

'We'll be challenging whoever comes to play in Bangladesh'

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In spite of the fact that Bangladesh managed to post their best opening stand so far, of 42 runs, in the five-match T20I series against Australia, the Tigers just could not capitalise on their start to land a big total in the fifth and final game at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Even then, Bangladesh's half-decent target of 122 for eight proved a little too much for the men from Down Under, as their middle-order miserably collapsed from 48 for three to becoming all out for 62 in 13.4 overs. And with this shambolic batting display, the Aussies registered their lowest-ever total in the shortest format of the game. Their previous lowest-ever score, of 79 in 14.3 overs, was in Southampton against England in 2005.

Shakib Al Hasan, the usual suspect

SCORES IN BRIEF

Bangladesh: 122 for 8 in 20 overs (Mahedi 13, Naim 23, Shakib 11, Soumya 16, Mahmudullah 19, extras 18; Ellis 2-16, Christian 2-17)
Australia: 62 all out in 13.4 overs (Wade 22, McDermott 17, extra 1; Nasum 2-8, Saifuddin 3-12, Shakib 4-9, Mahmudullah 1-9)
Result: Bangladesh won by 60 runs.
Player-of-the-match & player-of-the-series: Shakib Al Hasan.

when it comes to becoming the decider of a match, wrecked havoc by picking up four wickets, giving away just nine runs. He was adjudged to be the both player of the match and the series.

"I think we played some really good cricket through two series, in Zimbabwe and here. Obviously the wicket was tough, but we held our nerve well. All in all a team effort," said the champion all-rounder after the match.

"If you look at the last match, we scored 104-105 and the game still went to the last over. So we knew if we score 120-130 we'll always be in the game. We started well with the bat today, that gave us momentum. I think the bowlers did a fantastic job throughout this series. We're trying



to improve all our areas," Shakib added further.

A jubilant skipper Mahmudullah Riyad emphasised on the team effort.

"The boys showed a lot of character and hunger to win a series against a team like Australia. We executed our plans really well. Obviously it was hard for the batters, but we did well to keep getting 120-130. All the bowlers worked really well together.

"We always felt that in our backyard we are a very good team. We can't let anything go past. We'll be challenging whoever comes to play in Bangladesh and we'd like to win

every series. Though the ranking doesn't show it, I have always felt we have very good potential to be a very good team in T20Is," said Mahmudullah.

Earlier in the first innings, the hosts from being in a situation capable of posting somewhere near 140, were 91 for 4 in 16 overs. By losing wickets at regular intervals, Bangladesh eventually managed to add 31 runs and lost four wickets in the last six overs.

And yesterday's win for Bangladesh had meant, that in terms of Australia's win-percentage record against their oppositions in T20Is, the Tigers are levelled with England on 56 percent, ahead of South Africa (62%) and New Zealand (68%).

Australian captain Matthew Wade insisted that this was a learning curve for their side and gave hosts the credit.

"It's hard to say there will be more positives. Certainly a great learning opportunity for our group. I've played for a few years now, certainly the toughest conditions to play T20 cricket in. Great learning for youngsters. Wasn't our series unfortunately. There's no excuses of not playing enough cricket. We had enough cricket in the West Indies to come and play good cricket, we just didn't. Credit to Bangladesh, they did well."



Supporters had to get to the top of a building adjacent to the stadium to enjoy the last game as the health protocol for the Covid-19 restricted the spectators from entering the stadium.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Comeback King Shakib

MAZHAR UDDIN

He can be unpredictable and he can be a bit odd at times but one thing is for sure is that you just cannot take him out of the game at any moment and so once again Shakib Al Hasan proved why he has been the best all-rounder in the world for more than a decade now.

Not more than 48 hours ago, Shakib almost turned villain for many Bangladeshi fans after he was struck for five sixes in an over from Australian Daniel Christian in the fourth T20I.

And then yesterday in the fifth and final T20I against the Aussies, Shakib went on to register his most economical bowling in the shortest format with figures of four for nine and in the process broke records and created history.

It requires nerves of steel to overcome such a devastating scenario and come out as the champion the very next day and the 34-year-old did exactly that. And by doing so, Shakib reached new heights by becoming the first-ever cricketer to pick up hundred wickets while also scoring a thousand runs in the T20 format.

The question was there for Shakib on whether he has some alien superpowers to which the champion cricketer replied along with his signature smile, "Obviously I am a human. It can affect many mentally (referring to the five sixes in his over in the previous game) while some might not have an impact after such games. I might have prepared myself to that extent where I don't get affected after such a performance. So from that point, I am lucky," Shakib told the media after the game yesterday.

For his outstanding performances with both bat and ball, where Shakib went on to finish as the top scorer for the Tigers in the series with 114 runs and also bagged seven wickets, the champion cricketer bagged yet another player of the series award. With the latest being Shakib's 16th player of the series in his career across all formats, he now stands third in the all-time list of cricketers with most player of the series

awards, behind Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli.

"Obviously it feels good when you get some achievements and such achievements inspire you to play well for the team. But it would have never been possible if I didn't get the support from all the teammates, coaching staff, and also the fans. I'm really happy. I feel that I will be able to continue this for a very long time," added Shakib, displaying humility.

According to Shakib, if the Tigers can continue this momentum in the coming days, Bangladesh can do wonders in the upcoming ICC World T20 later this year.

"Many may not feel that confident when they look at the scorecard of this series but winning the series in Zimbabwe and

New Zealand announce squad for Bangladesh T20I series

New Zealand Cricket (NZC) announced squad for the upcoming five-match T20I series against Bangladesh. Players in the 16-strong squad for the T20 World Cup were not considered for the series against the Tigers. Black Caps will arrive in Dhaka on August 24. New Zealand squads for Bangladesh T20s & Pakistan ODIs: Tom Latham (c), Finn Allen, Hamish Bennett, Tom Blundell, Doug Bracewell, Colin de Grandhomme, Jacob Duffy, Matt Henry (ODI only), Scott Kuggeleijn, Cole McConchie, Henry Nicholls. Ajaz Patel, Rachin Ravindra, Ben Sears (T20 only), Blair Tuckner and Will Young.

now beating Australia by 4-1, and we also have a series against New Zealand, it will give us a lot of confidence in building up to the world cup. I think it will be a good preparation, however the batters might not get enough runs under their belt as we are playing in slow, low and turning wickets but it's important that the team still wins and this confidence boosts the morale of the side and also helps you nurture the winning habit," said Shakib.

Shakib Al Hasan became the only player to have scalped 100 wickets and score more than 1000 runs in T20Is when he took the wicket of Australia's Ashton Turner. The only other player to have reached the 100-wicket milestone in T20Is is Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga, who took 107 wickets in 84 matches. Shakib also reached the milestone in his 84th T20I but his uniqueness was that he had also scored 1718 runs during that time, averaging 23.53 with nine fifties and a high score of 84 in the format.



SAFF Championship moves to Male

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The 13th edition of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship has moved from Bangladesh to Maldives and will be held in Male from October 1 to 13, an emergency executive meeting of the regional football body decided yesterday.

Bangladesh was originally scheduled to host the biennial event in September last year but the first wave of the pandemic prompted a one-year deferral before the second wave forced Bangladesh Football Federation to relinquish the hosting rights altogether.

The All Nepal Football Association and the Football Association of Maldives expressed their desire to host the event, but the meeting, which was organised virtually and attended by general secretaries and presidents of six nations as well as delegate of Asian Football Confederation, unanimously supported Maldives' bid to host the regional championship.

Anwarul Huq, general secretary of the SAFF, briefed media following the meeting. "The decision for Maldives hosting was unanimously approved in the meeting. The decision was taken in light of the comparatively better Covid situation as well as higher vaccination rate in Maldives compared to Nepal," Huq said.

The Maldives capital will, meanwhile, host the AFC Cup South Zone matches later this month involving clubs from India, Bangladesh and the host nation. While the decision as of now is to stage the SAFF Championship with five teams in round-robin format, the SAFF has given Bhutan three days to decide on whether to participate and make it a six-team affair.

"The championship will be held in round robin format if five countries participate. In that case, the final will be held between the top two teams of the points table. However, if Bhutan plays, it will be in group format with two groups of three teams each with semifinals and final," Huq said.

Bhutan had earlier informed they would not be able to participate if the championship was held this year due to travel restrictions in and out of the country owing to the pandemic. Pakistan, the seventh country of the region, are ineligible to participate because of a FIFA suspension.

Invincible Kings clinch BPL title

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Defending champions Bashundhara Kings retained the title of Bangladesh Premier League after handing a 2-0 defeat to three-time champions Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Brazilian duo Robson Da Silva and Jonathan Fernandes struck one goal apiece to deliver season's second trophy to Kings who have taken an uncatchable lead in the 13-team table with 55 points from 20 matches.

Sheikh Jamal, on the other hand, slipped into the third position with 39 points from 19 matches after Abahani Dhaka beat Arambagh KS 6-1 in the day's second match, riding on a hat-trick from Jewel Rana, to reach the second position with 40 points from 20 outings.

Having been boosted with season's first trophy of the Federation Cup, Kings recruited two Brazilians, one Argentinian and one Iraqi who all had a superb run from the beginning of the league, notching up seven straight victories. Whereas, inconsistent performances from Abahani and Sheikh Jamal, meant that the title race by midway had turned into a one-horse race with Kings leading by at least eight points from their two nearest rivals.

The gap kept increasing during the league's second leg as Kings kept their momentum conserved with Abahani and Sheikh Jamal often dropping points. This paved the way for Kings to clinch the title

in record time, with four matches still left to play.

"There were plenty of things during the season's beginning. Our management surprised us by providing the best facilities, best players, confidence and support throughout the season. The credit goes to the players. I think we completed an excellent season filled with ups and downs due to discontinuities but we worked knowing that this season was going to be important. I think we played the perfect BPL and still have a big tournament ahead [AFC Cup in Maldives]. I'm delighted to win back-to-back titles," said Oscar Bruzon, Kings

Spanish coach, after the match.

Kings definitely did not want to delay the party this time unlike their debut season in 2018-19, in which they had prepared to celebrate the title triumph with a win over Sheikh Russel KC in their 21st match, with two games in hand; however, they ended up suffering a 0-1 defeat. Yesterday, Kings held their nerves to bring the outcome in their favour despite an initial surge from Sheikh Jamal who had to play the match without their head coach Shafiqul Islam Manik, after the club management terminated Manik three hours prior to the match.

Sheikh Jamal seemed to be lacking



Bashundhara Kings players toss their Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon as they celebrate retaining the Bangladesh Premier League title with four matches in hand after beating Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club 2-0 yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club terminated their head coach Shafiqul Islam Manik hours before their crucial tie against Bashundhara Kings. "I have been verbally asked not to accompany the team. They will let me know in written form tomorrow (Tuesday)," said Manik.

ideas without their coach along with the absence of hard-working Uzbek midfielder Jonov Otabek, who usually initiates most of the attacks by pairing with Solomon King for their formidable Gambian striking duo Pa Omar Jobe and Sulayman Sillah. Having survived Sheikh Jamal's initial burst of pressure, Kings established their authority on the match, thanks to a 21-minute strike from Robson, who drove home from 25 yards to raise his goal tally to 19.

Afterwards Jamal attempted to expose the Kings' backbone but Sillah was denied by the woodwork in the 43rd minute before the tall striker drove wide three minutes later.

After resumption, both sides fought on level terms before Jonathan doubled the lead with a powerful drive outside the box in the 62nd minute while in the 83rd minute, substitute Emon Hossain had rattled the crossbar.