

## Tigers' chance to change T20 narrative

NABID YEASIN



Bangladesh are fresh from their impeccable display against Zimbabwe, who the Tigers beat in every format last month to complete a comprehensive series sweep away from home. Even after such a dominant showing across formats, you will find very few who can confidently say that the Tigers have ended their troubles in the game, at least form-wise.

Bangladesh find a low-ranked Zimbabwe every time they need to end their form slump and the Tigers' history only goes on to give the statement more merit.

Before their recent triumph in Zimbabwe, Bangladesh were on an abysmal run of form away from home and in Tests, losing all six of their limited-overs overseas fixtures. That included three ODIs and as many T20s during their tour of New Zealand in March this year while their last Test win was recorded in February 2020 against Zimbabwe at home.

That Test win against Zimbabwe also ended the Tigers' seven-game losing streak, which included two T20I and two Test losses to India and two T20I and one Test defeat to Pakistan.

So the

question is whether the Tigers will be able to buck the inauspicious trend this time around? For Bangladesh, there could not be a better time to prove that statement wrong as they prepare for a five-match T20I series against Australia, starting from August 3.

Although Australia are here without their full-strength squad, that in no way diminishes their might. The absences of T20 experts like David Warner, Glenn Maxwell, Steve Smith and Marcus Stoinis may have dented the Aussies' usual batting prowess, but the injury-hit Tigers will still be up against a formidable Australian bowling attack comprising the likes of pacers Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Andrew Tye and leggie Adam Zampa. Right-arm quick Pat Cummins is the only one missing from the regular mix of first-team Aussie bowlers.

Bangladesh, who are missing three of their top batsmen in Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Liton Das, will definitely have their work cut out against a group of bowlers who are rich with years of experience in franchise T20 cricket.

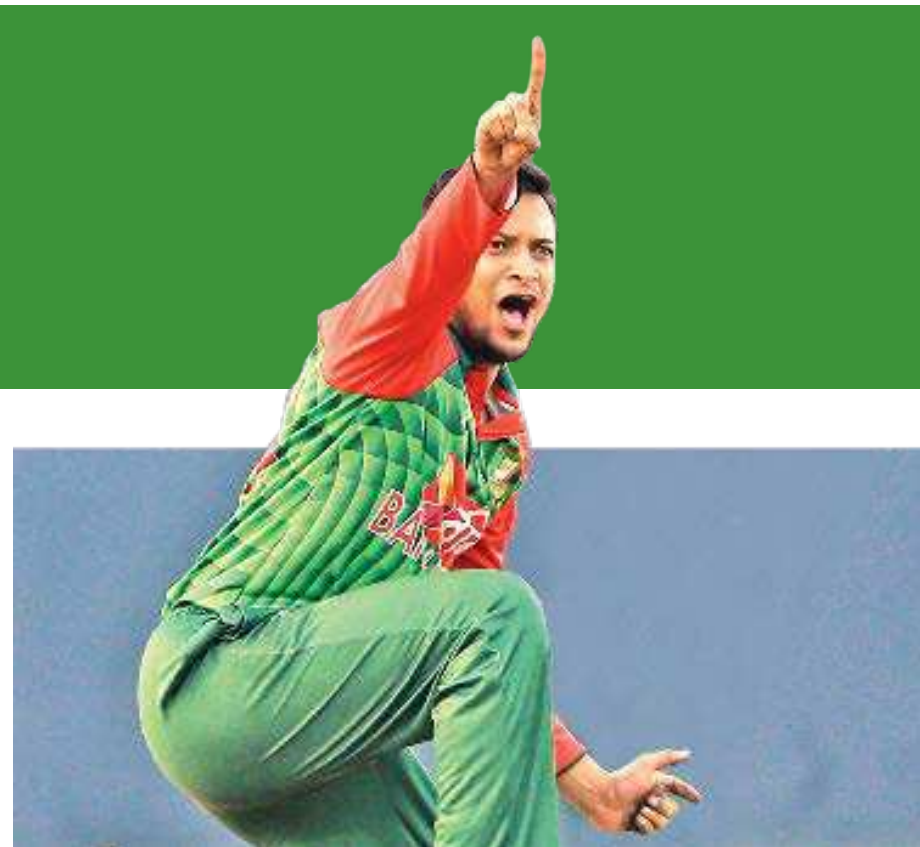
How the likes of inexperienced youngsters like Mohammad Naim, Afif Hossain and Shamim Hossain alongside someone like experienced-yet-unsettled Soumya Sarkar handle such a ruthless bowling attack, that too in a format that has always been Bangladesh cricket's weak link, could go a long

way to showing what Mahmudullah Riyad's men have in store for the upcoming T20 World Cup, scheduled for later this year in October-November.

Moreover, for a side like Bangladesh, absences of key players could serve as a blessing in disguise as it would give the team management an opportunity to prepare for future adversities and help them form a dynamic squad capable of taking on stiffer challenges.

Another thing that should get the Tigers pumped up to prove a point in the upcoming series is that Australia, who are only on their third ever tour to Bangladesh for a bilateral series, have mostly been reluctant to visit Bangladesh with security concerns being their prime excuse. Although the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) mentioned it is only 'fulfilling a few extra demands' posed by the Australian, in truth the board is having to go a few extra miles to make this series a reality.

Hence, it goes without saying that only an admirable performance from the Tigers can make BCB's extra stride for Australia's 13-day sojourn worthwhile while also making a resounding statement that could have big teams like Australia show more interest in visiting the country in the coming days. It could also prove to the world that Bangladesh's cricketing prowess is not only reserved for low-ranked teams like Zimbabwe.



### PLAYERS TO WATCH

#### BANGLADESH

##### Mahmudullah Riyad

The onus is on Mahmudullah Riyad, the captain of the Bangladesh T20 team, to guide his side on both fronts – as a player and a leader – against Australia. Bangladesh will be taking the field without their two of the most experienced players – Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim – along with an in-form Liton Das. Thus the 35-year-old, with his vast experience, will have to shepherd this relatively young side and under Mahmudullah's leadership, the Tigers will be eyeing to register their first-ever T20I win against the Aussies.

##### Shakib Al Hasan

Undoubtedly, Shakib Al Hasan will hold the key for the Tigers in the five-match T20I series against Australia in all three departments of the game. The champion all-rounder, who has been instrumental behind the Tigers' only win in the Tests against the Aussies back in 2017, will once again have to play a pivotal role for his side. Shakib has an average of 35.75 in four games against Australia which includes a fifty and he has also picked up five wickets with a best bowling figure of three for 27. However, the Tigers team management will have to manage the workload of Shakib who is carrying an old groin injury that reappeared in Zimbabwe last month.

##### Mustafizur Rahman

Despite the fact that Mustafizur Rahman is still recovering from his ankle injury, which forced him to miss a majority of the games in Zimbabwe, the left-arm seamer will be expected to lead the Tigers' pace bowling unit in the upcoming series. The 25-year-old so far played just one T20I against the Aussies during the 2016 ICC World T20 however, the wily customer possess the ability to outfox this seemingly inexperienced Aussie batting line-up with his cutters and slowers, especially in the Mirpur surface which is tailor-made to suit Mustafizur.

#### AUSTRALIA

##### Mitchell Starc

Having been the Player of the Series in the recent ODI series against the West Indies by securing 11 wickets in 3 matches, Mitchell Starc has come to Bangladesh with a top-notch form. The leader of Aussies' bowling attack took a while to pick up his form after a long break, which reflected on his last T20I series against the Caribbeans, but he came off firing in all cylinders in the

ODIs. Despite the fact that the wicket of Mirpur tends to remain slow and low for the seamers, Starc's vast experience will certainly remain a major threat for the batters of Bangladesh.

##### Mitchell Marsh

In the absence of big names such as Steven Smith, Aaron Finch, David Warner and Glenn Maxwell, recently Mitchel Marsh has been in terrific form with his new role at number three. He scored three fifties in his last five games, including a blistering 75-run knock in the 4th T20I against West Indies, which eventually steered the Aussies



in clinching a four-run victory. The 29-year-old also played a decisive role with his medium-pace bowling and the slow Mirpur pitch is expected to favour Marsh against the hosts.

##### Adam Zampa

Adam Zampa has emerged as the biggest weapon for the Aussies in the shortest format where the leg-spinner is not only able to contain runs but also manages to pick wickets in crucial circumstances. Beside his off-spin, Zampa has been instrumental with his googlies to a great effect which makes him even more difficult for the batsman to negotiate. The 29-year-old could certainly prove to be the x-factor for the Aussies against the Tigers, especially in this sub-continental conditions.



#### ITINERARY

August 3: First T20I.  
August 4: Second T20I.  
August 6: Third T20I.  
August 7: Fourth T20I.

August 9: Fifth T20I.  
\*All matches will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur and is scheduled to begin from 6pm.



### TIGERS, AUSSIES BEGIN TRAINING TODAY

Bangladesh batsman Soumya Sarkar, on his facebook page, posted a photo of him relaxing with a cup of tea and wrote: "Quarantine Bio Bubble Play Repeat. Its tough but the new normal it is. Looking forward to the Australia series." Meanwhile, pacer Taskin Ahmed posted a video of him performing fitness drills and wrote: "There are no shortcuts to Success, it's all about the PROCESS that you follow consistently. Dreams come true Only when YOU take immediate massive ACTION!! #roomquarantine day 3. Looking forward to upcoming series keep us in your good wishes. Love." Bangladesh and Australia both arrived in Dhaka on Thursday after completing their respective away series and entered the bio-secure bubble. Now both team's players will begin training today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur after a three-day quarantine in their respective hotels.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

## Ashrafal reckons Aussies as favourites

MAZHAR UDDIN

Among the monumental events in Bangladesh cricket's history that shaped the course of its evolution, the ODI win against Australia back in 2005 by riding on Mohammad Ashrafal's brilliant hundred, during the NatWest Series in Cardiff, will undoubtedly remain right on top for the Tigers.

However, it remained the only win for Bangladesh in ODIs against the Aussies while the Tigers have also managed to register their first-ever win in Tests against Australia at home in 2017.

Although in the shortest format of the game, Bangladesh is yet to get off the mark against the Kangaroos. Thus, the upcoming five-match T20I series starting from August 3 will present

a highly probable scenario for the Tigers to rewrite history at their den.

Ashrafal, on the contrary, considers the Aussies to remain favourites in the upcoming series but the former Bangladesh captain informed that it will be a great opportunity for the Tigers to clinch their maiden T20I win and even went on to predict the five-match series in the visitors' favour.

"Obviously the win against Australia in Cardiff is still fresh in my mind. Since we don't play much against them, this is probably the reason why we didn't get more wins over the years. If we can play our best against this Aussie side, I think the series could finish 3-2, but still in Australia's favor," Ashrafal told The Daily Star.

Despite Australia missing their

experienced batsmen in the series – the likes of Steve Smith, David Warner, Aaron Finch and Glenn Maxwell – but Ashrafal reckons that the Aussie bowling attack is likely to be the biggest threat for the hosts.

"I think their (Australia) bowling attack is top-class with the likes of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood in the pace bowling department. So, it will be important that we prepare the pitch which suits us and extract some help from the surface. If we offer a batting friendly track, it won't bring us any advantage but a slower surface might help our batsman in tackling their seamers better," he said.

Bangladesh will be without Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim, two of their most experienced batsmen, while the in-form wicket-

keeper batsman Liton Das is also missing from the series.

According to the 37-year-old, to gain momentum with the bat, at least one Bangladesh batsman from the top three needs to bat till the 19th over of the innings.

"Despite the fact that we will be without Tamim and Mushfiqur, I think the two openers – Soumya Sarkar and Naim Sheikh – have been in good touch recently and I give them the pass mark. In the middle-order, Mahmudullah can bat at Mushfiqur's position to fill that gap, so I don't see their absence to create a huge impact ultimately," Ashrafal added. Ashrafal concluded his views by saying how Shakib Al Hasan's rhythm and the consequent impact will be a crucial element from Bangladesh's perspective.



Bangladesh's greatest victory till date, a five-wicket humiliation of Australia in Cardiff in 2005, was engineered by Ashrafal's first ODI century -- a 101-ball 100. Meanwhile, Shakib Al Hasan was star with ten-for as Bangladesh carved a maiden Test win against Australia at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur in 2017.



PHOTO: AFP FILE/STAR FILE