

First Test win dented England morale, says Maharaj

REUTERS, Manchester

South Africa spinner Keshav Maharaj hopes his side's first Test win over England week has dented home morale ahead of the second clash, which begins at Old Trafford on Thursday.

Maharaj was one of the mainstays of a victory by an innings and 12 runs at Lord's that has put South Africa 1-0 up in the three-Test series.

"I'd like to think so," he said in answer to a question about whether South Africa had struck a psychological blow with the emphatic nature of their win, completed inside three days.

"But having said that, I think England have played some really good cricket and fought themselves out of tough situations to win test matches and series in the last year," Maharaj told a Tuesday news conference.

"We know what they're capable of. They have some really world class players within the team and are fierce competitors and they'll do everything to bounce back, as any team in their position would."

"I think we are more sound as a unit."

'No one is close to the quality of Pandya'

AGENCIES

India have ticked all the boxes so far heading into the Asia Cup and the impending T20 World Cup in October.

India's early exit from the T20 World Cup last year was a result of their cautious approach at the beginning of the innings and the competition served as Shastri's final task as head coach of India.

"They should not change the approach (they have shown of late). Even when I was coach we discussed we were a bit timid at the top considering the players we had down the order."

"It is the right approach. You will lose a few games in between but if you start winning with this approach you can take that confidence in big games and use the same tactics," said Shastri in a press conference organised by Star Sports.

KL Rahul returned from an injury layoff, and Virat Kohli, who was rested for the West Indies series, will be back in the starting lineup.

Can the younger players' replacements, the two veteran batters, exhibit the same level of ferocity?

"Why not? They are very experienced players," said Shastri.

The all-rounder Hardik Pandya's return has given the Indian starting eleven the much-needed balance.

"He is one of the most important cogs in India's wheel. You take him out, the balance goes awry. We missed him last year at the World Cup where he could not bowl. No one is close to the quality that he possesses," Shastri said.



Recalled to the squad despite ordinary performances, Sabbir Rahman will have a lot to prove in the upcoming Asia Cup. The Bangladesh squad, barring Taskin Ahmed and Anamul Haque, left for Dubai on Tuesday for the 15th edition of the continental tournament.

PHOTO: STAR/FACEBOOK

Tigers gauging their expectations

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh T20 team departed for UAE yesterday with hopes of getting their bearings in the shortest form in order in the Asia Cup. Only Anamul Haque Bijoy and pacer Taskin Ahmed did not travel with the squad due to their visas not arriving on time and are expected to travel today.

Termed as a 'new beginning' by the Bangladesh Cricket Board, questions have been raised about what the Tigers could realistically expect to achieve in the upcoming six-team tournament. That question was also pitched to newly-appointed T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan, when he was queried about expectations going into the Asia Cup and whether the team had a realistic chance of making the final.

"It will be difficult for us [to play final]. If we think realistically, it would be an achievement to play well in these two matches and improve our performances from the last few series that we played in the past year and a half," Shakib had replied in a press conference on August 22.

Continuous failures in T20Is led to the BCB shuffling the squad for the recent Zimbabwe series and trying out new players. However, after failing to embody the approach that the BCB were looking for and a resulting 2-1 loss in that series, the board decided to bring Sridharan Sriam, a coach with international and IPL experience, to take the reins of the T20

side. At the same time, Russell Domingo was relieved of his duties in the shortest format and told to focus on ODI and Tests.

Shakib admitted that failures and talk of new beginnings were not new, which at least shows that the all-rounder was ready to accept those shortcomings. "There is no way to not address the failures. It's only



a question of whether we are hearing this talk of new beginnings for the last time. We might hear again that we are trying to start things anew. I don't whether there is any end to these new beginnings. But if we don't try, we will never know. So, it's important to try," he had added.

However, Bangladesh have often come out firing with their backs to the wall. The Tigers have made the Asia Cup final thrice and took the final against India in 2018 till the final ball of the 50-over game. The Tigers also had to play that final without Shakib as he injured his finger during a match against Pakistan. This time the team will be hoping their captain and ace all-rounder turns up with vital performances to inspire the side.

Bangladesh have been placed in a group with strong T20 outfits Sri Lanka and Afghanistan and both sides are in better form than the Tigers.

The Tigers can still hope to make headway in the tournament if Shakib can deliver like he did against Sri Lanka, scoring 92 off 69 with the Tigers needing to win with bonus points in a tri-nation series at home to make the final. Or if he performs the way he did when striking a ton in 2017 against the Lankans to mark the special occasion of Tigers' 100th Test. Or like when he took the 2019 World Cup by storm.

"It's not that I will have to make changes. I don't think we don't need to change. It is important how we utilise our resources to get the best return on investment, I am only thinking about that," Shakib had said.

As far as expectations go, the team management will be hoping the skipper can make the best use of 'resources' available to him.

Ronaldo is in United's plans: Ten Hag

REUTERS

Manchester United's new manager Erik ten Hag said Cristiano Ronaldo still features in his plans for the season despite dropping the Portugal international from the club's starting lineup in their 2-1 Premier League win over Liverpool.

Ten Hag was rewarded for his decision to field a frontline of Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Anthony Elanga, as Sancho and Rashford found the net on Monday to secure a first win for United's Dutch manager.

Ronaldo came on as a substitute in the 86th minute, but was unable to make an impact during his brief cameo.

When asked if the 37-year-old can still fit into his style of play, Ten Hag told reporters: "I think he can."

"In his whole career, he, under several managers, he did in several styles and systems," Ten Hag added.

"He always performed, so, why he can't do this? For me, his age is not an issue. If you are young, you are good enough, and when you are old and you still deliver the performance, you are also good enough."

Ronaldo was not the only player from the United team that lost 4-0 to Brentford to be dropped, as captain Harry Maguire, Luke Shaw and Fred also started on the bench, with Ten Hag saying the changes were part of his game-plan to tackle Liverpool.

Stokes reveals he was 'angry at cricket'

REUTERS

England Test captain Ben Stokes told the Telegraph on Monday that he felt deep resentment towards cricket because he had been unable to visit his dying father as much as he wanted.

Stokes decided to prioritise his mental health after suffering from a series of panic attacks following the death of his father due to brain cancer almost two years ago.

"So I had a real thing with cricket at the time I took a break. I was really angry at the sport because it was dictating when I could see my dad," Stokes said.

The all-rounder also stressed the importance of opening up about mental health.

"I find sometimes people are a bit nervous to go into the detail about that kind of stuff with me," he said.

"It's perceived you can't feel a certain way - that's a sign of weakness to show that you are not mentally feeling great. People think they can't ask people who have struggled. No. It's fine. I'll happily tell you as much as I possibly can."

Stokes also said that he had feared he might not play again after taking an extended break from cricket last year to focus on his wellbeing.

Speaking about his state of mind prior to taking the break, Stokes told the BBC, "It wasn't over two weeks or a couple of months. It built up over a long, long time, maybe even like three or four years."

"It was like I had a glass bottle I kept on throwing my emotions into. Eventually, it got too full and just exploded."

Akram terms Kohli-Babar comparison a bit premature

AGENCIES

All eyes will be on former India captain Virat Kohli when India meet Pakistan in their Asia Cup opener in Dubai on August 28.

While Kohli has gone through an extended lean patch with no hundred since November 2019, the much younger Pakistan skipper Babar Azam seems to be at the peak of his powers and doing well across formats.

The Babar Azam vs Virat Kohli debate, in fact, has been a hot topic ever since the Pakistan captain made his international debut in 2015 and recently Babar has emulated a lot of the things in his pursuit for greatness.

Kohli has struggled for runs over the past two years but Pakistan legend Wasim Akram feels the former India captain remains one of the all-time greats and comparing Babar with him is still a bit premature.

"First of all, let me start by saying that criticism from Indian fans against Kohli has been unnecessary. He is one of the greatest of all times, not just this era. He still fit as a fiddle. He is still one of the best fielders in the Indian squad."

"As they say, 'class is forever' and that is Virat Kohli. Hope he doesn't come back

to form against Pakistan but he will come back eventually," said Akram in a press conference organised by Star Sports, the official broadcaster for Asia Cup.

"The comparisons are only natural. When we played, people used to compare Inzamam [Ul-Haq], Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar. Before that it was Sunil Gavaskar Javed Miandad, G Vishwanath and Zaheer Abbas."

"Babar has been very consistent, because he has got the right technique. He is very hungry and very fit. He is still a young captain but is learning very fast. However, comparisons with Virat it is too early."

"Babar is on the right track to be where Virat Kohli is but to compare him with him at this stage is too early. But he is absolutely on the right track to be one of the modern greats," said Akram in a call with long-time rival and friend Ravi Shastri.

The Pakistan great also predicted that it will be the most closely fought Asia Cup ever with the gap between teams reduced drastically.

"It will be the best Asia Cup ever in my opinion. Earlier, there used to be India Pakistan and Sri Lanka but now all teams are dangerous including Afghanistan and Bangladesh," added Akram.



Former India skipper Virat Kohli, along with wife Anushka Sharma, and other members of the Indian side were captured on camera before leaving for Dubai. Meanwhile, Babar Azam and Co also reached Dubai to play the Asia Cup, starting from August 27. India and Pakistan will meet on August 28 to kick their campaign.

PHOTO: COLLECTED