

TENSE ATMOSPHERE surrounds the Tigers

MAZHAR UDDIN from Muscat



Ever since the shocking defeat against Scotland, one question that has been constantly asked by the Bangladeshi expats here in Muscat is whether the Tigers can qualify for the Super 12 stage and take the flight for Dubai or whether Mahmudullah Riyad and his troops will have to return home empty handed.

The answer to the question, however, is still a mystery for the demoralised Bangladeshi supporters in Muscat where a defeat in one of the next two games could lead to a disaster.

The atmosphere among the cricketers during the optional training session remained tense with no smiles on their faces. Mushfiqur Rahim was the first one to enter the Al Amerat Cricket Stadium and went straight to the wicket at the centre for a batting session.

Head coach Russell Domingo was late to attend the official press conference and it was learned that the South African was busy answering questions to the Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan during a zoom meeting.

Bangladesh often breaks down whenever there is a pressure situation and the upcoming game against Oman would probably be the most important game for the Tigers if they want to stay alive in the mega event.

When asked whether Domingo and his players do

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actually believe that the Tigers can qualify for the Super 12 stage and can win the next two games on the trot following the latest shocking defeat, Domingo seemed pretty confident.

"I think it's important to do the basics right as you don't have to try to play fancy and do something spectacular. That often helps you do well in a pressure situation. Definitely, the boys are confident to still get through this situation.

"I have great belief in the boys who have played really tight games over the last year and came out on top. The guys are full of belief to win the next two games and qualify for the Super 12 stage and I don't doubt the self-belief of the boys,"

Domingo told the media yesterday.

The 47-year-old also clarified the reason for not including Naim Sheikh despite preparing the left-handed opener in the last 16 games for Bangladesh ahead of the mega event. Domingo, however, added that the left-hander has a chance to return to the playing eleven against Oman today.

"We actually needed the sixth bowling option as Mahmudullah was unable to bowl due to his injury. We wanted an option and Soumya was included in the eleven only because of this reason. Obviously, it was disappointing from Naim's point of view and I think he might get into the playing eleven today," he said.

Oman on the other hand, is gaining in confidence after the comprehensive ten-wicket win over Papua New Guinea and according to all-rounder Khawar Ali, the hosts will look to exploit the Tigers' weakness to win the game.

"I can remember Tamim Iqbal scored a hundred against us when we met last time. But it was six years back and Oman cricket has come a long way since then and we are a much better side now.

What we observed from the first game is that they struggled while chasing and were under pressure. I think they are a bit weak in batting and we want to utilise that aspect," said Khawar.

Paying for unwarranted confidence-booster doses?



ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh's 'shock' defeat at the hands of Scotland in their opening Group B fixture of the ICC T20 World Cup qualifiers, which came on the back of two losses in the preparation matches against Sri Lanka and Ireland, had created a rupture in the wall of confidence they seemed to have had following series wins against Australia and New Zealand at home. One might even ponder, now more than ever, on whether those series triumphs were pyrrhic victories leading into the World Cup.

Nevertheless, a win percentage of just over 36 percent in the shortest format should have been enough evidence to focus on building mental resilience going into the flagship event. While in below-strength Australia and New Zealand sides, the Tigers had enough of a challenge on their plate to prepare adequately, the management's decision to play on Mirpur surfaces, which were not geared towards actual cricket challenges but tailor-made to create a false sense of security, worked against the Tigers in the World Cup opener and the preparation matches.

Even if the warm-up fixtures are not testament to Bangladesh's failings, how the match against Scotland went away from the Tigers, when Scotland's number seven and eight batters put them under pressure, is something that can be considered as a precursor to falling levels of confidence.

Confidence can be a two-way torrent: One side is the confidence that others have placed on you and another one is your own belief in yourself. In terms of team sports, confidence transmits from one to another and to the whole squad. On the other hand, fear factor or a lack of confidence can also transmit when things do not go as planned.

Bangladesh had taken Mohammad Naim as an opener for the World Cup and the

management had, in fact, put their faith in him despite there being evidence that Naim was not doing what was required, which was scoring runs at a rapid rate in the Powerplay. And when the seeds of doubt were sown following the two defeats against Sri Lanka and Ireland, respectively, the team's think-tank resorted to dropping the opener they had earmarked going into the tournament.

If confidence is the key to performance, there was none on offer for Nasum Ahmed from the team management. In fact, if Nasum was not going to serve a purpose, the decision, once again, points finger at a lack of foresight.

"Naim's exclusion was a bit of a surprise. The way the team management built him up for the World Cup as one of the main openers, it [his exclusion] was a surprise for me," Tamim Iqbal, who had voluntarily stepped aside from the World Cup squad, said in a local TV show on Sunday.

Nasum had also been a key figure in recent series but following the two preparation matches, he too was dropped, perhaps with the conditions in mind. However, it is also a fact that the team management paid little heed to what the team required while playing on sporting surfaces. Suddenly when questions arose regarding Nasum's efficiency on such surfaces, he had to make way for an extra pacer.

Thus, the build-up by playing on such Mirpur surfaces, worked heavily against the Tigers since they began their real preparation. Often, the management has said that they would have to adjust to conditions, somewhat suggesting that these things cannot be planned ahead of time.

However, there is little evidence that such hotchpotch planning could ever get them ready to face conditions where batters play shots freely or bowlers come under pressure due to surfaces being friendly for batters.



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TODAY'S MATCHES

Scotland Vs PNG: 4pm

Oman Vs Bangladesh: 8pm

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Scotland look to continue good run

Scotland look in incredible nick heading into their second match against Papua New Guinea today.

After defeating Netherlands and Namibia in their two warm-up matches, Kyle Coetzer's side took down Bangladesh in their tournament opener in a display of a resilience and impressive batting depth. Papua New Guinea were comprehensively beaten in their opening game of the competition, losing by ten wickets against Oman after their total of 129 was chased down with 6.2 overs remaining.

Scotland and Papua New Guinea have met twice in T20Is, with the former winning on both occasions. In their most recent meeting, on October 8, Scotland won by eight wickets.

The T20 four-in-four club

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Ireland seam bowler Curtis Campher on Monday became only the third man to take four wickets in four balls in a Twenty20 International.

The 22-year-old Campher sent back Colin Ackermann, Ryan ten Doeschate and Scott Edwards for a hat-trick and then bowled Roelof van der Merwe in a sensational over in a World Cup match against the Netherlands.

AFP Sport looks at the only other men to have achieved the feat, Afghanistan's Rashid Khan and Lasith Malinga of Sri Lanka.

Rashid Khan: The Afghanistan leg-spinner took four in four against Ireland in the third match of a T20 series at Dehradun in India in February 2019.

Rashid dismissed Kevin O'Brien, George Dockrell, Shane Gextake and Simi Singh before he ended the game with figures of 5-27.

Afghanistan won the match by 32 runs.

Lasith Malinga: Later in 2019, Sri Lanka fast bowler Lasith Malinga also joined the four-in-four club in a 37-run win over New Zealand in Pallekele.

Malinga dismissed Colin Munro, for his 100th wicket in T20 internationals, Hamish Rutherford, Colin de Grandhomme and Ross Taylor.

Malinga finished the game with figures of 5-6. The Sri Lankan also took four-in-four against South Africa in the 2007 50-over World Cup in Guyana.



'Skinny guy' to 'Pakistan life-saver'

AFP, DUBAI

When Shoaib Malik takes the field for Pakistan in the Twenty20 World Cup, the 39-year-old all-rounder could be forgiven for feeling his age.

When Malik made his international debut in 1999, current teammates such as pace spearheads Shaheen Shah Afridi and Mohammad Wasim Junior, and batsman Haider Ali were not even born.

Vice-captain Shadab Khan was just one while skipper Babar Azam and fellow all-rounder Hasan Ali had both just turned five. Malik, still fighting fit, played his first one-day international against the West Indies at Sharjah in October 1999. Legendary paceman Wasim Akram, who led Pakistan in Malik's first game, retired 18 years ago.

"I remember when Malik came into the Pakistan team in 1999," Wasim Akram told AFP. "I picked him up, he was a 16-17 year old skinny guy and I initially picked him solely as a bowler and as a fielder and never knew that he can bat very well."

Malik, however, is not the oldest player at the World Cup -- Chris Gayle, 42, who made his ODI debut a month before Malik, will be looking to steer West Indies to a third T20 title.

"He (Malik) has turned out to be a life-saver for Pakistan in limited-overs cricket. Even now, when you talk about fitness, he is superb and trains so extensively," added Wasim.

"I think young players should see him as a role model as he is still



competing with them in domestic events and that shows how mentally strong he has been. "He is looking good and that shows he wants to go on a high."

Former team-mate and captain Shahid Afridi also believes Malik can contribute as Pakistan go in search of a second T20 World Cup title. "Good to see Shoaib Malik recalled for the T20 World Cup," said Afridi. "As a senior and experienced player, he can contribute big time for Pakistan."

Captain Babar Azam believes Malik will have a key role on and off the field in the United Arab Emirates. "His experience will be an asset. He is still one of the fittest members of the squad," Babar said.

Malik, whose career has seen a series of ups and downs, led Pakistan to a runners-up finish in the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in 2007. He was a member of the 2009 title-winning team and, after missing the 2010 event, featured in the last three editions.

Munna grabs gold

SPORTS REPORTER

Young shooter Rabbi Hasan Munna grabbed the gold medal in 10m air rifle event of the 2nd Sheikh Russel International Airgun Championship (Online), which took place yesterday.

The 25-year-old shooter from Tangail scored 626.8 points to win the top prize, beating Sviatoslav Hudzyi of Ukraine by 0.5 points. Islam Usseinov of Kazakhstan settled for the bronze medal with a score of 625.4 points.

There was also a silver and a bronze medal among the four events held during the event. Syeda Atkia Hasan won the silver medal in women's 10m air rifle event with a score of 623.3 points with Yelizaveta Bezrukova of Kazakhstan winning the gold medal with a score of 629.6 points.

The other medal came courtesy of Shakil Ahmed in 10m air pistol event. Shakil scored 571 points for the bronze medal, with Yaroslav Makhnyov taking the gold with 575 points.

A total of 73 shooters from nine countries took part in the daylong online tournament.