



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Even trusty Mirpur presents no takeaway

SPORTS REPORTER



Despite the two close-margin defeats, Bangladesh team management is bound to find very little room to extract any positives from the T20I series against Pakistan as the Tigers managed to expand their horizon of concerning areas rather than finding answers to the problems that already existed.

Pakistan won the three-match series comprehensively and handed the Tigers a whitewash with a five-wicket victory in the finale, which saw a last-ball finish, at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Prior to the series, solving Bangladesh's batting crisis was the biggest priority following a disastrous World Cup campaign and thus, this series was always going to set the tone in how Bangladesh recover from the slump as well as establish their vision for the future in the shortest format in order to fare better in the coming T20 World Cup in Australia next year.

The alarming question is whether the think-tank's blueprint for evolution, which they laid out this time prior to the series, is practically in tune with reality or whether the general planning and the backing philosophy need re-evaluation for its apparent lack



SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH

124 for 7 in 20 overs (Naim 47, Shamim 22, Afif 20; Wasim 2-15, Qadir 2-13)

PAKISTAN

127 for 5 in 20 overs (Rizwan 40, Haider 45; Mahmudullah 3-10, Shohidul 1-33, Aminul 1-26)

Result: Pakistan won by 5 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Haider Ali.

Player-of-the-series: Mohammad Rizwan.

"The way everyone has put in the efforts, credit goes to the players. You can always improve. Like our fielding has improved, our middle order has won games for us. Whatever mistakes we made; we want to make sure we don't repeat them in the upcoming games. We want to carry this momentum into the Test matches. I want to thank the fans here."

BABAR AZAM, PAKISTAN CAPTAIN

as many as six changes for this series, handed debut to a new opener, tried out two new opening combinations, shuffled the batting order, among many other things but eventually the side have only generated sorry figures one after another.

The fact that the paltry score of 127 for seven by the Tigers in the first game remained their top score of the series goes a long way to show that the problems in the batting department are far from being solved. Scores of 47, 23 and 35 in the final five overs in the three games only prove the lack of firepower in the batting order. And that none of the batters were able to score even a fifty in the entire series played on home soil would only add salt to the Tigers' wound.

Now, can someone like the tried-and-failed opener Saif Hassan, deemed as a Test specialist, be able to recover from the given nature of exposure, and can the batters undo the fracture in confidence that may induce from a home series whitewash? Can 'the process' be trusted when the evidences continue to speak otherwise?

On the face value, Bangladesh team management always seem to have answers to most bad patches they encounter. However, this time it looks like the nature of question has morphed by the time they began answering as the Tigers find themselves at a worse state from where they had started to regrow.

The Mahmudullah question

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The body language of any sports team on the field is a good indicator of where the side stands mentally and from the beginning of the recently concluded World Cup, Bangladesh side have painted a picture of falling heads and dropping shoulders. Coming into the T20I series at home against Pakistan, the crisis appears to have deepened with captain Mahmudullah Riyad unable to facilitate the mental changes that are basic in the modern game.

A dramatic last over from the skipper, where he bagged three wickets, had added some spark to the dead rubber in the third T20I against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla yesterday but the game in reality was well over before that point as the Tigers ended up succumbing to their first T20 series whitewash at home since 2018 against Sri Lanka. The last time that it happened was also under Mahmudullah's leadership and not much change has come in the attitude or acceptance of such difficult situations.

Yesterday's last over saw Mahmudullah marshalling his troops with more vigour than had been seen in the series so far, imbued by the two wickets of Sarfaraz Ahmed and Haider Ali off back-to-back deliveries. However, Mahmudullah's involvement on the field, when the team has found itself in difficult situations, has been puzzling since the series wins against Australia and New Zealand at home. It is easier to lead when there is momentum but team leaders need to galvanise others when the chips are down.

"Yeah, it's a little heartbreaking. We got close but unfortunately it didn't happen for us," Mahmudullah dictated with a dejected smile following the match yesterday.

When asked about Saif Hassan being

dropped from the third T20I, his response reminded of how he dealt with the Mushfiqur Rahim question: "The team management will be able to answer it well."

Mahmudullah, since the beginning of the Pakistan T20 series, has worn the expression of a man forced to carry a burden that he does not agree with. The vacant smile, answering media questions vaguely only because he has to answer for the sake of answering, were noticeable. When he refers to team management, the obvious question would be whether he is part of that management as the skipper. Whether or not he agrees with the selection, as the on-field captain, it was his duty to uplift players lacking confidence but his own submission has made things difficult. That he was not accountable on selection matters was made clear.

However, accountability has to be there. Even against sides like Scotland and Oman at the World Cup, the team's body language was one of despair at crunch times and Mahmudullah himself looked the most disheartened.

"If we could win one or two matches, the confidence level would be higher. The dressing room was spirited during Australia and New Zealand series. Obviously when you lose, it creates doubt. The boys tried hard," the skipper said regarding where his side is at the moment.

A side cannot however always have winning momentum, but the lack of involvement and positive body language that results in a defeatist mentality is more damaging than losses. At this rate, would it be unfair to ask whether Mahmudullah sees himself carrying on as captain in the long-term? If he does, does it correlate with the team finding a new way in T20s?



Fazle Mahmud continues to impress

SPORTS REPORTER



Barishal Division skipper Fazle Mahmud's 188-run knock on the second day of the final round of the ongoing National Cricket League against Rajshahi Division at Sylhet Academy Ground yesterday was yet another demonstration of his consistency throughout the campaign. In their race to top Tier-2, Barishal resumed the day on 225 for seven with Mahmud unbeaten on 122. The left-hander put an emphatic 212-run stand with Islamul Ahsan for the eighth wicket, helping their side pile up 333 in the first innings.

In reply, Rajshahi scored 118 for the loss of two wickets as they ended the day trailing by 215 runs.

In the other Tier-2 encounter in Sylhet, Dhaka Metropolis resumed on 52 for two against Chattogram Division. However, three-wicket hauls from

Chattogram's Nabil Samad, Noman Chowdhury and Hasan Murad restricted Dhaka Metro to 258 runs.

Coming down to bat, Chattogram scored 24 runs losing a solitary wicket as they lead by 11 runs ahead of the third day. Meanwhile, at BKSP 4, Tier-1 table-toppers Rangpur Division resumed the day on 304 against Sylhet Division. Myshukur Rahman, who was unbeaten on 131, went on to score 157 while runs from the bat of the tail-enders helped Rangpur reach 393 in their first innings.

In reply, Amite Hasan's unbeaten 90 saw Sylhet end the day with 190 for two, still trailing by 203 runs at the end of the day's play.

At BKSP 3, Dhaka Division off-spinner Shuvagata Hom ran through Khulna Division's middle order, reducing them to 180 for eight before stumps. Despite Soumya Sarkar's fighting 94-ball 65, Khulna find themselves in a precarious position as they trail by 155 runs.



Spinners put Sri Lanka on top

AFP, Galle

West Indies were on Monday in deep trouble in the first Test against Sri Lanka as they collapsed to 113 for six at stumps on day two in reply to the hosts' first innings total of 386 all out.

The tourists, hunting their first ever Test win in Sri Lanka, trailed by 273 runs with four wickets in hand in Galle.

After Sri Lanka's quicks failed to take a wicket, the spinners made hay as off-spinner Ramesh Mendis claimed three wickets and left-arm orthodox duo



Praveen Jayawickrama and Lasith Embuldeniya shared three wickets between them. Openers Kraigg Brathwaite and Jermaine Blackwood had added 46 runs for the first wicket before Embuldeniya provided the breakthrough trapping Blackwood leg-before for 20.

Earlier West Indies bowled out Sri Lanka for 386 with Roston Chase claiming a five-wicket haul.

Among his victims were Dimuth Karunaratne whose classy 147 came to an end when Joshua da Silva completed a smart stumping.



Mahmudul Hasan Joy



Rejaur Rahman Raja

Fresh blood in Test squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Batter Mahmudul Hasan Joy and pacer Rejaur Rahman Raja were the two new faces as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) selectors announced a 16-member squad for the first of the two-match Test series against Pakistan yesterday.

The selectors also included premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan in the squad.

However, Shakib's participation in the first Test, starting from November 26 in Chattogram, will depend on his fitness as the star all-rounder is recovering from a hamstring injury that he sustained during the Tigers' third Super 12 game of the ICC T20 World Cup against West Indies which eventually forced him out of the flagship event with two games remaining.

Member of the Bangladesh Under-19 World Cup-winning squad Joy has been in fine touch recently. He struck consecutive hundreds in the ongoing National Cricket League for Chattogram Division. Raja, on the other hand, has been rewarded for his consistent performance in the first-class circuit as the pacer from Sylhet picked up 33 wickets in his

BANGLADESH SQUAD FOR FIRST TEST



Mominul Haque (Captain), Shadman Islam, Saif Hasan, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Litton Das, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Nayeem Hasan, Taijul Islam, Ebadot Hossain, Abu Jayed, Yasir Ali Rabbi, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Rejaur Rahman Raja and Shakib Al Hasan (subject to being declared fit to play).

first ten first-class games so far.

"It is still early days for him but Mahmudul has shown good temperament for the longer version. He is also an in-form batsman," chief selector Minhajul Abedin was quoted as explaining the inclusion of Joy in the squad in a press release yesterday.

"With injury concerns to Taskin [Ahmed] and Shoriful [Islam], we needed to keep our pace bowling options open and Raja got the nod. We have been monitoring his performances in first-class competitions. He is strong and energetic and has a knack for taking wickets," Minhajul added.

Batter Yasir Ali, who was part of the last Test squad that played in Zimbabwe, is the third uncapped player in the 16-member Bangladesh squad while Mahmudullah Riyad, after unofficially retiring from the longest format in Zimbabwe, was not named in the squad.

Minhajul remained confident regarding the balance of the team that has a blend of both youth and experience and is looking forward to playing competitive cricket against Pakistan.

"There is a fair bit of experience if you consider that Mominul [Haque], Mushfiqur [Rahim], Shakib, Taijul [Islam] and [Mehidy Hasan] Miraz are all part of the squad. We will obviously have to wait to see if Shakib makes it for the first Test but these players have been the most consistent performers for us in Tests and their presence can make a difference.