

Tigers' approach and attitude need a refining

NABID YEASIN



Fingers are being pointed towards the two dropped catches by Liton Das and Mahmudullah Riyad's captaincy as prime causes for Bangladesh's five-wicket defeat against Sri Lanka in their first Super 12 clash in Sharjah on Sunday. Experts, fans, media and critics are spot on in pointing out these factors playing major roles in the defeat, but were those the only reasons? Was not the lack of killer-instinct responsible for the defeat as well?

Dissecting the game as it was played by the Tigers, the aforementioned two reasons will vividly come to the fore. Those are when Liton dropped Bhanuka Rajapaksa and Charith Asalanka -- the destroyer in chief -- at crucial junctures of the game and Mahmudullah opting for having three overs bowled by part-timers, two by himself and one by Afif Hossain, despite having the option of completing the 20 overs with just the regular bowlers.

But aside from the cricketing factors, the attitude of the players, especially of skipper Mahmudullah, was probably one of the causes for the Tigers' downfall.

Bangladesh were well and truly back in the game after Shakib Al Hasan removed Pathum Nissanka, ending an ominous 69-run stand, and Avishka Fernando in the ninth over with Mohammad Saifuddin following it up with the wicket of Wanindu Hasaranga in the very next over.

But what went wrong from there on? Asking this is not only imperative but finding and taking the answer on the chin-up is also vital for a professional side that saw a crucial game slip out of their hands.

Liton did drop two catches and Mahmudullah's decision backfired in the form of Sri Lanka

plundering 36 runs in those three overs by the part-timers, but the game was still far from over.

However, from the body language of the Tigers, it seemed that their morale was so shattered that they just gave in to the flow of the game even before it was over. The shock of losing the momentum seemed to have stunned the Tigers so badly that they probably failed to get a hold of themselves in the latter part of the game.

If we compare it with the other game of the day, the match between India and Pakistan which is arguably the most anticipated and hyped contest ever in cricket, we might be able to see a stark contrast. With Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam playing flawlessly and Pakistan firmly in the driving seat needing just a run-a-ball at the end of the 16th over, India skipper Virat Kohli still seemed animated, talking with teammates and contemplating a way to still turn the game around.

Kohli, however, failed in his pursuit and accepted his fate gracefully -- regardless of how tough it might have been to accept that his side were the only one to be ever defeated by Pakistan in a World Cup encounter and that too by a thumping margin of 10 wickets.

There was a contrast in the way Kohli and Mushfiqur fielded questions in the post-match press conferences. While Kohli playfully made a journalist realise that Rohit Sharma is a crucial part of India's T20 plan by throwing a question back and asking if the reporter would consider dropping a player of Rohit's calibre from the format, Mushfiqur had suggested that the naysayers 'too take a look in the mirror' and mentioned he felt like 'he hasn't scored runs for many years' before his unbeaten 57 on Sunday.

Let this be reminded that this is not an attempt to throw blame or instil grains of doubt inside the players' minds who are out there representing Bangladesh in the greatest stage of all, albeit in the shortest format of the game, the T20 World Cup.

What the Tigers did on Sunday was laudable, at least some aspects of their cricket definitely were.

But it is probably their attitude that needs some refining both on and off the field if the Tigers are to fulfil their dream of making it to their maiden semifinal of the marquee event.

Tigers keep facing the cons of left-right combination

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

From Chandika Hathurusingha to Steve Rhodes and now Russell Domingo, all the coaches in charge of Bangladesh team over the past five to six years seemed to have taken the conservative approach of sticking to the left and right-hand combination, regardless of the condition and game situation.

Whether it is the selection process of picking the best playing eleven or the opening pair, or the bowling changes from the captain -- the left and right-hand combination is an evident part of the Tigers' game plan which however, often backfires.

When it comes to the team selection, especially the opening pair, a huge question mark persists as the selectors had shuffled different players for the spot. Interestingly, the left-handed Naim Sheikh, who has played all the 16 matches this year ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup in mind was dropped in the first qualifier game despite being the most consistent batsman in the shortest format and was replaced by another lefty Soumya Sarkar against Scotland after considering his two thirty-plus knocks in the warm-up matches.

The obvious reason behind the decision was to keep the left and right combination intact with Liton Das being the right-handed opener on the other end despite the fact that he has failed to perform as consistently as Naim.

The Tigers' think-tank could only stick to their



decision for one game after Bangladesh went on to face a shocking six-run defeat to Scotland in which Soumya failed to make an impact and was replaced by Naim in the next game against Oman.

Since then Naim went on to smash a couple of fifties against Oman and Sri Lanka and whereas Liton, despite the scores of 15, 6, 10, 5, 6 and 29 in his last six games, was given the opportunity over Soumya against Sri Lanka in which the right-hander scored 16 runs.

Odd team selections aside, which also consists of three specialist wicket-keepers involving Liton, Nurul Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim, conservatism has also tangled the thought process of the

captains, regardless of the formats, where skipper Mahmudullah Riyad has been no exception.

During Bangladesh's five-wicket defeat to Sri Lanka in the opening Super 12 game on Sunday, there were occasions where Mahmudullah could have brought Shakib Al Hasan before Sri Lanka started cruising towards the target of 172 runs after Shakib had shifted the balance of the game in Tigers' favour by picking up two wickets in the ninth over of the innings.

Despite Shakib having two overs from his quota of four overs when Bangladesh needed to go for the kill, Mahmudullah took the conservative route of operating right-handed off-spinners from both ends with two left-handers Charith Asalanka and Bhanuka Rajapaksa at the crease.

Mahmudullah had opted to introduce himself in that situation where he went on to concede 21 runs from his two overs.

By the time Shakib came to bowl his third over in the 17th over of the innings, the Lankans already had the game in their control and the champion left-arm spinner ended up finishing the game with an over left from his quota.

Obviously, strategies may vary with respect to the given match scenarios but if the Tigers think-tank keeps falling back to the rigid, premeditated approach, things will continue to further tangle in a messy web of confusion in the upcoming days and beyond.

Wounded by defeat and words

MAZHAR UDDIN FROM DUBAI

The atmosphere at the Crown Plaza hotel in Dubai on Sunday night after Bangladesh's five-wicket defeat to Sri Lanka was in stark contrast to the one of Pakistan's, who registered a historic ten-wicket win over their archrivals India on the same night.

Both Bangladesh and Pakistan team are staying at the same hotel in which the Pakistani cricketers were cheering to their hearts' content after finishing the game while the Tigers' den smelled of all gloom and doom.

The environment in the Bangladesh camp has been restless ever since the shocking six-run defeat against Scotland in the qualifying round in Oman despite the Tigers eventually bouncing back to qualify for the Super 12 stage after winning their next two games against Oman and Papua New Guinea.

An ominous sense of insecurity and inexpressiveness among the Bangladeshi players have been reflected in the manner through which Mushfiqur Rahim and skipper Mahmudullah Riyad had dealt with the official post-match press conferences in the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup so far.

With none of the players willing to speak on the record to the media, however, it was learned that the cricketers are going through an odd situation in which they could not express themselves freely.

Whether it is the team selection or even forming the batting order, a sense of insecurity has seemingly trickled down from the head coach Russell Domingo to Riyad.

Due to Covid-19 protocols, the media are not being able to follow the team activities, as it has in the past. Nevertheless, one could easily read the discomfort, for whatever reasons, from the expression of the Bangladeshi players.

The defeat against Sri Lanka in the opening Super 12 game has turned the situation even more complex as the blame game from every corner is affecting the confidence of the Tigers.

The cricketers opted to rest yesterday ahead of their second Super 12 encounter against England on Wednesday and the closed environment inside the bio-secure bubble is further negatively impacting the players.

There were questions over the involvement of the Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan in the team, especially after his remarks to the media following the defeat against Scotland.

However, it was learned that Hassan had spoken to Shakib Al Hasan over the phone after the defeat against Sri Lanka on Sunday where he tried to lift the morale of the wounded Tigers.

Bangladesh will be training at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi today ahead of their second group game against England and the demoralised Tigers would look to neutralise the tense atmosphere in order to display their best.



High-flying Pakistan take on New Zealand

AGENCIES, Sharjah

Pakistan will have 'revenge' on their mind for a recent off-field snub when they take on New Zealand in the T20 World Cup here on Tuesday, looking to build on the historic high of beating arch-rivals India in their tournament-opener.

After the 10-wicket rout of India, Pakistan are fully capable of doing a Pakistan and self-destructing against the Black Caps, something that Babar discussed with his players in the dressing room after the win on Sunday night.

"We have not just come here to win against India, we have come here to win the World Cup, always remember that," Babar said after the match, fully aware that excess celebrations would only disturb focus.

Babar's team would be eyeing another big scalp in New Zealand, the team which recently withdrew from a scheduled series against Pakistan after landing there, citing a security threat which, according to the host country, did not exist.

The pullout hampered Pakistan's World Cup preparations which took a further hit with England too withdrawing from the tour.

Babar had hardly minced words in criticising the two sides saying that his country has "always tried to accommodate the interests of the game but others simply don't."

Tuesday's game is being perceived by Pakistan's cricket community as an opportunity for the team to extract revenge for the damage that New Zealand caused by going back without playing.

New Zealand have not had the best of build-ups to their campaign, having lost to Australia and England in the warm-ups.

One of their main concerns is the fitness of skipper Kane Williamson, who is battling with elbow pain for a while now and head coach Gary Stead said the injury had flared up a bit in the game against Australia.

Williamson did not bat against England.



Batting high on agenda as West Indies take on South Africa

AGENCIES

Smarting from opening game losses, a good batting display will be high on the agenda for South Africa and defending champions West Indies when the two teams lock horns in a Super 12 match of the T20 World Cup in Dubai today.

While South Africa were handed a five-wicket defeat by Australia, West Indies sank to six-wicket loss against England on Saturday. It will be imperative that both sides improve upon their batting as they seek to register their first points in the group.

Put in to bat, both sides struggled to put runs on the board. West Indies were skittled for just 55 runs while the Proteas were a touch better, managing 118 in 20 overs thanks to Aiden Makram's 36-ball 40.

South Africa's problem in recent games was one again on display in their opening clash. Playing with a top-heavy side, they were unable to overcome the loss of early wickets.

TODAY'S MATCHES

South Africa Vs West Indies, 4pm (BST)

Pakistan Vs New Zealand 8pm (BST)



"On a night that Pakistan supporters will remember for the rest of their lives, their team beat India for the first time in a World Cup match at the 13th time of asking. Not just beat them, but shredded them by ten wickets with 13 balls to spare. It was a hammering."

MICHAEL ATHERTON
FORMER ENGLAND CAPTAIN