

## Miraz eager to counter Proteas

SPORTS REPORTER

After a promising introduction to the international arena followed by some ups and downs, Mehedi Hasan Miraz seems to have matured as a cricketer in recent times and grown a deeper understanding of his role according to the demands of the situation.

The 24-year-old was struck for 38 runs in his first four overs in the first ODI, but his hunger and determination to contribute was heard when skipper Tamim Iqbal revealed that Miraz urged the skipper to bring him back into the attack.

Miraz lived up to his side of the bargain, ending with four wickets that proved instrumental to the Tigers' maiden win in South Africa in the first ODI.



Ahead of the decisive third encounter against the hosts, Bangladesh will be looking to take further strides and Miraz will hope to play a big role in the spin department.

"Always try to contain runs. Maybe the batters are taking chances against me because, if you notice, they [South Africa] are going after spinners. The wicket plays well [for batting] and they will be looking to score more against me," Miraz said yesterday, on the eve of the third and final ODI to be played at Centurion.

Bangladesh will also bank on Miraz's batting skills in the lower-middle order given that the right-hander has played crucial knocks recently. Miraz scored an unbeaten 81 against Afghanistan, stitching together a match-winning unbeaten 174-run partnership with Afif Hossain after Bangladesh were reeling on 45 for five in chase of 216. "I really enjoy batting with Afif. At times I tend to think a lot further ahead but he tries to keep things simple. We have good communication and his 30 runs and my 20 runs were crucial for the team," he said.



Despite being under tremendous mental pressure due to family health crisis, Shakib Al Hasan decided to stay back for the third ODI in South Africa. All eyes will be on the ace all-rounder as Bangladesh try to win a first-ever series against the Proteas in the decisive third match today. (Inset) The Bangladesh pacers, too, will have a big role to play if they are to win the encounter.

PHOTO: STAR FILE/BCB

## Can Tigers rediscover the winning formula?

SPORTS REPORTER

A first-ever series win on South African soil will surely be in the back of the minds of the Bangladesh team, but it will be vital for the Tigers' think-tank to ensure a relaxed atmosphere in the dressing room while ticking as many boxes as possible in the decisive third and final ODI at Centurion today.

Bangladesh have seen both sides of the coin in the first two games as Tamim Iqbal and his troops clinched a maiden win in South Africa courtesy of a collective approach in the first ODI before being ruthlessly outplayed by the hosts in the second game.

**While a collective approach remains key if the Tigers are to re-write history, there is an individual named Shakib who can turn things around single-handedly with his charisma.**

South Africa are expected to once again bank on their strengths and extract pace and bounce from the surface as they did at the Wanderers, when Kagiso Rabada led from the front with his second five-wicket haul to restrict Bangladesh on 194 for nine. The hosts went on to level the series by



chasing the target with seven wickets and 12.4 overs to spare, riding on a blistering fifty by Quinton de Kock.

The Proteas will be looking to replicate that performance from the second game by jolting the Tigers' batters early on. The ploy worked in the second ODI as Rabada knocked off Bangladesh's top order, reducing the Tigers to 36 for 5 inside 13 overs. The likes of Rabada and Lungi Ngidi will look to hit the deck hard and attempt to get that extra bit of bounce to create doubt.

On the other hand, it will not be easy for Bangladesh to repeat their performance from the first game, when Tamim and Liton Das negotiated the initial pace and bounce by opting for an initially conservative approach.

Keeping wickets intact and seeing out the first 10 overs will be key for Bangladesh

and a stable start could again lay the foundation.

It may have initially looked like a defensive approach after Bangladesh added just 33 runs in the first 10 overs of the first ODI, but as the game progressed, the 95-run opening stand between Tamim and Liton proved to be pivotal.

The middle order went on to cash in on that steady start as Shakib Al Hasan and Yasir Ali added 115 runs for the fifth wicket. Bangladesh would add another 91 runs in the last 10 overs to post a huge total of 314 for seven.

Posting ample runs on the board can also embolden the bowling unit, as evidenced by the first game, when the Bangladesh pace attack featuring the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam and Mustafizur Rahman showed what they were capable of.

While a collective approach remains key if the Tigers are to re-write history, there is an individual named Shakib who can turn things around single-handedly with his charisma.

The star all-rounder is going through a family health crisis and even considered returning home ahead of the third ODI to stay beside his family members, who are currently in hospital. But eventually deciding to stay back showed his determination and hunger to do well.

## Joty blames it on batting

SPORTS REPORTER

As the hopes for a spot in the final four of the ICC Women's World Cup was over for the Bangladesh team with two games remaining, the Tigresses skipper Nigar Sultana Joty hinted at revamping their composure following a massive 110-run defeat against India at Seddon Park yesterday.

"Controlling the nerves and the situation of the game, that's where we need to improve," Joty said during the presentation ceremony.

Chasing a target of 230, Bangladesh batters collapsed and got bundled out for 119. Joty, in her assessment, focused on the lack of partnerships. "We couldn't make partnerships in this or the last match, which has cost us," the captain stated as she appreciated her bowling unit.

"The bowlers did wonderfully today, as they have done in the last couple of matches. We put India under pressure and restricted them to a good total," the captain said.

Bangladesh will face Australia on March 25 before taking on holders England to round up their maiden ODI World Cup campaign.



## Naseem, Shaheen halt Australia

AFP, LAHORE

Pace spearheads Naseem Shah and Shaheen Shah Afridi knocked over eight wickets and restricted Australia to 391 before Pakistan ended day two of the deciding Test at 90-1 in Lahore on Tuesday.

The duo led a late charge to close the second session as Australia lost their last five wickets for 71 runs after reaching a commanding 320-5 at lunch. Naseem finished with figures of 4-58 and Shaheen 4-79.

At stumps, the game was evenly poised and the series hanging in the balance as Abdullah Shafique, 45, and Azhar Ali, 30, returned to the pavilion five overs early due to bad light.



The series is tied at 0-0 after the first two Tests in Rawalpindi and Karachi ended in high-scoring draws.

Shafique and Azhar had to rebuild after Pakistan opener Imam-ul-Haq was trapped leg-before by Australian skipper Pat Cummins on 11. But the pair looked untroubled, putting on 70 for the second wicket.

## Ashraful's first fifer in vain

SPORTS REPORTER

Brothers Union's Mohammad Ashraful is known for his accomplishments with the bat but in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) match against Mohammmedan Sporting Club, it was his skills with the ball that was on view as he picked up his first five-wicket haul in List A cricket. However, his efforts with the ball were offset by Mohammmedan skipper Shuvagata Hom, who notched career-best figures to give his side a handsome 54-run win in a low-scoring affair at BKSP's ground 3 yesterday.

Mohammmedan recovered from a bad start through opener Rony Talukdar and overseas star Mohammad Hafeez after other opener Parvez Hossain Emon and number three Soumya Sarkar departed within five overs. Ashraful broke the 72-run stand with Hafeez's scalp as one delivery turned and gripped the surface while keeping low and caught Hafeez in front of the stumps leg-before. Ashraful's celebrations were to become the highlight of the day as he danced to each wicket. Rony succumbed to Ashraful in the next over to a ball that jagged back sharply and clipped the off stump. After Rony's team-high 60-ball 58, it looked like Mohammmedan, without their key stars in the line-up as they are featuring for the Tigers in South Africa, crumbled. The middle-order of Ariful Haque, Sohravordi Shuvo and Shuvagata departed in quick succession. Zahiduzzaman's unbeaten 41 late down the order held the innings together before they were bowled out for 206.

In reply, Mohammmedan banked on their own off-spinner in Shuvagata, who gave early breakthroughs with the wickets of Sadikur

Rahman and Moshukur Rahman. Ashraful could not capitalise on the confidence boost with the ball by carrying with the bat as he departed out leg-before for one to a Nazmul Islam Arip delivery. Opener Imtiaz Hossain and Aminul Islam Biplob contributed in a 57-run stand before the former fell to a team-high 42. Biplob (36) and Dhiman Ghosh (32) kept ticking the runs but when the two departed to Ariful Islam and Shuvagata, respectively, Brothers innings folded at 152.



In another low-scoring affair at BKSP, Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club struggled early against Shireepukur Cricket Club's Hasan Murad, who picked up two key wickets of Saif Hassan and Imrul Kayes after the batters contributed in a 60-run stand. Regular fall of wickets saw Sheikh Jamal not getting enough partnerships in and Robiul Islam Robi's 55-ball 48 was their only positive with the bat as they were bowled out for 146. Rahatul Ferdous picked up a four for for Shireepukur. However, Shireepukur struggled immensely against left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam, who picked up four for 33 while Taibur Rahman bagged three for 43 to give Sheikh Jamal a 14-run win.



Italy midfields Jorginho (R) tries to block striker Giacomo Raspadori during a training session at the Coverciano Training Facilities in Florence on Tuesday. The Azzurri, faced with the grim prospect of missing out on a second consecutive World Cup, will host North Macedonia in Palermo on Thursday night in a World Cup playoff semifinal. A win in that fixture will see the four-time world champions travel to either Portugal or Turkey for the final qualifying playoff next Tuesday.

PHOTO: TWITTER