

## SPORT



## Can Tigers rediscover essence of leadership?

MAZHAR UDDIN FROM DUBAI



After falling to defeats in their first two Super 12 matches, Bangladesh's third game against the West Indies today is perhaps their biggest opportunity to regroup and make a comeback in the ICC T20 World Cup.

There are numerous reasons behind Bangladesh's poor showing at the flagship event, beginning with the unusual preparation that the team had back home before leaving for the mega-event. The team management had opted to prepare slow and low Mirpur surfaces for their T20I series ahead of the World Cup, which did not prepare batters for the sporting tracks generally found in ICC tournaments.

Interestingly, the team management believed it would be the winning momentum from the two series against Australia and New Zealand that would boost the Tigers in the World Cup. However, that proved to be wishful thinking and the Tigers' poor batting temperament has been brutally exposed at the World Cup.

Bangladesh were dealt a body blow in the first round of the T20 World Cup and the cricketers had to contend with a major dip in confidence following heavy criticism from all corners after a six-run defeat to Scotland in their opening game.

Captain Mahmudullah Riyad and seniors like Mushfiqur Rahim made some unusual statements and remarks to try and hit back

at critics, but that simply courted more controversy, especially after a so-far winless Super 12.

The situation became more awkward as all the senior players and members of the coaching staff shied away from the post-match press conference after a thrashing at the hands of England, instead sending out the media-shy

Russell Domingo, has not been able to create a healthy environment within the team and there appears to be no one to guide or motivate the players during this difficult situation, whether it be a team manager or a mentor.

In such circumstances, one is forced to cast their minds back to former Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, whose leadership qualities proved paramount whenever Bangladesh were going through a rough patch.

From providing assurances to backing teammates who were underperforming and allowing them to play through lean patches, Mashrafe's brand of leadership is certainly missing in the current set-up. It was Mashrafe's decision to promote Shakib Al Hasan to number three in the 2019 ODI World Cup and the move paid rich dividends to both Shakib and Bangladesh.

There were instances when Mashrafe would back players off the field and among many of such incidents was when he stood beside Rubel Hossain after the pacer had a rape case filed against him just before the

2015 World Cup. The rest is history, with Rubel playing a vital role in Bangladesh's win against England as they reached the quarterfinals of the World Cup. Bangladesh will perhaps have extra motivation when they take on West Indies, who are also in a similarly dire situation, and perhaps a win in today's do-or-die encounter can turn the tables for Bangladesh. But that motivation must be moulded into success by a leader, a figure this team is still desperately searching for.

## 'Don't want to overthink it'

SPORTS REPORTER FROM DUBAI

Although the Bangladesh team has come in for scathing criticism for all corners due to their poor performances at the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup, wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan Sohan is confident the Tigers can turn things around with a win against the West Indies in Sharjah today, an encounter that has shaped into a do-or-die contest for both teams.

There were no controversial statements during the virtual pre-match press conference yesterday, but Sohan exuded optimism while delicately answering every question.

"It's nothing new. Whenever we fail, there will be criticism. But it's important to have healthy criticism. Yes, we have to accept that we are not doing well but there were many occasions in the past where we managed to bounce back when our backs were against the wall. I think if we do well in the remaining three matches, things will positively favor us," Sohan told the media yesterday.

Things unraveled for Bangladesh in each of their Super 12 games so far as the Tigers first failed to defend a challenging 171-run total against Sri Lanka before the batting department failed miserably against England.

When quizzed about the areas that the Tigers would like to improve against the West Indies, Sohan replied: "There is always a different situation in every game. We had a different situation against Sri Lanka and

it will be different against West Indies. I think the first six overs in the Powerplay, both with bat and ball, will direct where the game heads. So I think it's important for us to cope with the situation in the Powerplay."

There was also talk that the small Sharjah ground would favour the West Indies side, who like to play power cricket. According to Sohan, that issue was discussed in the team meeting.

"Before we played in Sharjah, we heard that the wicket was not producing enough runs and that 140-150 was a good enough total to defend. But we were unable to win even after scoring 171 against Sri Lanka. So it will depend on the tomorrow's (Friday's) pitch and how it behaves will be very crucial for us. But before that, we don't want to overthink it. Obviously, the West Indies are a very good side and powerful. We discussed it in the team meeting and we will try to do the basics right."

Bangladesh can take positives from the fact that they have a good record against the Caribbean side, with five wins from 12 encounters.

A majority of those wins have come in recent times and given that the West Indies also lost their first two games in the Super 12, Bangladesh will be hoping to bounce back today.

### TODAY'S MATCHES

**West Indies Vs Bangladesh**  
4pm (BST)

**Afghanistan Vs Pakistan**  
8pm (BST)



## 'We're going to be successful'

REUTERS

Champions West Indies believe they can bounce back from their two consecutive Super 12 defeats when they clash against Bangladesh in their must-win Twenty20 World Cup match in Sharjah, batsman Nicholas Pooran said on Thursday.

The two-time champions, who won the trophy in the shortest format of the game in 2012 and in 2016 when the last edition of the tournament was held, suffered heavy defeats by England and South Africa in their first two matches in Group One.

They find themselves at the bottom of the group, which also has teams like Sri Lanka and Australia, and with only two teams to progress to the semi-finals, another defeat will surely rule them out of contention.

West Indies' opponents on Friday are also in the same situation with Bangladesh going down to Sri Lanka and England in their Super 12 matches so far.

"I definitely think it's a good opportunity for us to bounce back," Pooran told reporters. "It's just another game of cricket. Anyone can win. But... it's a do-or-die game for us. And we believe that we're going to be successful tomorrow."

The West Indies side, teeming with power-hitters, have been let down by the batters in both their matches in Dubai with the team getting bundled out for 55 against England and managing a sub-par 143 for eight against South Africa.

Sharjah's shorter boundaries could be a welcome relief for them on Friday.

"We're not sure how Sharjah is going to play tomorrow. But our focus is not on the small boundaries, to be honest," he said, adding that the team's batting lacked intent in the first two matches.

"We just want to execute our skills. And once we can do that, then the results can take care of itself.

"If you can accept that we weren't good on the first two games, I think as batsmen, as a team, we already accepted that we didn't come to the party. And we're looking forward to moving forward and hopefully we can do much better."

## Can spirited Afghanistan ground high-flying Pakistan?

AGENCIES



Their confidence sky-high after two consecutive victories, Pakistan's razor-sharp attack will test the prowess and maturity of Afghanistan's impressive batters when the two teams clash in a Super 12 Group 2 match in the T20 World Cup today.

The convincing wins over India and New Zealand has made Pakistan the team to watch out in this tournament but the unpredictability factor that has always surrounded this team is something that their Asian neighbours can benefit from.

The Babar Azam-led side will certainly go into this contest as favourites but Afghanistan is not a side that can be taken lightly now. A mix of powerful strikers and world-class spinners make them an exciting unit.

Afghanistan batters dominated the Scotland bowlers with their power-hitting but now they have to contend with an attack which is one

of the most dangerous in this event.

Afghanistan players are not fretting over what the future may hold for the team and are instead pre-occupied with the task of making the semi-finals of the flagship event, spinner Rashid Khan said on Thursday.

"To be honest, at the moment, we don't have anything in mind," Rashid, Afghan cricket's brightest star, said ahead of their match against Pakistan. "We have only this thing in the mind that we're here for the World Cup and we're playing five games and we need to win three games."

"What is in our hand is to play the five games of this group stage and try to qualify to the semi-finals and make the country proud," Rashid said.

Pakistan have kick-started their Twenty20 World Cup campaign by winning both their grudge matches but coach Saqlain Mushtaq insists they cannot afford to lower their guard against a "fearless" Afghanistan.

"The boys put their heart and soul in the first two matches," Saqlain, who took over as the interim head coach just before the tournament, told reporters on Thursday.

"The confidence and the self-belief we got from those two matches, we have to take it forward. Regardless of who we face, whether it's Afghanistan or any other team, we need to play that brand of cricket and execute our plans with that mindset."

"If we can't do that, it would come back to bite us."

Afghanistan thumped Scotland by 130 runs in their opener and will rely on their formidable three-pronged spin attack to try and pull off an upset against Pakistan.

"It's a strong unit. We can't really say 'that's very easy and you will roll over them. They have a wonderful bowling attack, especially the spinners, and they bat the way they feel like. They just play sort of a fearless cricket. I think that kind of team can be dangerous," said the former spinner.

## Unconventional De Kock toes the line

AFP, Johannesburg

Quinton de Kock has long been a maverick. A precocious talent, it was obvious early in his career that he did not fit easily into any cricketing stereotypes.

It's a trait that is familiar to his teammates, and one that the sporting world as a whole recognised after he refused to take a knee in South Africa's game against West Indies at the T20 World Cup last Tuesday.

On Thursday, the saga took another twist when De Kock apologised for his stance and said he would now fall into line with the wishes of CSA.

"If me taking a knee helps to educate others, and makes the lives of others better, I am more than happy to do so," he said in a lengthy statement.

Even before his first selection for South Africa four days



after his 20th birthday in December 2012, De Kock told an interviewer that he really didn't like to talk about cricket.

He accepted that it would be part of his job if he made the big time but added, "I have no clue what I'll say but my answers will be short and sweet." It was a mantra that he has largely lived by, although he became more comfortable in front of cameras and microphones as the runs piled up in all forms of the game.

Soon after he started to establish himself in the national team he told journalists that he didn't study opposition bowlers or believe in video analysis. "I just go out and play," he said.

Nor was he obsessive about the exact specifications of his bats. "I take the bat that's given to me and that's what it is," he said on a visit to his bat sponsor's factory in 2017.

His individualistic approach has been no barrier to success. However, it would be a mistake to categorise De Kock, 28, as a carefree young man.

But his reluctance to take the knee following last year's Black Lives Matter movement was becoming an issue.

All eyes now will be on Sharjah on Saturday when South Africa play their next World Cup match against Sri Lanka.

