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Batting intent on display at last

MAZHAR UDDIN from Muscat

It was not the best of starts with the bat from Bangladesh but the positive approach yielded a much better performance for the Tigers on their last qualifying group game of the ICC T20 World Cup against Papua New Guinea at the Al Amerat Cricket Stadium in Muscat yesterday.

Bangladesh went on to post their highest score in their ICC T20 World Cup history -- of 181 for 7 in 20 overs -- surpassing their previous best of 180 for 2 against Oman back in 2016.

Compared to the first two qualifying matches, Bangladesh's lack of intent in the Powerplay and the inability to go for the late launch in the final stage of the innings were neutralised considerably in their latest batting display.

Although the Tigers initially had a bit of a shaky start, having lost the half-century of the previous game Naim Sheikh without troubling the scoreboard, they managed to shrug it off to score 45 for 1 after six overs -- Bangladesh's best score so far in the flagship event and also their first 40-plus score in the Powerplay after 12 games.

There were no individual heroics but everyone played their part in a collective approach that helped the Tigers post the highest score of the qualifying round in the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup from group B.

Liton Das, after missing out on the first two games, looked to have regained some sort of form alongside the in-form Shakib Al Hasan, who picked up from where he left off in the previous game.

Bangladesh were six for one after the second over before Liton broke the shackles with a slog sweep for a six to Chad Soper in the third over. And soon, Shakib joined the party with a maximum in the next over and slowly the Tigers started to gain momentum.

Liton perished after scoring 29 off 23 balls before Mushfiqur Rahim, coming at his usual number four position, continued his poor run of form. A soft dismissal saw Mushfiqur depart on five after handing a simple catch at deep-square leg off a long hop from Assad Vala.

Probably a lot of credit must be given to skipper Mahmudullah, who kept the tempo high in the middle overs while Shakib seemed tired under a hot and humid condition.

Shakib, who struck a one-handed slap for a six to Vala earlier and went for another, was caught brilliantly by Charles Amini, diving in front at long-on. The star all-rounder's handy 37-ball 46-run knock featured three sixes.

Mahmudullah and Afif Hossain then made sure to rotate the strike in between hitting boundaries, a feature of the game that has been missing in the previous games from the Tigers.

Mahmudullah targeted the first ball of each over that worked well for Bangladesh's cause. 19 runs were scored in the 17th over off Soper where Mahmudullah struck two sixes and a four that saw him reach his second fifty in the T20 World Cup in just 27 balls. It also became the fastest fifty in the ongoing World Cup after which the Tigers' skipper departed in the next over while going for another big heave.

Mohammad Saifuddin utilised the long handle to great effect, striking two maximums and a four, to score 20 runs off the last over as Bangladesh added a whopping 68 runs in the last five overs of their innings.

'No one has more emotion attached to the team than us'

SPORTS REPORTER FROM MUSCAT

It seems the reactions from Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan and in the press and on social media after Bangladesh's defeat to Scotland in the opening game of the ICC T20 World Cup had a negative impact on the Bangladesh team.

Despite qualifying for the Super 12 following an 84-run win over Papua New Guinea yesterday, skipper Mahmudullah Riyad's body language at the post-match press conference was that of someone holding more than just a little grudge.



the players.

When asked whether it was a particular reaction from the media, the board or the fans that had hurt them, Mahmudullah replied: "Everything... Obviously, everything touches us. After all, we all are human and we also have feelings. We have families. Our parents and kids also sit in front of the TV and they also feel bad. Social media is in everyone's palms these days. There will be criticism and we expect that."

There were a lot of questions been raised about the strike rate of the three seniors and a lot of other things. We tried our best and that is all we can do. Maybe the result did not go our way so there will be criticism, but it has to be healthy so that it is good for everyone.

"When we wear the Bangladesh jersey, we also get that feeling. We play with pain, some play despite injuries and even after taking pain-killers right before taking the field. Many don't know the inside story so I don't think it is right to raise questions about commitment," he said.

Mahmudullah believes all members of the team deserve credit for believing in themselves during the tough time. He also praised Shakib Al Hasan for his consistent all-round performances and the likes of Mohammad Saifuddin and Mahedi Hasan for putting their hands up on the big stage.



Shakib reaches new height

STAR SPORTS REPORT

When Shakib Al Hasan scalped the wicket of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) Hiri Hiri in the 11th over during Bangladesh's last T20 World Cup qualifier game in Muscat yesterday, the premier all-rounder reached new heights.

With 39 wickets in 28 T20 World Cup games, the 34-year-old became the joint highest wicket-taker of the tournament alongside Pakistan's Shahid Afridi.

Former Pakistan skipper Afridi, however, had played 34 T20 World Cup games, six more than Shakib, to take the same number of wickets.

Shakib, who scored a fluent 37-ball 46, laced with three maximums, also ended with outstanding figures of nine for four in four overs, which is also his best figure in the marquee event.

"When we wear the Bangladesh jersey, we also get that feeling. We play with pain, some play despite injuries and even after taking pain-killers right before taking the field. Many don't know the inside story so I don't think it is right to raise questions about commitment."

MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD

There was no smile on Mahmudullah's face when he walked in for the press conference and his reaction to each question suggested the entire team was unhappy about the criticism of the past few days.

When he was eventually asked about his stoic expression and emotionless answers, the T20I captain replied: "I think it's natural to be strict. We are also humans and we make mistakes but that does not make it right to portray us as so small. Bangladesh is also our country. We are all in this together. Whenever we play, we play together with the entire country and we always keep that in mind. I think no one else can have more emotion or feeling attached to the team than us. There will be criticism when we play badly, but that doesn't mean you have the right to put us down. It hurts all of us."

The 35-year-old -- who scored the fastest fifty of the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup in yesterday's game off just 27 balls as Bangladesh posted 181 for 7, their highest total at the flagship T20 event -- said that questions being raised about the low strike rate of the three senior batsmen in the game against Scotland had hurt the sentiments of

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AGENCIES

Sri Lanka have already booked their spot in the next stage of the T20 World Cup with their second consecutive win in the tournament. They now eye on becoming the group champions as they face the bottom-table Netherlands at Sharjah Cricket Stadium on their third group match today.

The Lankans were strong with both bat and ball despite getting off to a disastrous start against Ireland. However, important individual performances from the likes of Wanindu Hasaranga, Pathum Nissanka and Maheesh Theekshana helped Sri Lanka to secure

a comfortable 70-run success.

Netherlands crashed out of the T20 World Cup after they failed to overcome Namibia last time out and only pride is at stake for them in this final match before they exit the tournament.

With the winner of the clash between Namibia and Ireland guaranteed to join Sri Lanka in the Super 12s, the desperation to progress is immense. Ireland have been particularly poor in the shortest format.

However, Namibia have already made history at this tournament. Their victory over Netherlands was their first at a World Cup, and all indications are that they will not be satisfied with that.

India favourites to win T20 World Cup: Smith

REUTERS

Steve Smith has branded India favourites to win the T20 World Cup after Virat Kohli's side outclassed Australia in a warm-up match on Wednesday.

Smith scored a half-century to help Australia post a competitive 152 for five in the tune-up in

Dubai but India's batsmen moved down the total with 13 balls to spare to win by eight wickets.

"They're a terrific side, they've got all bases covered and some serious match-winners," Smith said after his 57 from 48 balls.

"They've all been playing in these conditions the last couple of months with the IPL (Indian Premier League). So they'll be used to that."



T20 WORLD CUP BLAST

TODAY'S MATCHES

Namibia Vs Ireland
4pm

Sri Lanka Vs Netherlands
8pm

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Fast bowlers need variety in 'tired' pitches, says Cummins

REUTERS

Fast bowlers will need a varied skillset to conquer the "tired"

pitches in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Australia's Pat Cummins said ahead of their Twenty20 World Cup opener against South Africa on Saturday.

The pacers would be a worried lot heading into the World Cup looking for ways to master the dry and slow pitches in the UAE which has split warm-up matches with Oman but hosts the rest of the tournament from Saturday.

The UAE also hosted the second leg of the Indian Premier League (IPL) which concluded on Friday, meaning fast bowlers face the prospect of toiling on worn-out pitches in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah.

"A couple of wickets have been tired and a couple times you get some really good wickets," Cummins told a virtual news conference on Thursday sharing his warm-up match experience.

"In Twenty20, you got to have a few different varieties. Bowling with a new ball up front is going to look quite different to how you bowl in the end.

"So you've got to be able to adapt and have two or three different spells within the 20 overs..."