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South Africa skipper Temba Bavuma



ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Whether to focus on the batting line-up's form and ability to counter South Africa's pacers or to focus on their own pace battery's performance on South African soil is what may boggle the Bangladesh think-tank most going into the first ODI at Centurion today.

Bangladesh have never won on South African soil in any format, so rather than going in with shaky feelings and a half-hearted approach borne from past defeats, Tamim Iqbal opted for brevity. "We know that South Africa is always a difficult tour for us. We want to change that and for that we have to prepare ourselves for a difficult challenge and be brave," the ODI skipper claimed at the press conference yesterday, a day ahead of the game.

Bangladesh have historically struggled in South Africa, especially with the pace and bounce. The likes of Kagiso Rabada terrorised them in the recent T20I World Cup at UAE too. Anrich Nortje's pace could be a handful while in Tabraiz Shamsi they have the kind of bowler that Bangladesh have not really had much experience with.

The ground at Centurion has produced runs in the last three ODIs, with the latest two being the Proteas' series against Pakistan. Tamim, who said that his side had been able to get a feel of the pitch by practicing in the centre wickets, was finding hope from the team's last match against South Africa in ODI format – a 21-run win at The Oval in the 2019 World Cup.

"This is a ground where, if you go by the statistics, you see that a lot of runs are scored because the ground is a bit smaller and the outfield is fast. But whatever the statistics say, you have to accept that we have to play well. We're ready for the challenge. We know they will be onto us. We have to handle the pressure. We played well against them recently and I believe there is no reason not to do well. The most important thing will be how we start tomorrow," Tamim said.

- » Bangladesh are already on top of the ICC ODI Super League table with 100 points from 15 matches. Even a single win from the three-match series against South Africa would further solidify the Tigers' chances of qualifying for the 2023 ODI World Cup in India.
- » South Africa, meanwhile, are 10th in the Super League table with just 39 points from 10 matches. Bangladesh are yet to win in any formats away to South Africa. The Tigers have played nine ODIs, six Tests and four T20Is against the Proteas in their backyard.
- » Playing in 14 of the 21 ODIs between

Bangladesh and South Africa, Shakib Al Hasan has scored 397 runs – the highest among the players from the current squads of the two sides.

- » Quinton de Kock is just behind Shakib in the top-scorers' chart. However, De Kock took only seven matches to score 354 runs at an average of 59.
- » With 13 wickets in seven ODIs, Kagiso Rabada is the active player with the most number of wickets against Bangladesh.
- » Shakib also scalped the same number of wickets as Rabada but the all-rounder played seven more games than the pacer.

The team will be buoyed by the fact that ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is keen on taking on the Proteas as well. "He is with the team and he's fully available for all the matches. Shakib is waiting for tomorrow's match and he wants to do well. Just like I want to do well, the other members of the team want to do the same," Tamim informed.

Alongside exactly how much of an advantage fast bowlers will get on tracks that might be flat, the main worry may be how the top-order can weather and push past the early storm.

"We know it will be challenging. If you think about it, bar one or two, most of the members of our side are quite experienced with at least 40-50 ODIs in the bag. Everyone

knows what to expect. The most important thing will be the mindset. If we have a good day, I feel we can beat any side anywhere in the world," Tamim said.

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma was counting on having a good day too. Bangladesh had the experience and for Bavuma the Tigers deserved respect.

"The players you mentioned [Shakib, Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim] are very experienced. They are guys who have played here in South Africa... they are guys who have played in Australia. So, from a mental point of view, they know what to expect. They [Bangladesh] are on top of the [ICC ODI Super] League, so we will give them the respect. But it's what happens on the day that matters," he concluded.

Diya, Nasrin dazzle to guarantee gold

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh already secured a gold medal before the actual gold-medal event as archers Diya Siddique and Nasrin Akter landed in the final of the women's individual recurve event yesterday at the 2022 Asia Cup World Ranking Tournament Stage 1 in Thailand. "It is really a different feeling that we, two Bangladeshis, will play the final of an international event," an elated Diya told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

Apart from success in the individual events, Bangladesh, after yesterday's matches, will also be eyeing a gold in the women's team recurve event, and bronzes in men's individual and team recurve events and in men's compound event as well.

Diya, despite losing two of the first three sets, overcame top seed Ridhi Phor of India 6-4 in the first round and went on to convincingly beat fourth seed Tisha Punia of India 7-3 in the semifinals.

Nasrin, however, went through a much tougher challenge on the road to meeting Diya in the final. First, she handed Laxmi Hembrom of India a first round exit by edging past the tenth seed 6-5 in tiebreakers and then underwent another gruelling battle in the semifinal against Malaysia's Nur Fozi as Nasrin won again by the exact margin.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh women – comprising Diya, Nasrin and Famida Sultana Nisha – ousted Kazakhstan 5-1 in the semifinals and thus reached the team recurve event's final, where India stand in between them and the gold.



Khorshedur treble fires BD to top

SPORTS REPORTER

Penalty-corner specialist Khorshedur Rahman netted a hattrick to help Bangladesh earn a hard-fought 3-2 win over Oman in Jakarta yesterday and emerge as Group B champions in the Men's AHF Cup.

The unbeaten Bangladesh team will meet Pool A runners-up Kazakhstan in the semifinal while Oman will take on Pool A champions Sri Lanka in the other semifinal on Saturday.

With three wins from as many matches, Bangladesh and Oman both took to the field to decide who would finish on top of the group.

Bangladesh started positively by taking the lead in the eighth minute as Khorshedur converted the second penalty corner of the match.

However, Oman hit back two minutes into the second half, with Rashad Al Fazari scoring from a counter-attack in the 32nd minute before Fahad Al Lawati gave Oman a deserved lead in the 48th minute with a clever flick.

After falling behind, Bangladesh began to press and converted their third penalty corner through Khorshedur in the 56th minute, before he completed his hattrick and secured a win by converting another penalty stroke two minutes from time.

Tuchel praises players' focus

Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel praised his players for remaining focused amid the uncertainty about the club's future after they progressed Wednesday to the Champions League quarter-finals, where he said they would be "the team nobody wants to play". The reigning European champions came from behind to beat Lille 2-1 in northern France and win their last-16 tie 4-1 on aggregate with Christian Pulisic and captain Cesar Azpilicueta scoring their goals.

"Chelsea is so clear what it demands from every employee and from every player – play your role to the limit, live up to it and take responsibility," Tuchel said when asked how he and his team managed to maintain their concentration amid all the turmoil.



AGENCIES

Villarreal scored three late goals to secure a stunning 3-0 Champions League second-leg victory at Juventus on Wednesday, condemning the Serie A side to a 4-1 aggregate loss and a last-16 exit for the third successive season.

Penalties from Gerard Moreno and Arnaut Danjuma and Pau Torres's tap-in in the final quarter of an hour were enough for Unai Emery's well-organised side to see off the Italians at the Allianz Stadium and make Friday's last-eight draw.

"It's a magical night," said Moreno to Movistar+.

"We thought we could do it, we've always shown that in the big games we compete, the team gives its best... we all want to be in there with the best in Europe, we're going to keep dreaming and we're going to do it together."

Having fallen before the quarter-finals against Olympique Lyonnais and Porto in the previous two seasons, in-form Juventus, who had lost just once in their last 21 matches in all competitions, were firm favourites to progress.

Juve dominated the first half and were unfortunate not to go into the break in front after Dusan Vlahovic's brilliant flicked effort came back off the crossbar, but they could not keep up the pressure in the second period. Villarreal were content to

sit back and wait for their moment, which came in the 78th minute after the visitors were awarded a penalty following a VAR review, with substitute Gerard Moreno, who had only just come on, squeezing the spot kick home.

Juve threw on Argentine striker Paulo Dybala as they looked to level the tie, but goals down the other end from defender

Liverpool, Bayern Munich, Manchester City, Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid, Benfica, Villarreal and Chelsea have booked a spot in the quarter-finals. The quarter-final draw will take place today. The first leg of the quarter-finals will take place on April 5 and 6, with the return fixtures a week later on April 12 and 13.

Pau Torres and another penalty, this time converted by Arnaut Danjuma, completed a famous win for Unai Emery's team.

It is the first time Emery has progressed from a tie in the knockout stages of the Champions League, while Villarreal had not qualified for the quarter-finals of the competition since 2008-09.



Villarreal players celebrate after a late show helped them stun Juventus 3-0 in the second-leg, condemning the Serie A side to a 4-1 aggregate loss and a last-16 exit from the Champions League for the third successive season.

PHOTO: REUTERS