

Litmus test for Tigers

MAZHAR UDDIN from Dubai

After opening their Super 12 journey of the ICC T20 World Cup with a defeat to Sri Lanka, things are expected to get even tougher for Bangladesh when they take on high-flying England in their second Group I game in Abu Dhabi today.

There are quite a few areas that the Tigers will be looking to improve upon when they take on the top-ranked T20I side in the world and if they really want to keep themselves on course for a place in the semifinal, it will require a collective approach in all the three departments.

Bangladesh's catching emerged as the biggest area of concern after two dropped catches from Liton Das proved to be the turning point in that defeat to Sri Lanka.

Apart from catching, the manner in which the two Sri Lankan batters, Charith Asalanka and Bhanuka Rajapaksa, toyed with the Bangladeshi bowlers displayed that even a score of 171 would not be enough.

Bangladesh's highest score in Powerplay overs came against Papua New Guinea, when they reached 45 for one in the first six overs. The Tigers managed to cross 40 just one other time in the Powerplay overs, getting 41 against Sri Lanka.

The opening pair's lack of firepower is also among major concerns for the team management, especially considering that the Tigers will be playing England in the T20 format for the first time. So will the team management do something outside the box?

A defeat to Bangladesh that led to their elimination from the 2015 ODI World Cup had made a positive impact on England's mentality as Eoin Morgan's side emerged from that tournament as a different unit altogether, especially in the white-ball format.

An attacking mindset has paid rich dividends for English cricket and they got the ultimate reward by lifting 2019 ODI World Cup before coming to the T20 World Cup as one of the favourites.

Bangladesh can take positives from their wins against England in the fifty-over World Cup in 2011 and 2015, but it is going to be

an entirely different ball game in the T20 format. England's hard-hitting strategy has been a feature of their successes over the past six years and it has continued to work, with Morgan's side having won eight of their last twelve games this year.

The likes of Jos Buttler and Jason Roy set the tone in the opening position, looking to score as many runs as possible in the Powerplay before Jonny Bairstow, Moeen Ali, Liam Livingstone and of course the number-one-ranked T20I batsman Dawid Malan round out their vaunted batting line-up.

England started off their T20 World Cup



campaign by bundling out West Indies for 55 runs in their opening game and lost four wickets in chasing down the paltry target.

Bangladesh may be able to exploit the pitch in the UAE, which has started to become slow and low, making it difficult to score runs freely.



'What anybody outside our circle says doesn't matter'

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

There was a hint that the restlessness and discomfort arising from the scathing criticism that Bangladesh received following their defeat to Scotland in the first round of the T20 World Cup still lingered in the Bangladesh camp as bowling coach Ottis Gibson arrived for the pre-match press conference yesterday on the eve of the Tigers' second Super 12 encounter against England.

Even former Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza raised questions over the role from the coaching staff after the defeat to Sri Lanka in their Super 12 opener, but Gibson said the team management was not focusing on what was being said on the outside.

"I have no thoughts whatsoever. It doesn't interest or concern me what anybody outside of our circle is saying. We know what we do here as a coaching group, so whatever anybody outside the group is saying doesn't really matter."

There has been a lot of talk about Bangladesh's catching, especially after two crucial dropped catches from Liton Das against Sri Lanka, but Gibson said the team management would back players and stress that individuals reduce mistakes.

"Anybody can drop a catch at any time. We must not allow that to affect the player too much. We can't control what people are saying on social media. Only thing we can control is what is being said in the group and around the group," he said.

Bangladesh will be facing England for the very first time in the shortest format and with the experience of working with the English side in the past, Gibson said that it would be important for the Tigers to not panic in pressure situations.

"I have spoken to our bowlers and our batsmen. The England bowlers are looking to take wickets all the time and their batters are looking to score runs all the time and put bowlers under pressure. The message is not to panic, understand that you are going to get hit. You might bowl a good ball and get hit because that's their mentality, but they also give you opportunities to take wickets," Gibson said.



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Namibia look to continue fairytale

AGENCIES

After two stunning wins, debutant Namibia will look to continue its fairytale run when it takes on Scotland in the ICC T20 World Cup on Wednesday.

As for Scotland, they could not have asked for a worse start, as they were humbled by Afghanistan by a score-line of 130 runs.

Gerhard Erasmus and his bunch of unknown cricketers beat Netherlands by six wickets and then beat Ireland to grab a spot in the Super 12s.

It was a historic moment for a country with a population of 2.5 million which doesn't boast of any cricketing legacy. The win over Ireland was its first against a Test playing nation and it also guaranteed Namibia a spot in next year's T20 World Cup.

Having earned its right to rub shoulders with cricket's elites, Namibia will now be keen to test its skills against the best in the business. It will fancy a win over Scotland before it takes on heavyweights in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and New Zealand.

The two sides have met only twice in T20I cricket, with Namibia winning both encounters.

Namibia has produced some solid batting displays as it scripted two successive chases in its last two matches.

TODAY'S MATCHES

England Vs Bangladesh
4pm (BST)

Scotland Vs Namibia
8pm (BST)



Signed Serena rookie card goes for \$44,280

REUTERS

An autographed Serena Williams rookie card printed in 2003 has become the most expensive women's sports card after fetching \$44,280 at auction last weekend, New Jersey-based Goldin Auctions said.

The previous record was \$34,440 for a rookie card of former U.S. soccer player Mia Hamm sold in June.

ESPN reported the Williams card

was bought by alternative-asset trading platform Alt on behalf of a private client. "People are accepting women's trading cards as collectables," ESPN quoted Goldin Auctions founder Ken Goldin as saying.

The 40-year-old Williams, who is still hunting a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title, has not competed since limping out of her first-round match at Wimbledon in August.

'Winning momentum is vital, isn't it?'

AGENCIES

Buoyed by the emphatic win over defending champions West Indies, England will look to continue their winning momentum when they face Bangladesh in a tricky Super 12 clash of the T20 World Cup at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi today.

Their bowling unit was right on the job as the Eoin Morgan-led England bundled out an otherwise lacklustre West Indies for a paltry 55 in 14.2 overs before cantering home in 8.2 overs. Against an opposition who are familiar with the sluggish sub-continent conditions and capable of producing upsets, Morgan will ill-afford to rest on the laurels.

"We take lots of confidence from the first game. It's absolutely fantastic to get a win on the board and we know West Indies didn't play anywhere near their best. We focused on ourselves, and I thought everything we wanted to happen came off brilliantly well and we take that confidence," said England vice-captain Jos Buttler in a pre-match press conference yesterday.

"But now we prepare well for our next match against Bangladesh, and we'll be fully ready for the big challenge that they will throw at us," he added.

"Winning momentum is vital, isn't it? Sort of the way the tournament is set out, there's not much room for mistakes. The beauty of T20 cricket is anyone can beat anyone on their day, and an individual can win a match for their team," Buttler continued.

With the match starting in the afternoon, the reigning ODI world champions will be tested in the oppressive heat of Abu Dhabi where temperature soars above 32C.

"No, we prepare well and we are a very level team, don't get too high, don't get too low and we'll try to bring our level of intensity which always brings our best level to the game," said the right-hander, who has been a brute force for England

in limited-overs cricket at the top of the order for quite a few years.

"We prepare specifically for the opposition and so for the conditions we face, the spins, it's going to play a huge part in this tournament and of course Bangladesh have a couple of left-arm spinners. Been practicing against that a lot in the nets and trying to get some plans in place," he responded when asked about their preparation against Bangladesh spinners.

Teams have been successful in chasing so far in the World Cup at this venue, with three out of four games being won by the team batting second.

England's build-up to the tournament has centred around the unavailability of Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer and Sam Curran, but they hardly missed their star trio with Moeen Ali providing the winning edge.



Ferguson out of T20 World Cup with calf tear

REUTERS

New Zealand pace bowler Lockie Ferguson has been ruled out of the ongoing Twenty20 World Cup due to a calf muscle tear, the team said in a statement on Tuesday.

New Zealand Cricket said the 30-year-old felt tightness in his right calf after a training session and an MRI scan ahead of their tournament opener against Pakistan on Tuesday revealed a grade two tear which would rule him out for up to four weeks.

He will be replaced in the 15-player squad by Adam Milne, subject to approval by the International Cricket Council's Technical Committee.



"It's a real shame for Lockie to have this happen on the eve of the tournament and the entire team is really feeling for him right now," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said in a statement.

"He's a massive part of our side and has been in such good form - so to lose him at this time is a blow."

"However, we are fortunate to have a like-for-like replacement in the form of Adam who has been with the squad training for the past two weeks."

New Zealand have never been past the last four in the six previous World Cups but confidence will be high after T20 home series triumphs over West Indies, Pakistan, Australia and Bangladesh in the last two years.