



'Tigers must establish bold intent quick'

KHALID HOSSAIN

Bangladesh have a stern test in their Asia Cup opener on Tuesday against Afghanistan and that they have to grab the proverbial bull by the horn right from the onset for success, reckons veteran coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim.

Prior to the ongoing continental tournament, Bangladesh engaged in two three-match T20I away series against West Indies and Zimbabwe, in that order. And in both tours, not only the Tigers failed to win the series, they could neither establish a stable playing eleven nor a playing style in the fast-evolving format.

Fahim reckons the Tigers will be in uncharted waters as they take on the Afghans, who demolished the Lankans with a convincing eight-wicket win in the tournament opener on Saturday.

"Bangladesh are not familiar with an opponent who are playing like how Afghanistan did against Sri Lanka. And the preparation ahead of the Asia Cup did not help their cause either," Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

Afghanistan have demonstrated how far they've progressed since making their debut in the Asia Cup in 2014, showing boldness and clarity in their approach against Sri Lanka in all departments of the game.

Sri Lanka were struggling from the start as left-arm quick, Fazalhaq Farooqi, caused all sorts of trouble with his control of swing deliveries that zipped in either direction. Fahim knows the Bangladesh batters all too



well, having mentored several stalwarts in the country, and thinks that Bangladesh, especially their batters, cannot afford to sit back, play to their impulses, and wait for things to happen.

"Afghan bowlers have shown that they are not willing to play in conventional means, bowling dot balls to stifle the batters but instead they are eager to look for the breakthroughs."

Fahim praised the Afghan bowlers, who were able to bundle out the Sri Lanka side to a below-par 105. He was also impressed with how Afghanistan did not let their foot off the pedal during the chase.

"The way they chased 100-odd runs in under 11 overs was a testament to their evolved mindset and approach. They could've taken the chase easy but to their credit, Afghanistan did not allow any room for complacency," Fahim said.

The veteran coach reiterated the need for Bangladesh to establish a positive intent as early as possible, to heighten their chances of progressing far in the marquee event.

"Bangladesh have to ensure they don't allow pressure to build up. Positive intent is vital to make the difference," concluded the coach.

With Sri Lanka beaten, Bangladesh can afford to lose the Afghanistan encounter and go all out against the Lankans and thus, progress in the Super Four behind the Afghans. However, by doing so, Tigers' fixtures in the Super Four will be complicated since the second-placed team from Group B is the only team who are scheduled to play two games on consecutive days.

Therefore, a high-risk approach against the high-flying Afghans could reap high rewards for the three-time runners-up in their quest for the elusive Asia Cup trophy.



There are hardly any bigger occasions in international cricket than India-Pakistan clashes as fans from both sides deck up with colourful clothing and instruments. Two Pakistan fans prepare to enter the Dubai International Cricket Stadium with trumpets while an Indian fan paints his friend in Indian colours ahead of the marquee clash yesterday. Meanwhile, the two teams line up for the national anthems just before the start of the match, where India won the toss and sent Pakistan to bat.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Nawaz differs with Shanaka

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM DUBAI

After being dealt a crushing blow by Afghanistan in the first match of the 2022 Asia Cup, Sri Lanka captain and all-rounder Dasun Shanaka opined that Afghanistan was a much more difficult hurdle than their Group B opponents Bangladesh.

"Afghanistan has a world-class bowling attack. We know Fizz [Mustafizur Rahman] is a good bowler. Shakib [al Hasan] is a world-class bowler. But apart from them, there is no world-class bowler in the side. So if we compare with Afghanistan, Bangladesh is an easier opponent," Shanaka said in the post-match press conference on Saturday.

The remarks might have touched a nerve on at least a few Bangladesh supporters but Sri Lanka's assistant coach Naveed Nawaz was far more nuanced in his observation of the relative strengths of the two sides.

When this reporter and a few other media personnel caught up with him at Sri Lanka's team hotel, Nawaz reminisced on his past with Bangladesh cricket, talking about how good it was to see former players such as Parvez Hossain Emon in the side. Having won the U-19 World Cup with the Tigers, Naveed had a lot of pride attached to his former players.

When the comments made by Shanaka were brought to his attention, Nawaz said: "It's hard to

agree with that."

Discussing the topic, Nawaz felt that Bangladesh were more aware of playing T20s due to the BPL.

"Bangladesh are ahead of us in T20s as they played more. Due to the BPL, I see that Bangladesh players are adjusting well to the format. I think we still need a lot more experience in the format but it will happen," the Lankan said.

Talking about the game against Afghanistan, Nawaz was analytical to a certain degree.

"Afghan boys knew what they had to do and they knew the lengths and lines to bowl. They have played here a lot and we also had two new bowlers. We have many cross-format players in the team. Most of the Afghan players are used to playing in T20 format.

"Developing in T20s means you cannot be in two minds and do a bit of this and also that. You have to settle on what you want to do and it means taking the fear out of your approach. As coaches, we also try to coach T20 with a similar approach," the Lankan said.

The loss against Afghanistan meant that the fixture against Bangladesh is a do-or-die fixture for Sri Lanka in order for them to making it through to the Super 4 stage.

Bangladesh would take on Afghanistan on August 30 in Sharjah before taking on Sri Lanka in their second game in Dubai on September 1.



'All will be proven on the pitch'

SPORTS REPORTER FROM DUBAI

As Bangladesh are set to begin their Asia Cup quest with their group opener against Afghanistan on Tuesday, the Tigers' bowling all-rounder, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, yesterday talked about his side's preparation and more.

ON BEING AWARE OF THEIR ROLES

I think it's important that everyone is well aware of their roles. An opener should be aware of how to handle their front bowlers, how to handle their swings and all that. We have prepared well for the Asia Cup before coming here and trained here as well. So, all we need to do now is to execute that on the pitch.

ON AFGHANISTAN CHALLENGE

We have played against Afghanistan in the past



and we've played good cricket against them and won. In the last T20I series we played against them at home, both teams won apiece. I won't say we're lagging behind them. They have a very strong bowling line-up, but we have experienced batters who are also in good touch.

ON SRI LANKA CAPTAIN'S STATEMENT

Actually, who's better than whom will be proven on the field. There are days when good teams play bad games and lose and bad teams play good game and win. I don't want to judge or give any prediction on who's better or not. Instead, I believe that all will be proven on the pitch during the match.

ON PACERS' FORM

You said that our pacers aren't performing well. Perhaps a lot of series at the same time has created some fatigue to the fast bowlers. But now I think the fast bowlers and spinners are in very good shape.

ON SHARJAH'S SPINNING WICKET

Both teams will be relieved if the wicket is spinning as both teams possess quality spinners. However, batting will prove to be the key since the team that bats better will have more opportunity to pull the match in their favour.

ON FOLLOWING THE PROCESS

What's important in these tournaments is the first match. Afghanistan's first match was important for them as they've won it. It's also important for us to win the first match and set the tone for the team. And to win, we need to follow the process. If you look at the past, the matches that we've won were where the entire team followed the process, where the bowlers did their bit, and so did the batters. Individual efforts can't win you matches all the time, especially not in this kind of tournament.



Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim attempts to take a high catch while newly appointed vice-captain Afif Hossain [Inset] inspects his pad during practice at the ICC Academy ground in Dubai yesterday. Bangladesh will start their campaign tomorrow against Afghanistan, who already made a statement with an emphatic eight-wicket victory against Sri Lanka on Saturday. Alongside assisting Shakib Al Hasan, Afif might feature in another new role as the number four batter in the Bangladesh batting order.

PHOTO: BCB

