

Star SPORT

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BATTLE FOR ASIAN SUPREMACY

ASIA CUP 2022



'Always difficult when you lose four wickets in seven overs'

SPORTS REPORTER FROM SHARJAH

Batting failures once again proved to be Bangladesh's downfall as they ended up losing their first Asia Cup 2022 match against Afghanistan by seven wickets at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Bangladesh posted a meagre 127 for seven before putting up a fight with some tight bowling.

However, an unbeaten 33-ball 69-run partnership between Najibullah Zadran and Ibrahim Zadran for the fourth wicket sealed an easy win for the Afghans.

Bangladesh struggled from the start after skipper Shakib Al Hasan elected to bat, as they were left reeling on 53 for five inside eleven overs.

Mosaddek Hossain remained unbeaten on 48 off 31 balls and Mahmudullah Riyad added 25 off 27 balls.

According to Shakib, who was featuring in his 100th T20I yesterday, the Tigers were 10-15 runs short. He also credited the bowlers for showing a fighting spirit.

"It's always difficult when you lose four wickets inside



"Everyone knows Rashid and Mujeeb are world class spinners, that's why we were in the game in the first 10 overs. We were ahead of the game cos we got early wickets. Everyone knows we have power hitters in the death. That's we made sure not to lose early wickets, so that our power hitters could finish the game."

Afghanistan captain
Mohammed Nabi

seven overs. I think in the end we were 10-15 runs short. Mosaddek played well but we needed more contributions," Shakib said during the post-match presentation ceremony.

Afghanistan looked in trouble at one point in their innings courtesy of that disciplined bowling, with the scoreboard reading 62 for three after 13 overs and the required run rate having jumped to 10 per over.

Having brought that equation down to 43 needed from last four overs, Najibullah Zadran struck two sixes to Mustafizur Rahman - who ended up conceding 17 runs in a game-changing 17th over.

Najibullah went on to smash another couple of sixes off Saifuddin as Afghanistan took 22 runs from the 18th over and he remained unbeaten on 43 off just 17 balls after smashing six maximums.

At the other end, Ibrahim Zadran was unbeaten on 42 off 41 balls as Afghanistan confirmed top spot in Group B.

"We thought we had the game when they needed 60-odd in the last 6 overs. But credit to Najibullah," Shakib said.

Bangladesh will take on Sri Lanka on September 1 at the Dubai International Cricket stadium. The winner of that match will qualify for the Super Four stage as the second team from Group B.



Opening struggle continues

SPORTS REPORTER

There was a lot of speculation surrounding Bangladesh's opening combination ahead of the Tigers' Asia Cup campaign.

In a bid to turn their T20 fortunes and as part of their new approach towards the shortest format, the team management had said that they would be promoting someone from the middle order to partner Anamul Haque Bijoy at the top.

However, Bangladesh went with a regular opener in Mohammad Naim in their Asia Cup opener against Afghanistan in Sharjah yesterday.

Just the way Bangladesh opted to stay with their regular approach, the Tigers' fate in the format did not see any changes. In no time, Bangladesh were reduced to four for 28 in just 6.2 overs with the openers amounting to a seven-run stand as Afghan spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman ripped through the Tigers' top order.



India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja trains with the squad ahead of their final Asia Cup group stage match against Hong Kong in Dubai today.

PHOTO: TWITTER



Mujeeb Ur Rahman ripped through the fragile top order of Bangladesh to give Afghanistan the momentum at the start of the game in Sharjah yesterday. Meanwhile, after the Bangladesh bowlers tried to compensate for the batters' failure with some tight bowling, it was the two Zadrans -- Najibullah Zadran and Ibrahim Zadran -- who combined for an unbeaten 69-run stand off just 33 balls that eventually shattered the Tigers' hopes.

PHOTO: AFP/TWITTER

Fellowship of the fans

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Sharjah

Bangladesh fans, draped in the red and green of Bangladesh, wanted their side to win and Afghan fans, some clad in the traditional Afghan Perahan turban wanted the same for their side, but a few spectators were cheering on both teams, completing the festive atmosphere despite sweltering heat as Bangladesh took the field for their first game in the 2022 Asia Cup.

And while the two teams were certainly not taking each other lightly, there was a certain camaraderie between the fans of the two sides.

Supporters on either side lined the streets adjacent to the Sharjah Cricket Stadium in Dubai and a few of the Afghans cheered in front of TV cameras. But upon realising that the media present featured Bangladesh-based outlets, a few said: "Good luck to Afghanistan, we can win. Good luck to Bangladesh too."

Most were rooting for Shakib Al Hasan to come up trumps, with a few naming Mustafizur Rahman or Mashfiqur Rahim as potential match-winners. One remarked that BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon appeared to be consistently fighting with senior players. Even away from home, such sentiments grab a huge part of the Bangladeshi fans' attention in UAE, just as those back at home.



But as the game drew nearer, loud cheers of 'Bangladesh, Bangladesh' rang around as Tigers fans got warmed up.

Inside the stadium, there was an air of electricity players gathered for their warm-up routines.

The dimensions of the Sharjah Cricket Stadium are surprising for those who have been watching matches held in the famous stadium on TV. After all, the 60-65 metre dimension of the Sharjah ground looks much bigger on TV.

Interestingly, the press box area is out in the open, meaning a right-handed batter playing from the opposite end could potentially break a laptop or camera lens with a hit over mid-off. Shop owners nearby the stadium say that a few

Kookaburra balls have shattered glass over the years.

Shakib and Rashid Khan are the biggest stars for the sides and greeted each other while making their way back to the dressing room after toss.

Prior to that, Shakib had won the toss and opted to bat, but Afghan skipper Mohammed Nabi was not too certain it was a better of a wicket.

"The pitch is fresh; the soil is fresh. Maybe the pitch is a little bit low today. Hopefully we can restrict them to a low total," he added.

Unfortunately for the Tigers' faithful, Nabi's words rang true, with Bangladesh scoring 127 for 7 in 20 overs.

India look to play 'positive cricket' against Hong Kong

AFP, Dubai

India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja insisted that the tournament favourites would not take anything for granted when they face minnows Hong Kong in the Asia Cup today.

Rohit Sharma's men can book a spot in the Super Four stage with victory after a tense opening win over arch-rivals Pakistan.

The Hong Kong team is largely made up of expats, led by Pakistan-born captain Nizakat Khan.

Hong Kong, with a population of 7.5 million, will face powerhouse India, a cricket-mad country of 1.4 billion people, in a T20 international for the first time.

"Definitely we are going to play with a positive mindset and we are not going to take them lightly because in T20 on a given day anything could happen," Jadeja told reporters.

"So will look to play positive cricket and give our best."

India justified their favourites tag in the six-nation tournament, which acts as a tune-up to the T20 World Cup in October-November, after they edged out Pakistan in Dubai and need just one more win to make the next stage from Group A.

Jadeja, hitting 35 with the bat, played a key role in India's victory as they chased down a target of 148 with two balls to spare.

His 52 run fifth wicket partnership with Hardik Pandya, who made an unbeaten 33, proved crucial.

"If a team has so many options then they are bound to play freely and the opposition will feel the pressure," said Jadeja.

"And we have the kind of batting line-up that can tackle any situation."



INFO ZONE

INDIA

M	W	L	NR
2	2	0	0

M	W	L	NR
N/A			

HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

M	W	L	NR
2	0	2	0

HEAD TO HEAD IN T20IS

M	W	L	NR
N/A			

Last meeting in Asia Cup: Dubai, September 18, 2018. India won by 26 runs.



Hardik Pandya

BOWLING
MATCHES: 68
WICKETS: 53
AVERAGE: 26.69
ECONOMY: 8.23
BEST BOWLING: 4/33

BATTING
MATCHES: 68
RUNS: 867
AVERAGE: 24.08
HS: 51
SR: 145.46



Ehsan Khan

BOWLING
MATCHES: 31
WICKETS: 39
AVERAGE: 17.56
ECONOMY: 6.06
BEST BOWLING: 4/24

BATTING
MATCHES: 31
RUNS: 197
AVERAGE: 7.90
HS: 42*
SR: 113.87
50s: 0



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