

More than just 10 points on the line

SPORTS REPORTER

An 88-run win in the second ODI against Afghanistan saw the Tigers reach a century of points in the ICC Cricket World Cup Super League and overtake England (95 points) at the top of the table.

Bangladesh have already secured the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan with a game in hand, but Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who started in the first ODI, underlined the importance of getting ten points from the third and final ODI today.

But why exactly are these 10 points so important? The top eight teams and hosts India will automatically qualify for the 2023 ICC World Cup, so 10 points would give Tamim Iqbal's side a slight cushion. That takes on more significance since the Tigers have only 10 more Super League games to go, including the third ODI against Afghanistan. Each team in the Super League plays a three-ODI series against eight other teams, with four series at home and four away, totaling



Tamim Iqbal inspects his bat during practice at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday as the Bangladesh ODI captain looks ahead to whitewash Afghanistan and also get back among runs in the final ODI of the three-match series today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Greater foundation through osmosis

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI *from Chattogram*

"We are becoming seniors too, right?" Liton posed the question as an answer at the press conference after his 136-run knock in the second ODI. Such words reflected his confidence, momentum and growing responsibility but also showcased the changing nature of the team's dynamics.

Mushfiqur Rahim was grinding at the nets in the practice session yesterday at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. There was the sweet sound of his bat giving away his form and current confidence levels after a big innings but nothing is permanent.

It is often easy to miss the work and effort stars like Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan or Mushfiqur Rahim put in to push themselves that extra yard. In the past, it bred a certain dependency when juniors were found wanting in matches. There was a certain motif at play as things progress in the Afghan series.

Players such as Mehedi Hasan Miraz or Liton had been watching the seniors' backs, but over the years, their own consistency had been an issue. But that their difficult formative years in the national team are bearing fruit now is a very recent emerging pattern, and a welcome one.

There had been performances here and there from less established stars in

recent years but the astonishing Test win at Mount Maunganui in New Zealand scratched deeper into the surface. More shoulders appeared to take responsibility. After Mehedi and Afif Hossain's incredible partnership won the first ODI against Afghanistan from an incredible situation, that pattern became more apparent.

"Cricket is a game of eleven players and everyone has to contribute. Since we had an opportunity to do something like this, we played normal cricket. As players, we had an opportunity. It worked, which is good for our careers and our future," Mehedi said ahead of the third ODI today.

His emphasis on the opportunity to win games for the team was pronounced. They were ready for more responsibility.

"Obviously, we learn from watching them. Our senior players have a lot of experience and have achieved big things. They have won us a lot of matches. We used to think that if we got the opportunity, we would try to win matches too. So me and Afif had that confidence on the field. We set a game plan," he said, hinting that their experience was building after six years on the international scene.

"Competitiveness is there at every moment. In the national team, you have to perform to play. From the point of view of challenges, maybe

we are young in terms of experience. But in the national team, you can't make excuses about whether you are a senior or junior. At the end of the day, if I don't perform, someone will say that maybe it may be better if someone else takes my place. It's important to adjust to international cricket. The quicker one adjusts, the more chances of success and to lengthen one's career."

While the concept of seniors and juniors is null in any international side, it is not the same in Bangladesh. With the current batch slowly showing faith in younger faces, it may just be time for that concept to ebb away.

Tamim was seen working on his foot movement, still gearing to improve. He along with Shakib will be looking for runs in the third ODI, as will Mahmudullah Riyad. They too have to show up, an osmosis improving team culture and the membrane being competitiveness. Seniors know their contribution is important but the balancing act is being provided by Liton, Mustafizur Rahman or Miraz's growing experience and stature, a sign of good things to come.

'I feel incredibly safe'

REUTERS, ISLAMABAD

Australia players are feeling "incredibly safe" after arriving for their first tour of Pakistan in 24 years and raring to dish out their aggressive brand of cricket, Test captain Pat Cummins said on Sunday.

Top teams have shunned Pakistan since gunmen attacked a visiting Sri Lanka team in Lahore in 2009 and a heavy security dragnet has been thrown around Australia's six-week tour beginning with the first test in Rawalpindi on Mar. 4.

"I feel incredibly safe," Cummins, on his first overseas tour since taking over the test captaincy, told a virtual news conference.

"Upon arrival there's been lots of security. We were straight off the plane and straight to the hotel. We've got a pretty good set-up here and we'll be confined to the hotel except for games and training."

The 28-year-old ruled out any apprehensions among his team mates and said they were focused on the tour featuring three tests, an equal number of one-dayers and a solitary Twenty20 International.

"It's comforting and we're really lucky to be surrounded by so many professionals," Cummins said.

"There's lots of things around which might be a little bit different to what we're used to but we know it's been taken care of so we can just really enjoy ourselves here ...

"Pakistan is an incredible cricket nation. We feel lucky to get to come back here after a whole generation didn't get the chance to play any cricket over here."

Mbappe equals Ibra

AGENCIES

Kylian Mbappe scored twice from Lionel Messi assists as an impressive Paris Saint-Germain came from behind to beat Saint-Etienne 3-1 and further extend their lead at the top of Ligue 1 on Saturday.

Mbappe has now scored 156 goals in a PSG shirt, equalling Zlatan Ibrahimovic's tally from his four-year spell in Paris between 2012 and 2016.

Only Edinson Cavani, with 200, has scored more goals for the club.

"My 156th goal? It's incredibly special. I think that having the opportunity to be able to equal the record of a player like Ibrahimovic is fantastic. We all know what he did here, so it means that we are playing with high standards," said Mbappe.

"It is not easy to describe his performances. He is incredible. I am proud of him," said Mauricio Pochettino.

Mbappe was withdrawn to a standing ovation late on at the Parc des Princes, where supporters kept themselves warm on a bitterly cold night by performing a Mexican wave as their team turned on the style.

The World Cup-winning striker will now serve a suspension and so will miss next weekend's trip to Nice which will be followed by the second leg of PSG's Champions League last-16 tie against Real Madrid in Spain on March 9.

There Paris will defend the 1-0 advantage given to them by Mbappe's goal in the first leg.

Grandhomme hundred gives NZ a lifeline

AFP, CHRISTCHURCH

After being outplayed for two days, New Zealand held a glimmer of hope that they could salvage the second Test as they reduced South Africa to 140 for five at stumps on day three in Christchurch on Sunday.

It gave the Proteas a lead of 211 with five wickets remaining after posting 364 in their first innings and then bowling New Zealand out for 293.

South Africa dominated the first two days but Sunday belonged to New Zealand after they were rescued from 91 for five by a 133-run stand between Colin de Grandhomme and Daryl Mitchell on the docile wicket.

"We're reasonably happy, not entirely happy," said Rassie van der Dussen, adding that a lead of 270-280 would put South Africa in a strong position.

"The main thing is the ball swings, that's the biggest challenge." But New Zealand believed that sort of target would be achievable.

"It's still a good batting wicket," said de Grandhomme, who scored a Test-best 120 not out. "If they set 270 we'll definitely back ourselves to get it."

De Grandhomme added there was nothing special about his innings in the conditions.



"It was a pretty good wicket so there wasn't too much to worry about, just see the ball, hit the ball," he said.

When South Africa started their second innings 71 runs ahead, New Zealand needed quick wickets and Tim Southee and Matt Henry obliged to have the tourists 38-3.

A Southee inswinger beat Sarel Erwee's bat and trapped the opener in front after he had scored eight off nine deliveries.



'I'm very pleased'

Rafael Nadal continued his perfect start to 2022, beating Cameron Norrie 6-4, 6-4 to lift the Acapulco ATP title in his first tournament since winning the Australian Open yesterday. Nadal needed one hour and 54 minutes to beat Britain's 12th-ranked Norrie for the fourth time in as many career meetings. "I'm very pleased," Nadal said of his week's work. "It was a very important title for me, so I can't be happier."