



PHOTO: BCB

Mushfiquer needs just one good knock

AL-AMIN



As Bangladesh's T20 World Cup campaign begins in earnest today, the Tigers will look to quickly resolve some disconcerting issues within the team instead of looking too much at their lightweight opponents in the first round of the competition – known as qualifiers for the Super 12.

The most pressing of them would be probably the return of experienced batsman Mushfiquer Rahim to some sort of form in the week-long prelude to the main event.

Masufiqur has been going through a lean patch with the bat for quite some time, a far cry from the lofty standard he has come to set. Known as Mr. Dependable by his adoring followers, the right-hander has been the vital bridge between the top and the lower order for his country in all three formats of the game.

He is considered the man in crisis after the fall of early wickets. With his uncanny ability to absorb pressure and then taking the attack to the opposition, Mushfiquer's return to form is very important for a Bangladesh team packed with relatively inexperienced players.

With Tamim Iqbal not around and young opener Naim Sheikh and Liton Das still struggling to be consistent at the top and Shakib Al Hasan enduring a forgettable

IPL season for Kolkata Knight Riders with the bat, Bangladesh need Mushfiquer more than ever to be competitive in what is predominantly a batsman's game.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are the two Test playing nations featuring in the first round where eight teams, split into two groups, will compete for four slots available for the Super 12. Eight top-ranked teams made direct entry into the main event.

However, playing against lightweights like Scotland, Oman and PNG can be a blessing in disguise for the Tigers. These three games will provide ample opportunity to fleece out some problems the team has been facing.

It will be high time for the batting to click as a unit and the bowling hitting the right length. And for Mushfiquer, it will be time to get his rhythm back.

The right-hander was dismissed cheaply in the two warm-up games against Sri Lanka and Ireland. After being dismissed in both games, he trudged back to the dressing room with his head hanging over his shoulders and face buried under the helmet.

But Mushfiquer is a far better player and one of the few exciting exponents of scoring boundaries while always looking for singles and doubles in the Bangladesh ranks. He just needs one good knock. Tigers' fans only hope that it comes sooner rather than later.

TODAY'S MATCHES

Oman v PNG
4pm (BST)

Bangladesh v Scotland
8pm (BST)



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MAHMUDULLAH BULLISH ahead of opener

MAZHAR UDDIN from Muscat

Without the comforts of home advantage or spin-friendly tracks, Bangladesh will need to focus on proper planning and team combination as they begin their ICC T20 World Cup mission today in the opening game of the qualifiers against Scotland at the Al Amerat Cricket Stadium in Muscat.

Skipper Mahmudullah Riyad said there were no concerns after defeats in both official warm-up games against Sri Lanka and Ireland, but it will be important for the Tigers to remain on their toes against a confident Scotland.

Mahmudullah was rested for the two warm-up games after suffering a back injury but the 35-year-old informed he was ready to lead the Tigers and looking for a fresh start.

"I have recovered a lot since I suffered the back injury nine or ten months ago. That caused some problems which is why I didn't play the two practice matches. But I have fully recovered and hopefully I will be able to participate in tomorrow's game," Mahmudullah told media yesterday.

"We lost two practice matches but that won't have an effect. We are ready for tomorrow's game. Our confidence is intact and I hope we



will be able to play our best cricket."

Pitches played a vital role in the Tigers recent series wins against Australia and New Zealand at home so it will be a big test for the Tigers, especially in Muscat, where they have played just one game -- a warm-up against Oman A in which the Tigers racked up over 200 runs.

Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo was having a close look at the pitch during their final training session alongside spin-bowling coach Rangana Herath.

"I think the warm up game against Oman A had a sporting wicket. I hope it will remain the same, but I think we have to be prepared for any sort of conditions mentally. Only then will we be able to adapt if it varies. Hopefully we will be able to bring our best game," Mahmudullah added.

When asked whether he would again bank on a spin-heavy attack, Mahmudullah replied with a smile: "I can answer you now. No, we are not going for a spin-heavy attack."

There was also raging discussions about the opening slots and Mahmudullah informed that he would be counting on Liton Das and Naim Sheikh, adding that the team management was also considering Soumya Sarkar as an opening option after his decent outings in the warm-up games.

Meanwhile, Mushfiquer Rahim's lack of form with the bat, which has seen him make little impact in his last 9 games, is another area of concern.

"We all know how valuable he is for our team but it happens in shortest format that a batsman can miss out on scoring runs. We have no doubt about his calibre. He has proved over the years and we all believe he will make a comeback when the team needs him," said Mahmudullah.



Oman's Aqib Ilyas and Papua New Guinea's Assad Vala at a press conference. PHOTO: AFP

Battle of the underdogs gets things underway

STAR SPORT DESK

Oman and Papua New Guinea will kickstart the T20 World Cup 2021 in Muscat at 4:00pm (Bangladesh standard time), with an aim to make it to the Super 12 stage.

Oman is hosting this first leg of the tournament and hence it has a slight advantage over all other teams. Over the years, Oman have built a solid pool of players who have consistently beaten allies across the globe.

While they go as strong favourites in this match, Papua New Guinea will also be hoping to cause a flutter or two.

The conditions at the Al Amerat Cricket Ground are expected to be good for cricket, both weather-wise and the pitch. There was nice amount of pace and carry in the surface when Oman played Sri Lanka in a warm-up match just a few days ago. That is not likely to change and we can expect more of the same in this match. A total of around 170 is quite easily on the cards especially if Oman bat first.

While Oman have lost their warm-up matches against Sri Lanka, they were indicative of the kind of challenge they would face all other teams. With Bangladesh and Scotland in the same group, qualifying

for Super-12 for Oman is a difficult task but not an impossible one.

Zeeshan Maqsood is going to lead the bowling lineup with the support of Fayaz Butt and Kalimullah. Oman don't have the strongest bowling attack, but have managed fight against Sri Lanka in both matches.

Jatinder Singh, Aaqib Ilyas and Khurram Nawaz are the batsmen to watch. There isn't much quality in the batting line-up, but almost everyone is capable of swinging the bat and chipping in if needed.

PNG, on the other hand, may have qualified for the first leg of the T20 World Cup but it is going to be very difficult for them to win a single match in the Super-12 stage. They played two matches in the lead-up: one against Namibia and the other against Scotland, losing both matches heavily. The fact that they didn't play any other cricket in 2021 and none in 2020 would count against PNG.

PNG don't have the kind of quality or experience that other teams have in this tournament. Kiplin Doriga and Asad Wala are the two batsmen to keep an eye on while Jason Killa and Damien Ravu can create some problems for Oman with the ball.

Who's laughing now?

AFP, London

In just under 20 years, Twenty20 cricket has gone from being a light-hearted sideshow to a money-spinning, central plank of the sport's global calendar.

With the seventh T20 World Cup about to get underway in Oman and the UAE on Sunday, AFP Sport looks at the rise and rise of the game's big-hitting, crowd-pleasing format.

THE BEGINNING

The end of the Benson and Hedges Cup one-day competition, due to a ban on tobacco advertising, in 2002 left a gap in English cricket's domestic calendar.

Stuart Robertson, the marketing manager of the England and Wales Cricket Board, proposed a 20-overs-per-side event, a format already known in amateur and junior cricket.

The aim was to attract a younger audience who might not have the time to engage with longer formats.

The first official Twenty20 county matches took place in 2003 and proved an instant success in terms of attracting crowds. More than 27,000 turned up to see Middlesex play Surrey at Lord's -- the largest attendance for any county game at the "home of cricket" outside of a one-day final since 1953.

That success was noted elsewhere, with the frenetic pace and in particular, the dynamic hitting of batsmen, proving popular with spectators

worldwide. Yet there was still a sense this was not 'proper cricket'.

THE INTERNATIONAL GAME
The first international T20 match between New Zealand and Australia at Eden Park, Auckland, in 2005 saw both teams clad in retro 1980s kits, with New Zealand decked out in an exact replica of their 'Beige Brigade' colours of that era. Some players even wore fake beards and moustaches in honour of styles



PHOTO: ICC

of that time. "I think it's difficult to play seriously," said Australia's Ricky Ponting, the man of the match.

But the format's growing popularity was noted by the International Cricket Council and led to the inaugural 2007 men's T20 World Cup in South Africa that saw India beat arch-rivals Pakistan in a thrilling final.

THE IPL

Just as India's victory in the 1983 men's one-day World Cup had changed the attitude of cricket's

most populous nation towards the limited overs game, so was this success equally transformative in the sport's economic powerhouse nation.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India, looking to capitalise on that success and concerned by the Indian Cricket League, a private T20 event, launched the Indian Premier League in 2008. Not only did that move effectively end the ICL, the new six-week tournament

changed cricket's global environment, particularly the power relations between national boards and players. The city-based IPL, where teams were bankrolled by wealthy private owners, with squads based on player auctions, meant leading cricketers could earn vast sums of money in a short space of time.

Traditionally, the way to having a lucrative career was to become an established international in multi-day Test cricket and benefit

from the sponsorship deals that followed.

Now, however, there was another route, with the creation of other leagues such as Australia's Big Bash and the Caribbean Premier League creating a global T20 circuit.

When the IPL started, it clashed with international fixtures and then England captain Kevin Pietersen found himself involved in rows with then team management over his desire to play in the new event.

As the gifted batsman recalled in a tweet in May: "When I went up against ENG, I was alone. This time, it's all their best branded players!"

THE FUTURE

The IPL has so changed the game the ICC has effectively barred international men's matches during the usual April-May timeframe for the tournament in a bid to ensure top-class cricketers remain available.

Now there is an uneasy co-existence between the formats, with the ICC creating the World Test Championship -- New Zealand won this year's inaugural edition -- in a bid to bolster the five-day game and Virat Kohli, captain of beaten finalists India, proclaiming in August: "For me this is the absolute pinnacle of the game. I will give everything to Test cricket for the time I play, I can assure you of that." But how long Kohli's attitude lasts across cricket remains to be seen.