Star SPORT
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Dravid named India's new head coach

Former captain Rahul Dravid was appointed head coach of the Indian men's cricket team on Wednesday, replacing the highly successful Ravi Shastri, the BCCI national cricket board said. "Rahul has had an illustrious playing career and is one of the greats of the game... I am hopeful that his new stint will take Indian cricket to new heights," Sourav Ganguly, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, said in a statement announcing the appointment. Dravid, 48, will take charge from the upcoming home series against New Zealand later this month. **AFP**

'I had to play a bit differently'

AFP, *Abu Dhabi*

Opening batsman Rohit Sharma hit a blistering 74 to set up India's first win at the Twenty20 World Cup with a 66-run drubbing of Afghanistan on Wednesday as Virat Kohli's team avoided a shock early exit. The Indian batting finally fired with Sharma and KL Rahul, who made 69, putting on 140 for the opening wicket to guide India to 210 for two in their must-win Super 12 game in Abu Dhabi.

The tournament's highest total proved too much for Afghanistan who finished on 144-7 in 20 overs. They still remain in the hunt for the semi-finals along with New Zealand and India. Pakistan have already secured their place in the last-four from the group. "It was a much better wicket today, to be fair," said India skipper Kohli.

"We back the guys because they're so skillful, and sometimes it comes off like today. To give credit to the oppositions, they bowled really well in the first two matches and didn't let us get away."

India, who came in as hot favourites but crashed to two straight losses, needed to win their remaining three games and depend on others for their entry in the semis. Returning off spinner Ravichandran Ashwin returned figures of 2-14 in his first white-ball international since 2017.

"We were looking to field first, but it was a good pitch to bat on. A good start and a respectable total were very important from our side. We knew run rate could come into play and we wanted to win by a good margin, glad that we did that," said player-of-the-match Sharma.

"Whatever the team requires, I'll try to do that. Today the need was for a quick start, normally I try to assess early on but today I had to play a bit differently," he added. Afghanistan, who usually bat first, decided to put India in but that plan spectacularly backfired. "We wanted to bat second because of the dew, and the wicket looked really good for batting," said captain Mohammad Nabi whose team now have two wins and two losses.

Sharma remained the star with his 47-ball knock that deflated the opposition bowling after Afghanistan elected to field first. Sharma took five balls to get going with a boundary off skipper Mohammad Nabi, who opened the attack with his off spin, and then tore into the bowling attack.

'HISTORIC' SERIES WIN *a distant memory*

Sports Reporter

Bangladesh created history when they clinched their first-ever series win over Australia last August at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

That 'historic' T20 series win could have been a great inspiration for the Tigers in their search for positives from the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup. But unfortunately, there was hardly anyone in the team who would dare to seek inspiration from that success when their 'winning tonic', alchemised on questionable pitches, backfired.

With four losses in as many games in the Super 12 stage of the T20 World Cup, Bangladesh are not only out of the tournament but their confidence has also hit a nadir. It will not be an easy task for the Tigers to sign off on their forlorn journey with a win today when they take on a full-strength Australia as opposed to the opponents they had faced in Mirpur.

Australia spinner Ashton Agar also made that clear at the pre-match press conference yesterday. "We have a very different looking side [to the one played in Bangladesh], and the wickets certainly aren't playing like those pitches that we played on over there," Agar said.

"To be fair, Bangladesh played in those conditions incredibly well and we weren't surprised. But it is very different now. We have a very different-looking side and the wickets certainly aren't playing like those conditions that we played over there."

The Aaron Finch-led side were looking a formidable unit until England blew the archrivals away, exposing their vulnerabilities.

Australia, who have never won the T20 World Cup, have so far defeated South Africa by five wickets and Sri Lanka by seven wickets.

Their high-profile pace attack comprising Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc was put to sword by Jos Buttler but they will be expected to return to their efficient ways against Bangladesh.

The big question is whether a demoralised Bangladesh batting line-up can handle this top-class bowling unit when their batting has let them down throughout the tournament?

With England effectively assured of their semifinal place with four wins from four games in Group 1, Australia and South Africa are scrambling over the last spot.

At the moment, the Proteas have six points from four games while Australia are on four points from three matches. However, after an eight-wicket mauling by England in their last match after being dismissed for 125, Aaron Finch's team took a hit on their run-rate which will be the tiebreaker should they finish level on points with South Africa.

So Australia will look to even up their points and runs when they face a hapless Bangladesh side. "We go into every game thinking that you have to win. It's something that helps you move on from the England game," said Agar. Without doubt, Bangladesh need to make sure they go out all-guns-blazing if they want to prove Agar's observations regarding their Mirpur success wrong and spoil their party.

TODAY'S MATCHES

Australia Vs Bangladesh
4pm (BST)

West Indies Vs Sri Lanka
8pm (BST)

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND
172 for 5 in 20 overs
(Guptill 93, Phillips 33; Wheal 2-40, Sharif 2-28)

SCOTLAND
156 for 5 in 20 overs
(Leask 42, Cross 27; Boult 2-29, Sodhi 2-42)

RESULT
New Zealand won by 16 runs

Player-of-the-match:
Martin Guptill

INDIA
210 for 2 in 20 overs
(Rahul 69, Sharma 74, Pant 27 not out, Pandya 35 not out; Naib 1-39, Janat 1-7)

AFGHANISTAN
144 for 7 in 20 overs
(Nabi 35, Janat 42 not out; Shami 3-32, Ashwin 2-14)

RESULT
India won by 66 runs.

Player-of-the-match:
Rohit Sharma.

'Cooked' Guptill leads NZ to victory over Scotland

AFP, *Dubai*

Martin Guptill hit 93 and became only the second man to pass 3,000 Twenty20 International runs as New Zealand defeated Scotland by 16 runs at the World Cup on Wednesday.

New Zealand made 172-5 before Scotland battled to a respectable 156-5 off their 20 overs. The Kiwis' second win in three matches in the Super 12 stage kept them on course for the semi-finals.

Put into bat, 35-year-old opener Guptill put on 105 for the fourth wicket with Glenn Phillips. Guptill made his runs off 56 balls with six fours and seven sixes.

His first six off Alasdair Evans in the sixth over allowed him to pass 3,000 runs in the format, second only to India captain Virat Kohli.

"I was pretty cooked. We've got a day off so I won't be doing much tomorrow," said Guptill after batting almost the entire innings in blistering heat. "We didn't have a great start, losing three wickets in the powerplay. Glenn and I had to assess the situation and get a partnership together. We created a bit of momentum."

Phillips made a steady 33 off 37 balls before he was dismissed by Brad Wheal.

The Scottish bowler also accounted for a weary Guptill off the next ball of the 19th over as the opener attempted to cart him over long on. Guptill now has 3,069 runs in T20 Internationals while Kohli leads the way on 3,225. Despite taking two wickets in two balls, Wheal conceded 40 runs off his four overs. New Zealand hit 35 from the first four overs, 24 of those off Wheal.

But Safyaan Sharif then sent back Daryl Mitchell for 13 and, four balls later, claimed the key wicket of skipper Kane Williamson for nought. At the midway point, the Black Caps were 70-3 before Guptill completed his 18th T20 half century off 35 balls with another six, his 150th in the format.

'We're looking to have good pitches back home'

Sports Reporter
from Dubai

The ploy of gathering winning momentum by exploiting home conditions ahead of the T20 World Cup was exposed brutally by sporting tracks at the event, leaving Bangladesh still searching for a first win in the Super 12 stage ahead of their fifth and final game against Australia in Dubai today.

Initially, the team management and players seemed assured of the tonic that winning series against Australia and New Zealand before the mega event would provide. But following a disastrous campaign, at least one of the members of the Bangladesh team management agreed that the Tigers needed a level playing field for batters and the bowlers.

Sri Lanka spin legend Rangana Herath, currently the Tigers' spin coach, realises that Bangladesh need sporting pitches in upcoming home series, starting in the Pakistan series after the T20 World Cup.

"It all depends where we are going to play. I am sure we need to expect good pitches, which give chances to batters and bowlers. We are looking to have good pitches back home," Herath said ahead of the game against Australia yesterday.

While Bangladesh's hopes of reaching the semifinals were extinguished, Herath was eyeing a positive finish against an Australian side the Tigers defeated 4-1 prior to the World Cup. However, it will be a different ball game against the Aussies on the sporting tracks of the UAE, where spinners will not get the support they received on tailor-made Mirpur pitches.

"As professionals, we need to come back strongly. We have another game to go. We need to maintain that winning mindset and build winning confidence. We have to think about Bangladesh cricket's way forward. We have another chance to win against Australia tomorrow (Thursday). The guys will analyse what they have done, and what they have to do. I am sure they will come back strongly," he said.

The 43-year-old, who was part of Sri Lanka's golden generation which won the 2014 ICC T20 World Cup in Bangladesh, opined that the players needed to challenge themselves.

"Playing for your country is a matter of pride and responsibility. We should all understand the responsibilities and roles whether you play for Sri Lanka or Bangladesh. You have to identify that role and then improve day by day. A cricketer has to realise that if they want to be a good or great cricketer. You need to be more professional, work harder and challenge yourself. In that way you can improve individually and as a team," said Herath.

There were questions regarding not keeping leg-spinner Aminul Islam as a backup following Shakib Al Hasan's departure due to injury as leggies have had a huge impact in the mega event and Herath, perhaps having realised that, informed that Aminul would be included for the Tigers' next assignments at home and away.