is.

Regarding injury concerns, left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman who is struggling from an ankle injury and wicket-keeper batsman Liton Das, who missed out on the second game due to his thigh injury, are likely to return to the playing eleven today if they recover in time.

No doubt over Australia's tour to Bangladesh

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The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) confirmed yesterday that there was no doubt over hosting Australia in a five-match T20I series, next month.

"We are working as per our previous plan," said BCB's CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury when asked about the latest development of the second ODI between West Indies and Australia.

Two days after the scheduled fixture was postponed, the match was set to resume in Barbados yesterday after 152 people involved in the ongoing West Indies and Australia ODI series returned negative Covid-19 test results on Friday.

Doubts over Australia's upcoming tour of Bangladesh had surfaced immediately after the postponement was declared.

However, Australia is now expected to arrive in Bangladesh on July 29, for a five-match T20I series against the Tigers.



SRI LANKA AVOID WHITEWASH

Indian cricket team players pose with the trophy after winning the three-match ODI series 2-1 against Sri Lanka at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo on Friday. Sri Lanka avoided a series whitewash against a second-string India side after half-centuries by Avishka Fernando and Bhanuka Rajapaksa led them to a three-wicket victory in the rain-hit third and final match. It was Sri Lanka's first ODI win against India since 2017 and they collected 10 Super League points for the 2023 World Cup qualification. The teams will now clash in a three-match Twenty20 series in Colombo beginning on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP



Bangladesh's Ruman Sana fist bumps with Kim Je Deok of South Korea as coach Martin Frederick looks on following the pre-quarterfinal match of recurve mixed event at the Yumenoshima Archery Field in Tokyo on Saturday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Ruman, Diya lose against the best

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Archers Ruman Sana and Diya Siddique were eliminated by the eventual gold-winning South Korean team in the pre-quarterfinal stage of recurve mixed event of the Tokyo Olympics on Saturday morning.

The Bangladeshi duo lost against the top-ranked team in the event by 6-0 set points. An San and Kim Je Deok, two young debutants at the Games, had claimed the number one seed, having both topped the individual men's and women's qualifying rounds on Friday.

Bangladesh had qualified as the 16th and last team in the competition and hence got the top-ranked side as their opponents in this stage.

After losing the first set by a big margin

of 38-30, Ruman and Diya showed resilience against the fancied Korean duo. However, despite lifting their efforts they failed to avoid defeat in the following sets by 35-33 and 39-38 points.

The South Korean pair went on to win the gold medal later in the day beating Netherlands in the title-deciding match. Mexico claimed bronze.

Ruman and Diya will, however, have other chances to write their names in history books when they play in individual rounds. Ruman, ranked 25th in the world, will face Tom Hall of Great Britain on July 27 in the first elimination round.

Diya will, meanwhile, take on 29th-seed Dzioninskaya Karyna of Belarus in the first elimination round on July 29. Karyna is ranked number 31 in the world, 124 places above Diya.

Tigresses' future in jeopardy

MAZHAR UDDIN



"If you ask me in one word, the situation is bleak. Much like the present scenario, our future also looks uncertain," a member of the Bangladesh national women's cricket team, while requesting anonymity, expressed her vulnerable state to The Daily Star as the women's cricket in the country suffered a heavy blow since the COVID-19 outbreak back in March last year.

After a majority of 2020 went without much action on the field, the Tigresses had anticipated a busy 2021, which was set to feature some competitive cricket.

However, with the current pandemic situation digressing from bad to worse, the government once again imposed

a strict nationwide lockdown, putting all activities on hold.

The women's national team last took the field on March 2, 2020, during the Tigresses' poor display in the ICC Women's Twenty20 World Cup in Australia. The women's team is slated to take part in the 2021 ICC Women's World Cup qualifiers in Sri Lanka in November-December.

"We have a big hurdle in the form of the ODI World Cup qualifier in November and so we are planning to call for a residential camp once the situation improves. Like all other countries, I think we too lost the momentum due to the pandemic situation. Now keeping the World Cup in New Zealand in March next year in mind, our plan is to arrange as many matches, both local and international series. We even had a few plans in store

where we were in talk with the other boards but the pandemic has put everything to a standstill," said BCB women's wing manager Towhid Mahmood.

He further added that the trainers and coaches are providing continuous guidance to the players regarding maintaining fitness from home.

Members of the national team, under-19, and the Emerging team had taken part in the Bangladesh Games earlier in March this year. The following month in April, BCB hosted the South African Emerging team who played four one-dayers, however the fifth and final game had to be cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak. It was also the last time the Tigresses took the field and since then they have been agonizingly waiting to reappear on their hunting grounds again.

"To be honest, by sitting and

doing nothing at home, it's getting more difficult with each passing day. Those who are under the central contract still get some financial support consistently but the rest of us are having a tough time in maintaining our livelihood. I heard many of the girls, who were not in the national pool of 30 to 35 cricketers, have decided to quit the game," said an aspiring female cricketer while requesting anonymity.

According to Towhid, BCB's women's wing is trying to arrange domestic competition once the situation improves considering the financial aspect of the cricketers in mind.

"Yes, the cricketers will benefit financially if we can start the domestic competition as soon as possible. But again, for that to happen, we need the situation to improve," Towhid said.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK