

Confidence key for mental make-up

The Twenty20 World Cup fixtures were announced yesterday. The 16-nation tournament -- to be held in the United Arab Emirates and Oman -- will begin on October 17. The top two teams from both group A and group B in the first round will advance to the Super 12 stage, where the game's heavyweight nations join the tournament. Australia are in Group 1 of the Super 12 stage alongside England, defending champions West Indies, South Africa and two qualifiers from the preliminary round. India have been placed in Group 2 with archrivals Pakistan, New Zealand, Afghanistan and two more qualifiers. The second round of the tournament -- the Super12 stage -- will get underway in Abu Dhabi on October 23. India and Pakistan, who only play each other in ICC events, will meet on Oct. 24 in one of the most highly-anticipated clashes in the sport. The final will be held in Dubai on November 14.

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Bangladesh's recent performances in the shortest format of the game, including the historic 4-1 series win over Australia, will surely boost the Tigers' confidence ahead of the T20 World Cup, the schedule for which was announced by the ICC yesterday.

Bangladesh are in Group B at the flagship event to be played in Oman and the UAE and will take on Scotland on the opening day of the Round 1 qualifiers on October 17. The Tigers then face the hosts, Oman, and Papua New Guinea on October 19 and 21 respectively.

The top two teams of each group will qualify for the Super 12, which is scheduled to begin on October 23. Sri Lanka, Ireland, Netherlands, and Namibia will face each other in Group A.

If Bangladesh finish on top of their group, they will join India, Pakistan, New Zealand, and Afghanistan alongside the runner-up of Group A in Group 2 of the Super 12.

Bangladesh finished top during the qualifiers for the 2016 T20 World Cup, but the Tigers went on to lose all the matches at the Super 10 stage.

It will be interesting to see whether Mahmudullah Riyad and his troops can use the upcoming five-match T20I series against New Zealand next month to gain some more confidence ahead of the flagship event considering it will be the last international series before the tournament.

"I think this tournament is important for all teams, especially for us. We will be playing a few series before the T20 World Cup and if we can do well and gain confidence ahead of the tournament by winning those series, it will certainly be a big boost for us," Bangladesh T20I skipper Mahmudullah said.



ROUND 1 FIXTURES

- OCT 17**
Bangladesh v Scotland and Oman v PNG in Muscat.
- OCT 18**
Ireland v Netherlands and Sri Lanka v Namibia in Abu Dhabi.
- OCT 19**
Bangladesh v Oman and Scotland v PNG in Muscat.
- OCT 20**
Namibia v Netherlands and Sri Lanka v Ireland in Abu Dhabi.
- OCT 21**
Bangladesh v PNG and Oman v Scotland in Muscat.
- OCT 22**
Namibia v Ireland and Sri Lanka v Netherlands in Sharjah.

"I think in a tournament like the T20 World Cup, every game is equally important regardless of opposition. You have to play your best game from the first ball and if you have a good frame of mind and keep the process right, it's possible to win all the matches."

Oman playing hosts may catch some off-guard as they are virtual unknowns in world cricket, but they are certainly not newcomers. Oman have been playing T20 cricket for the past six years and even participated in the previous T20 World Cup in India. Oman also started playing ODIs in 2019 and have so far played 11 ODIs and 36 T20Is.

Bangladesh faced Oman once, during the previous T20 World Cup qualifiers in Dharamshala when Tamim Iqbal struck a century as Bangladesh registered a comfortable 54-run win.

The Al Amerat Cricket ground in Muscat has already hosted 30 T20Is and it is going to be the first major world event that will be hosted in Oman.

"I think our strengths have been our all-rounders and our bowling department. Having said that, I think our batting department is also very good. I think we've got a good balance in our team, especially with five or six all-rounders who can bowl and bat. Our fast bowlers have been doing an incredible job at the moment and as usual, our spinners are our strength. If they can put up their hands in few matches, hopefully we can have good results."

Bangladesh T20I captain Mahmudullah said in an interview with ICC media.

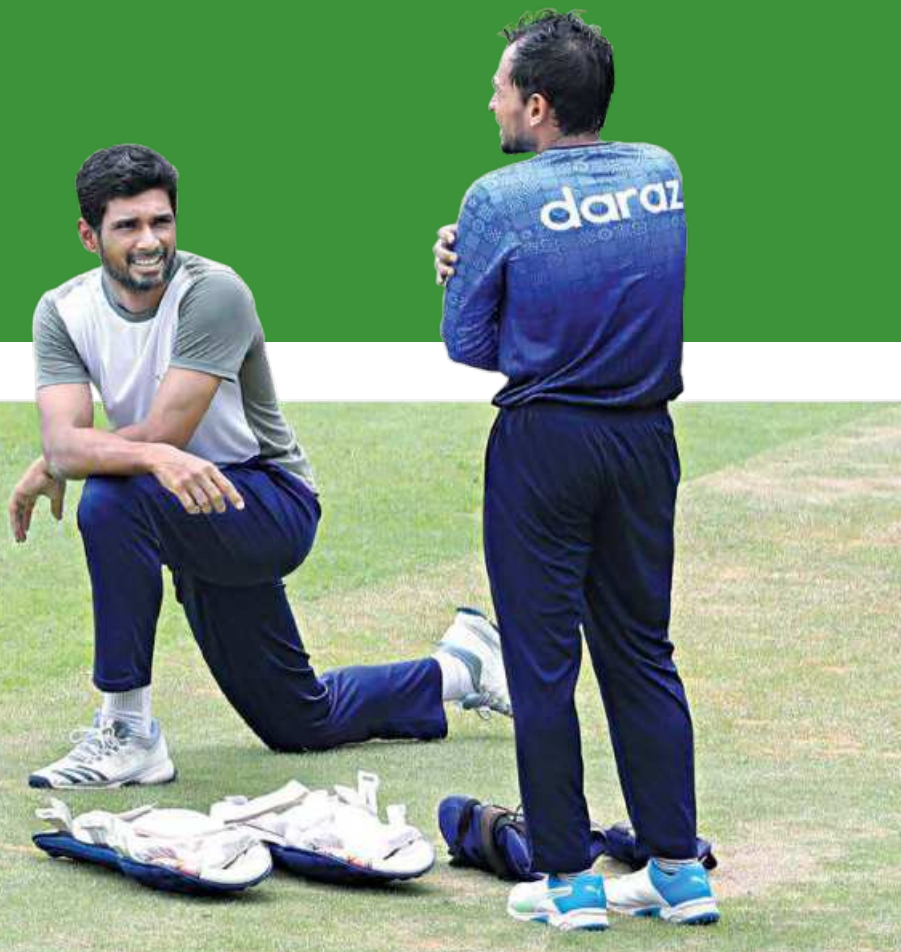


PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

CHALLENGES REMAIN despite sweet problem

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI



A fascinating but by no means unproblematic trend in Bangladesh cricket, one that has existed for some time, is how players make their way back into the national side because others have performed badly. As in a game of musical chairs, players circle back into the team, but the problem in terms of team selection is how many players return without having performed in order to stake a claim.

The recent two T20I series against Zimbabwe away and Australia at home, however, have seen a number of players perform, which gave 'competition for places in the side' real meaning. Thus, the Tigers' team management might be facing a sweet problem, an unfamiliar one, especially in the shortest format where the Tigers have historically been found wanting.

The recent injection of youth to the T20 outfit has given the team a better outlook in the shortest

format. There is depth in the lower middle-order with the likes of Afif Hossain, Shamim Hossain and Nurul Hasan bolstering the batting order.

Problems still remain at the top, with Soumya Sarkar remaining inconsistent throughout the Australia series while Mohammad Naim, despite getting a few good starts, yet to deliver big. Despite that, the fact remains that the Tigers had a winning combination.

With the likes of Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal and Liton Das returning to the side, the question remains how the Tigers balance the team ahead of the New Zealand series and with an eye on the T20 World Cup in October.

Mushfiqur and Tamim are automatic choices but does that mean someone else fit for the format is excluded? Nurul looked confident behind the stumps in the recent series but the role of wicketkeeper means he is constantly in competition with Mushfiqur and Liton.

The return of the experienced

players also means changes in the batting order. Skipper Mahmudullah Riyad had promoted himself up the order in Mushfiqur's absence but that will perhaps not be on the cards with Mushfiqur and Tamim returning. Afif has also already made a good case of batting higher than the position that he has been prescribed so far in T20s.

Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a mentor to many of the national team stalwarts, analysed the scenario for The Daily Star thusly: "In the T20 format, skill does not matter as much as the ODI format. Power is an issue in this format and we have suffered due to that previously. However, Afif, Shamim and Nurul have given us depth and intention from the top-order that will have to be aggressive going forward," he analysed.

"You cannot get the desired total by just playing a long innings in this format. As long as you are out there, there is a demand to stay aggressive," he dictated.

The modus operandi, according to one of the best minds in

Bangladesh cricket, is to select squads with situations and roles in mind. "You have to select the squad according to roles. It's not about picking the best players; it's about picking the players that are going to be most effective."

"It's not about the names. For instance, Nurul knows the demand of batting in last five overs in this format better than Tamim or Shakib [Al Hasan]."

Despite the sweet selection headache, challenges remain.

The bowling department has added dynamism with Mahedi Hasan and Mohammad Saifuddin while Mustafizur Rahman and Shoriful Islam were able to contain Australia on home soil.

However, the wickets at the World Cup will be different, Fahim reminded. "Even with our bowling doing well, we have to chase down 170 or 180 in regular wickets. Rather than our bowlers becoming overconfident now, perhaps it would be better to gain experience of regular wickets also with the T20 World Cup in mind," he concluded.

BROTHERS GO DOWN

Brothers Union manager Amer Khan has his hands on his head as the players look dejected during their 4-0 drubbing by Muktijoddha Sangsad KC in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. The defeat relegated the Gopeebagh outfit from the top-tier football of the country for the first time since they gained promotion to the then First Division of Dhaka football in 1975. Brothers follow Arambagh KS, who were confirmed of their demotion on the previous day, to the Bangladesh Championship League for next season.

PHOTO: STAR



NEWS IN BRIEF

ABAHANI THRASH RUSSEL

Nigerian forward Sunday Chizoba and Brazilian midfielder Raphael Augusto scored braces to power Abahani to a massive 5-1 win over Sheikh Russel KC in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter yesterday.

NZC DELEGATES IN DHAKA

New Zealand Cricket's (NZC's) three-member delegation arrived in Dhaka yesterday to assess the conditions and the bio-secure bubble arrangements ahead of the Kiwis' tour of Bangladesh for a five-match T20I series next month.

SEARCH ON FOR MARADONAS

A major sports manufacturer launched a campaign to find 1,703 Argentines named after football icon Diego Armando Maradona.

CARLI LLOYD CALLS TIME

Carli Lloyd, one of the greatest women's soccer players to ever grace the game, has announced her retirement, U.S. Soccer said on Monday.

LUKAKU FEELS MORE COMPLETE

Belgium international Romelu Lukaku said he has evolved since he last played in the Premier League two years ago and has returned to Chelsea as a more complete player.

**To read stories in detail, please visit online version of The Daily Star.

India savours 'fantastic' Lord's victory

AGENCIES

Former cricketers and national media on Tuesday lauded India's thrashing of England in the second Test at Lord's with fast bowlers coming in for special praise.

Indian quicks including Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj and Ishant Sharma shared 10 wickets between them to bundle out England for 120 in the final session on Monday's fifth day to go 1-0 up in the five-match series.

But it was an unbeaten ninth-wicket stand of 89 between Shami, who hit a career-best 56, and Bumrah, who made 34, that swung the momentum back in India's favour after they were struggling on 209-8.

"Fantastic win for India...what character and guts from the team...each and every one...such a pleasure to watch it from so close," India's cricket chief Sourav Ganguly, who was in London for the match, wrote on Twitter.

The Indian Express headlined its report "India sledge hammer England" while The Times Of India said, "India Believe In The Lord's!".

Virat Kohli's side won by 151 runs in a match that witnessed some on-field verbal exchanges between the two sides.



first-innings total of 364 after being invited to bat first by England skipper Joe Root.

Rahul said his side's victory at Lord's will go down as one of their best, particularly as they had lost heavily at the venue in 2018.

"I played with a lot of control and discipline. That was my plan and what I prepared for, and to go out there and execute it was really pleasing and satisfying," Rahul said.

"It's a very memorable innings for me, also because it turned out to be a match-winning one for us. A win in England and a win at Lord's is always special."

England responded with 391 riding Root's unbeaten 180. India declared their second innings on 298-8 early in the second session on day five and the new-ball bowlers Bumrah and Shami

struck early to corner England.

"That was some Test match #TeamIndia! Enjoyed watching every moment of it. The resilience and grit that the team displayed in difficult situations is something that stood out for me. Very well played!," cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar said.

Batting great VVS Laxman said: "What an incredible day of Test Match Cricket and one to remember for a long time for every Indian Fan. 'Bumrah and Shami fighting with the bat early in the day, and pace attack of Siraj, Ishant, Bumrah, Shami giving it their all and India registering a sensational win."

Former England captain Michael Vaughan said: "Amazing game of Cricket.. India today showed why they are so much better than England.. The belief to Win was immense."

Kings start AFC Cup mission today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings will hope to repeat their 2020 AFC Cup performance when they begin this year's campaign by taking on hosts Maziya S&RC in a Group D encounter at the National Football Stadium in Male, Maldives today.

The match is scheduled to kick off at 10:00pm (BST) after the group opener between ATK Mohun Bagan and JWS Bengaluru FC.

Kings had made a dream start with a 5-1 win over Maldivian outfit TC Sports Club in the previous edition of the continental tournament, but could not play any more matches due to the pandemic, which forced the cancellation of the tournament.

Bolstered by the signings of Argentine, Brazilian and Iranian players, Kings are in even better form currently as they have already bagged the league title with 19 wins in 21 matches. Now they are looking to take that form to Maldives.

Kings may not have former Argentina international Hernan Bercos, who scored four goals against TC Sports in last season's

AFC Cup but they have Raul Becerra of Argentina and Robson Da Silva of Brazil, who together scored 35 goals in the league.

"We had a good start in the last AFC Cup and as it is all set to begin again, we are really ready and eager to play the tournament," Kings' captain Tapu Barman told reporters in a pre-match press briefing yesterday.

Coach Oscar Bruzon believes there is no clear favourite in Group D and the real strength of the participating teams will only be known after the two matches on the opening day.

"I have full respect for Maziya, whom I know well because I had been here for some years. The main point of Maziya is coach Risto Vidakovic who has a lot of experience



playing in the La Liga for Real Betis. I think the Maziya are a very solid unit and they will trust him to settle the team. I have all the respect but on the pitch we have to be the best team and take the opportunity in our favour," Bruzon said. "We are looking forward to securing all three points. If we drop points against Maziya, it is going to be very tough for us against the two other strong teams of the group."

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS

AFC Cup

Mohun Bagan vs Bengaluru FC

Live from 5:00 pm

Bashundhara Kings vs Maziya

Live from 10:00 pm