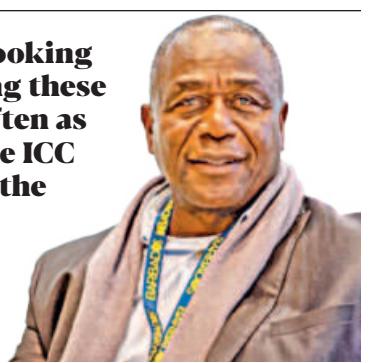


SPORT

"Generally, we have to start looking at the bigger picture of getting these players playing together as often as possible in preparation for the ICC T20 World Cup later down in the year. We need to ensure we are fielding a very strong side for that tournament."

West Indies' chief selector
DESMOND HAYNES



Bangladesh-West Indies T20Is have doled out exciting contests over the years. The two teams once again brace for a three-match T20I series, set to begin with at the Windsor Park in Dominica tonight. Both the sides will have added motivation heading into the series as it is being considered to be their first step in preparing for the upcoming T20 World Cup in Australia in October-November this year. With seven wins in 13 encounters, West Indies edge out the head-to-head statistics, but the fact that the eighth-ranked Bangladesh remain just a place below the Caribbeans in the T20I rankings indicate an action-packed next few days for cricket fans. To hype up the fans' excitement even further, here we try to outline the importance of the series with the T20 World Cup in just a few months' time.



Road to T20 World Cup starts in the Caribbean

NABID YEASIN

The horrific memories of the 2021 T20 World Cup must still be fresh in the Bangladesh cricketers' minds. In that edition, the Tigers' tongues wagged more than their willows bashed.

A little over three months' time is left for the next edition of the T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in Australia in October-November. But for the Tigers, the road to the land Down Under starts tonight, in the Caribbean, when they face hosts West Indies in the first of three-match T20I series at the Windsor Park in Dominica.

The upcoming T20I series against the Windies is being considered the first step in shaping up the squad for the next T20 World Cup in order to avoid mishaps like in the preceding edition of the tournament.

Even the Tigers' team management acknowledged the fact that it needs to keep one eye on the World Cup from now on every time they go out on the field to play the shortest format. And the promising thing for

Bangladesh is that Mahmudullah Riyad's troops are braced for plenty of T20 action before they hop on the Australia-bound flight.

The lack of opportunity to aptly prepare for the tournament was not an issue even ahead of the last edition of the tournament. Despite that, Bangladesh succumbed to six defeats in eight encounters, including a humiliating loss in the opener to Scotland, in the UAE and Oman in the 2021 T20 World Cup.

That was because of the false sense of achievement garnered from sealing historic series wins over Australia and New Zealand

The truth is that like in the case of Tests, Bangladesh have not yet been able to settle into a set style of play and do not have an ironed-out team combination in T20Is.

at favourable home conditions just months before the previous World Cup. But no such opportunities will be there for Bangladesh this time around as only three of the minimum 18 T20Is that the Tigers are set to play leading up to the next T20 extravaganza will be played on home soil, which essentially takes away the Tigers' ability to extract results by exploiting home conditions.

This, however, should work as a blessing in disguise for Bangladesh as it would give them the opportunity to assess their abilities in testing foreign conditions and go into the World Cup with a realistic sense of their capabilities and limitations.

But the concerns for the Tigers still outweigh their potential chance for better preparation. The truth is that like in the case of Tests, Bangladesh have not yet been able to settle into a set style of play and do not have an ironed-out team combination in T20Is. The challenge starting from the Windies T20Is will be to at least start addressing the bugs in the system and slowly instilling in the troops the brand of cricket that they would like to play in the upcoming World Cup.

The team management would need to fix roles for the players and have like-for-like backups in mind in case someone fails to fulfil their roles, something that the Tigers have failed to do over the years as an apparent lack of depth in the pipeline has always seen the team management pick from a handful of the available choices.

With the Windies T20Is, Bangladesh will return to the format after almost four months. And contrary to what Mahmudullah had said before leaving the country for the Caribbean, Bangladesh do not have a balanced squad in the T20 format and that can be ascertained from the fact that the Tigers have lost nine of their last 10 T20Is.

But Bangladesh can take inspiration from their last tour of the Caribbean in 2018 when they bounced back from a humiliating 2-0 Test series defeat to win the following T20I and ODI series by the same 2-1 margin. The scenario this time around is quite similar as the Tigers go into this T20I series on the back of yet another embarrassing Test series whitewash.

Even if the Tigers find a way to repeat the feats of 2018, the challenge this time will be much bigger. It will be to sustain that momentum and keep improving on their approach to the format so that they can go to Australia for the World Cup with a refined squad who are aware of their capabilities and limitations instead of being misled by a false sense of achievement.



A trio of hopefus

MAZHAR UDDIN

Bangladesh will start their build up to the ICC T20 World Cup, slated to be held in Australia in October, with the upcoming three-match T20I series against West Indies starting from July 2. Bangladesh's performance in the last T20 World Cup was disappointing as the Tigers lost to Scotland in the qualifying phase before losing all of their games in the Super 10 stage. T20I Skipper Mahmudullah Riyad and the team management will be keen to form a stable unit ahead of the mega event and there are a few contenders for spots, who will be hoping to make a case in the T20I series against the West Indies. The Daily Star tried to focus on some of the prospects that have a chance to cement a place as T20 specialists.

MUNIM SHAHRIAR

After an impressive in the latest Bangladesh Premier League campaign, young right-handed opener Munim Shahriar caught

selectors' eyes before eventually making his T20I debut against Afghanistan in March this year. The 24-year-old has had little impact initially, scoring 17 on his international debut and following that up with just two runs in his next outing. But the hard-hitting right-hander will get another opportunity



it is that fearless attitude that the team management would most want him to replicate in the international circuit.

NASUM AHMED

Left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed has emerged as one of the crucial cogs in the Tigers' T20I unit with his ability to keep things tight. The 27-year-old



eight wickets in those two series and managed to trouble batters. He also boasts a decent economy rate of just under seven per over across 20 T20Is, but Nasum's biggest challenge will be to show his prowess away from home, where pitches offer less to spinners.

MAHEDI HASAN

Off-spinning all-rounder Mahedi Hasan has been a prolific performer in the domestic circuit and has shown great promise on his comeback to the T20I side in 2020 after being dropped following his debut in 2018.

His ability to bowl with the new ball has been a highlight, with Mahedi scalping 25 wickets in 31 games at an economy rate of 6.51. The 27-year-old is also considered a handy option with the bat and he has been utilised as a floating batter that can either chance his arms at the top or chip in with some crucial runs in the lower middle order. The fact that he is an outstanding fielder makes him the complete package that Bangladesh have been searching for.

in the Caribbean in the upcoming T20I series as the team management looks someone who can ignite an explosive start in the shortest format. Although the Mymensingh native starred for finalists Fortune Barishal in the BPL with 178 runs in six matches at a strike rate of 152,

has successfully demonstrated his abilities to bowl accurately with the new ball and has managed to provide early breakthroughs. He plays a handy role alongside left-arm spinner Shakib Al Hasan and also played a pivotal role in T20I wins against New Zealand and Australia at home last year. The lad from Sylhet scalped

WHAT THEY SAID

IMRUL KAYES

Since we did not have a good Test series, it will be important for us to gain the confidence back. I think we have the ability but we need to play as a unit which was missing in the Test series. It is very important to have a good start with the bat to lay the platform for a big total. Someone from the top needs to bat till 15-16 over as T20 cricket is a fast-paced game and it's not easy for a new batter to go out there and hit the ball right from the word go. The last time we won the T20I series in West Indies where Tamim Iqbal gave good starts and we capitalised on those starts. If we can post totals around 170-180 and put pressure on the West Indies, there is a chance but if we score 140-150, it won't help.

NAZMUL ISLAM APU

West Indies are a tough opponent in the T20 format and they have shown that through their muscle cricket. From bowling point of view, I feel we need to be cleverer in operating against the Windies batters. The last time when we won the T20 series, we had the belief even after losing the first game. Though the pitches there mostly help the seamers, in T20 format spinners can play a big role too.

It is important not to bowl too quick on those surfaces and not give anything on the slot as they are strong enough to clear the field. If our spinners can tempt the Windies batters and force them to reach for the ball and use the variation accordingly, we have a good chance of beating them. The spinners can use bowling on block holes, like I did in the previous tour, as part of variation.

RUBEL HOSSAIN

The pace bowling department will play a crucial role in the upcoming limited over formats in West Indies. Since we will begin with the T20 series, it will be important for our seamers to keep things full and straight and they should hardly give any room to the batters. Change of pace also plays a big role in any conditions in the shortest format. Our fast bowling unit is doing really well in recent times and I am confident that they will continue to do that in West Indies.