



CAPTAINS' TAKES

“It is difficult for us [to think about making the Asia Cup final]. If we can show a bit of improvement from what we have done in the last year-and-a-half, it would be an achievement.

SHAKIB AL HASAN,
BANGLADESH

“It will be a different kind of pressure but as we tried in the last World Cup [not to let it affect us], we'll try to focus on our game and believe in our abilities. This time also our focus will be to give our best.

BABAR AZAM, PAKISTAN

“Winning the Asia Cup seven times, being the No.1 team, creating new world records but there's no greater pride than hearing 140 crore of fans chanting 'India, India'. So, with this pride, let's take the world but before that let's conquer Asia.

ROHIT SHARMA, INDIA

“This is a big tournament to showcase our talent, and this is a great opportunity for everyone on this squad.

NIZAKAT KHAN,
HONG KONG

“From the last year, we have been playing good cricket. We played some good series in the last two-three months against teams like Australia and a few other countries. What I trust in is in the process. Hopefully we can clinch the title.

DASUN SHANAKA, SRI LANKA

“The boys are improving day by day in both batting and bowling and in the field. [Performance with] Both ball and bat are important and also fielding is very important.

MOHAMMAD NABI,
AFGHANISTAN



The 15th edition of the Asia Cup is set to begin today with hosts Sri Lanka taking on Afghanistan at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. Six teams -- Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Hong Kong -- will battle it out for the ultimate glory in the next 16 days.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Can Bangladesh repeat their Asia Cup wonders?

SPORTS REPORTER

When it comes to tales of the Asia Cup, Bangladesh are the team that have always been so close, yet so far, reaching the final of the tournament three times but failing to lift the trophy even once.

With the 15th edition of the multinational tournament set to kick off from today, Shakib Al Hasan and his troops will be looking to pass the first hurdle in their opening game against Afghanistan on August 30 at Sharjah Cricket Stadium.

Bangladesh, placed in Group B, will face a stiff challenge afterwards on September 1 as well, when they take on the other team in their group, Sri Lanka. Coupling the fact that only the top two teams from each group will qualify with Bangladesh's current scenario in the shortest format of the game, things look quite difficult for the Tigers.

Bangladesh have been in turmoil in recent times, especially in the shortest format of the game where performances have been below-par, leaving the team management desperate for stability.

After a lot of drama, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) eventually named Shakib captain of the T20 side for the upcoming Asia Cup. In that same quest to revive the Tigers' T20 fortunes, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) also took further drastic steps, relieving head coach Russell Domingo from his duties in the shortest format just ahead of the

flagship event.

Sridhar Sriram, who was roped in as the Tigers' 'technical consultant', is expected to guide the coaching staff in the absence of a head coach in the Asia Cup.

However, questions can be raised whether such dramatic moves just days before an important tournament will help a demotivated Bangladesh turn around their disappointing performances.



Regardless, the Asia Cup is a platform that Bangladesh can take plenty of positives from, having reached the final thrice in the past four editions.

This edition will also serve as a crucial platform as part of the build up for the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup and, with that in mind, the team management will look to fix a few things, especially in a batting line up decimated by injuries that is now left with just

two recognised openers in the form of Anamul Haque and young Parvez Hossain Emon.

Interestingly, team director Khaled Mahmud hinted before travelling to the UAE that the team management would experiment in the opening slots, adding that even players like Mashfiqur Rahim and Shakib could open the innings if needed.

Experience can also play a huge role in high-pressure situations and the likes of Mahmudullah, Riyad, Mashfiqur and Shakib will hope to use that to prevent any top order collapses while there will also be keen eyes on young Afif Hossain, who has shown great promise recently.

While the Tigers' think-tank may have not mentioned their challenges in the bowling department, the fact is that it will play a major role if Bangladesh are seriously eyeing success in the tournament.

Mustafizur Rahman is still struggling with injury and it is doubtful whether he will recover ahead of the opening game against Afghanistan, meaning the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain and Mohammad Saifuddin will take the responsibility in the pace-bowling line-up.

Shakib will lead the spin-bowling department, with another left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed in the squad. The Tigers may also opt for all round options such as Mosaddek Hossain, Mahmudullah and Afif in the spin department.

ASIA CUP TRIVIA

The first edition of the Asia Cup was held in 1984 in the UAE. In a tournament featuring India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Sunil Gavaskar's India emerged as the winner by beating Sri Lanka in the final.

Sri Lanka, hosts of the 15th edition of the tournament, are the only side who have appeared in every edition of the tournament.

With seven titles to their name, India are the most successful side in the continental tournament. They have also lost three finals.

Bangladesh have played the final thrice in the last four editions of the tournament. The Tigers, however, are yet to clinch the title. They are also runners-up of the last edition that was won by India.

Sri Lanka's Sanath Jayasuriya has scored the most runs in the Asia Cup. The left-hander scored 1,220 runs at an average of 53.04 in 25 matches between 1990 and 2008. His haul included six centuries three fifties.

The only other batter surpass the 1,000-run mark in the competition is Kumar Sangakkara, who, between 2004 and 2014, made 1075 runs in 24 matches at an average of 48.86.

Among those still playing the game, India captain Rohit Sharma has scored the most runs in the tournament. He has scored 883 runs in 27 matches.

With 33 scalps in 15 games, former Sri Lanka pacer Lasith Malinga leads the chart for most wickets in Asia Cup.

Among those still playing, Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan has the most wickets in Asia Cup. The all-rounder has scalped 24 wickets in 18 matches.

Shanaka looks to lift nation's morale with title

AFP, Dubai

Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka on Friday said victory in the Asia Cup would lift the spirits of fans in the cricket-crazy island nation as it struggles through its worst economic crisis.

The six-nation Twenty20 tournament will begin in the United Arab Emirates on Saturday after being moved from Sri Lanka because of political unrest.

Sri Lanka will take on Afghanistan in the tournament opener, which will serve as a tune-up for the T20 World Cup in Australia in October and November.

"The cricket always brings a different kind of vibe to Sri Lankan people, winning is the most thrilling thing," Shanaka told reporters. "So we look forward to delivering for our country."

Sri Lanka has been hit in recent months by food and fuel shortages along with power blackouts, but enjoyed success in a home series in June when they beat Australia



in one-day internationals.

They also drew level in Tests with Australia and Pakistan.

Shanaka said playing at home

would have been a definite advantage but added that there are no favourites in the T20 format.

"Hosting this tournament in

Sri Lanka would have favoured us more because the crowd support is there and playing in home conditions has a bigger advantage," he said.

"When it comes to the favourites, India is a leading side at the moment but in T20 there are no favourites. On a day if we play good cricket, we can be the favourites as well."

Sri Lanka may play spoilers to a predicted India-Pakistan clash in the final of the tournament.

Leg spinner Wanindu Hasaranga remained key for the side in the white-ball series against Australia at home and Shanaka said the team would rely on the all-rounder in the UAE.

"Our main spinner Wanindu Hasaranga will definitely play a major role in this tour for us," said Shanaka.

"We have played some good series in the last two-three months. What I trust the most is the process, so we are on the right track and hopefully we can clean the series here as well."

INFO ZONE

SRI LANKA

M	W	L	NR
2	1	1	0

M	W	L	NR
1	1	0	0

HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

M	W	L	NR
2	1	1	0

M	W	L	NR
1	0	1	0

HEAD TO HEAD IN T20Is

M	W	L	NR
2	1	1	0

Last and only meeting in T20Is: Kolkata, March 17, 2016 in T20 World Cup. Sri Lanka won by 6 wickets.



Rashid Khan (Afghanistan)

BOWLING	MATCHES: 66
	WICKETS: 112
	AVERAGE: 13.80
	ECONOMY: 6.22
	BEST BOWLING: 5/3
NR:	505: 0



Wanindu Hasaranga (Sri Lanka)

BOWLING	MATCHES: 38
	WICKETS: 62
	AVERAGE: 14.14
	ECONOMY: 6.61
	BEST BOWLING: 4/9
NR:	505: 1

KEY PLAYERS