



Top-ranked India face minnows Hong Kong

AGENCIES

Probably 10 out of 10 would pick India as the runaway winner in their Asia Cup group stage game against Hong Kong in Dubai today. However, India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin will not be taking his opposition lightly, and the 35-year-old has his reasons.

In a video shared by Ashwin on his YouTube channel last Sunday, he reminded how Hong Kong gave India a tough competition when the two sides last faced off at the continental event in 2018.

In that ODI contest, Nizakat Khan, the current skipper of Hong Kong, forged a huge opening stand with then skipper Anshu Rath. Chasing 286, the duo put on 174 for the first wicket but then fell 26 runs short. To put things into context, Hong Kong, a team that did not even have an ODI status at that point, gave one of the top-ranked sides a run for their money.

"We should not take Hong Kong lightly because they gave us a terrific fight when they played against us the last time. [Hong Kong's] Ehsan Khan is a very good off-spinner. The quality is right up there with the likes of Mohammad Nabi," Ashwin said.

For Hong Kong, it would be about keeping the good work going from the Qualifiers as they were superb in the qualifying event and found ways to come out of the tough situation.

Hong Kong went through the recent Asia Cup

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Ravichandran Ashwin

Qualifiers unscathed and now have another crack at giving India and Pakistan a scare, at least. Their veteran 37-year-old off-spinner Ehsan Khan, who picked up 10 wickets in three matches in the Qualifiers, will be Hong Kong's biggest weapon in the Asia Cup as well.

For India, it would be an opportunity to confirm their Super 4 spot. And even though they must be wary, the top-ranked T20I side, India, couldn't have wished for an easier opponent who are ranked 20 in T20Is.

This will also be India's first T20I against Hong Kong.

When India batters face Hong Kong, obviously, the quality of Hong Kong bowling, to put it politely, won't match up to Pakistan, but there is always a fear as one doesn't exactly know what to expect from an unknown entity.

Without any doubt batter like KL Rahul, Virat Kohli and captain Rohit Sharma use this opportunity to the fullest to gain their confidence before the start of the Super Fours and business end of the tournament if Hong Kong can put up a fight against them.

Rohit has made it clear that experimentation will continue and hence one shouldn't be surprised if there is another batting order that could be tried out on Wednesday.

It would be interesting to see if Ravindra Jadeja is sent at No.4 position against Hong Kong or whether Rishabh Pant is tried in place of Dinesh Karthik, just to give him some game time.

Games like Hong Kong does help in beefing up stats and no player would like to sit out.

Ashwin and Ravi Bishnoi could also get a look in, letting Yuzvendra Chahal and Jadeja cool their heels a bit.



Opening
struggle
continues

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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.

Tigresses begin training for T20 WC qualifier

SPORTS REPORTER

While the men's team are eyeing to clinch their much-awaited Asia Cup title in the UAE, the Bangladesh national women's cricket team started their training camp for the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifier.

The tournament is set to take place in the UAE next month and the Tigresses will conclude their training camp on September 4. Afterwards, they will board a flight to Dubai on September 8 to take part in the event.

Nigar Sultana Joty and her troops will have a busy schedule as Bangladesh will host the upcoming Asia Cup in October, right after the Qualifier.

The 2022 Women's Asia Cup will be held at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium from October 1 to 16, with seven teams competing in the T20 tournament.

"We have started our preparation camp from today keeping the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup qualifiers and followed by a short training we will travel to Dubai. Since the upcoming Asia Cup will take place in the T20 format, our plan is to prepare keeping both the important tournaments in mind," Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) women's wing manager, Tawhid Mahmud, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Being the defending champions of the Asia Cup, the Tigresses' team management will surely hope to retain the title at home soil. Bangladesh is also set to host the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup,

and it will be the first time the country will be hosting a major ICC women's cricket tournament.



Fellowship of the fans

SPORTS REPORTER, 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 Mushfiqur 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' rung 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 stadiums 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 Afghanistan skipper Mohammed Nabi was not too certain it was a belter 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 losing five wickets inside the first 11 overs after adding only 50 odd runs.



Former India captain Virat Kohli, who scored 35 runs against Pakistan, will be looking forward to more quality hitting when his side face Hong Kong in their second league match in the Asia Cup today.

PHOTO: TWITTER

INFO				ZONE			
INDIA				HONG KONG			
M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
2	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP				HEAD TO HEAD IN T20IS			
M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
N/A				N/A			
Last meeting in Asia Cup: Dubai, September 18, 2018. India won by 26 runs.							
KEY PLAYERS				KEY PLAYERS			
 Hardik Pandya				 Ehsan Khan			
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			
BATTING MATCHES: 31 WICKETS: 39 AVERAGE: 17.56 ECONOMY: 6.06 BEST BOWLING: 4/24				BOWLING MATCHES: 31 WICKETS: 39 AVERAGE: 7.90 HS: 42* SR: 113.87 50S: 0			