



‘Never tried that shot in my life before’

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

Afghanistan had seven wickets in hand and needed 26 off 18 deliveries against Bangladesh before the start of the 18th over on Tuesday. Najibullah Zadran had already seized the momentum with three sixes prior to that over but he was not done, and in the fifth delivery of that Saifuddin over he produced a shot that left hands on heads.

The delivery was a bouncer and was about to go over Najibullah's head with Saifuddin looking to find a top-edge or, at the very least, extract a dot ball. Zadran robbed back and then had that extra time in his hand as the left-hander decided to play the most effective shot.

It was neither a pull nor a hook, or a swat, but somehow it appeared something in between all those shots and yet unique in its sheer invention. It was akin to a backhand badminton shot and the ball sailed over the square-leg boundary for a six.

Such a shot, with intent and class in equal measure, goes a long way into asserting the courage and confidence of the young Afghan side.

A day after their seven-wicket victory against the Tigers, this reporter caught up to Najibullah at his team hotel yesterday. Asked if he had practiced that shot, he just shook his head with a smile and said, "Never tried that shot in my life before."

Even the sternest critic would have to admit that Najibullah had the intent to do what he actually did. However, Najibullah did mention what might have helped him execute such a shot. "Well, I did play a lot of tennis-ball cricket," he said.

The ability to play that extraordinary shot was enabled by the flexible wrists developed while playing cricket as a kid and he made it look easy. Fans might remember that shot for a while.



Another milestone for Shakib

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's T20 and Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan reached another milestone in his career as the premier all-rounder became only the second player in history to have scored 6000 runs and taken over 400 wickets in T20s during the Tigers' Asia Cup game against Sri Lanka in Dubai yesterday.

Shakib, who already boasts 419 wickets in the shortest format of the game, surpassed the 6000-run mark in the 10th over when he shuffled across and scooped a Chamika Karunaratne delivery down the fine leg for a boundary.

The only other player who has scored over 6000 runs and also taken more than 400 wickets in the format is West Indies all-rounder Dwayne Bravo. Bravo, playing 549 T20s, has scored 6871 runs and scalped a total of 605 wickets in T20s.

However, the Bangladesh skipper, who featured in his 369th T20, was dismissed off a Maheesh Theekshana delivery in the 11th over after a 22-ball 24-run knock, laced with three boundaries.

INFO	ZONE
PAKISTAN	HONG KONG

M W L NR
3 3 0 0

HEAD TO HEAD
IN ASIA CUP

M W L NR
3 0 3 0

N/A

HEAD TO HEAD
IN T20IS

N/A

LAST MEETING IN ASIA CUP: DUBAI, SEPTEMBER 16, 2018. PAKISTAN WON BY 8 WICKETS.



Mohammad Rizwan (Pakistan)

BATTING
MATCHES: 57
RUNS: 1705
AVERAGE: 50.14
HS: 104*
SR: 128.00
50S: 13
100S: 1



Babar Hayat (Hong Kong)

BATTING
MATCHES: 33
RUNS: 799
AVERAGE: 29.59
HS: 122
SR: 127.02
50S: 4
100S: 1

KEY PLAYERS



Mehedi Hasan Miraz made the cut as an opening batter in the Bangladesh playing eleven against Sri Lanka in Dubai yesterday and the bowling all-rounder grabbed the opportunity with both hands. Miraz's 26-ball 38, laced with two fours and two sixes, had set the tone for the Tigers in their must-win fixture to remain in the marquee event.

PHOTO: AFP



Message sent regarding intent

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

Bangladesh team director Khaled Mahmud had a fiery press conference on Wednesday on the eve of the crucial encounter against Sri Lanka, unrelenting in his disappointment regarding the performances of the players in the Afghanistan game.

But while talking outside of the press conference, he was feeling the intensity of having to make do with stop-gap solutions due to injuries to key players.

Bangladesh's 17-member squad will have to be slimmed to 15 for the upcoming T20 World Cup and the team director rued the fact that four key players were unable to feature in a tournament as crucial as the Asia Cup.

"We left four players at home. There were injuries so we can't do anything about that. We needed Liton [Das], Yasir [Ali], [Nurul Hasan] Sohan and Hasan [Mahmud] a lot," Mahmud had said.

For large portions of that press conference, the team director rued the approach of batters.

"Rashid [Khan], [Mohammad] Nabi and Mujeeb [Ur Rahman] do not only create problems for us but batters all over the world. Maybe we had difficulty adjusting to the wicket, but even then I would say

that we were far off the mindset we talked about," he had pointed out, indicating that struggling against Afghanistan spinners was the norm but that the approach was wrong. It could be surmised that the lack of intent in trying to go for shots against loose deliveries was disappointing for the team management.

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With the World Cup in mind, at least six or seven players in the existing squad will have to make way for those players.

Liton Das has been a revelation across formats and, not long ago, had been Bangladesh's key weapon with the bat in T20s. Sohan had proven himself capable of delivering big hits with consistency at the death while Yasir Ali showed promise, intent and ability. Pacer Hasan

Mahmud had picked up early wickets in Zimbabwe and was certain to make the playing eleven in the Asia Cup until injury.

If Liton comes in, a change in the opening slots is inevitable. With Yasir returning, there will be changes in middle order. Afif Hossain has been touted as the future, thus veterans Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad's position in the side could come into question.

"If you are afraid of losing your place in the side, you will never perform in international matches," Mahmud had said on Wednesday.

Changes were already made for yesterday's game against Sri Lanka yesterday when Sabbir Rahman and Mehedi Hasan Miraz replaced Anamul Haque Bijoy and Mohammad Naim as openers.

The two began with gusto. Miraz in particular was very effective during a 26-ball 38 as Bangladesh reached 55 runs for the loss of one wicket in the Powerplay. More importantly, the required intent was shown.

But with some players inevitably now aware their positions will be in question, their approach remains to be seen. Confidence is a two-way street and the team management may ultimately opt to back youth over experience without intent.

Whether the message has already been sent will be clear soon.

SKY is the limit: Suryakumar redefines T20 batting

AFP, Dubai

India's Suryakumar Yadav makes unconventional look cool and his attacking instincts makes him a force to reckon with for the Twenty20 World Cup later this year in Australia.

Suryakumar smashed 68 off 26 balls to lift India from 94-2 in 13 overs to post a mammoth 192-2 against minnows Hong Kong in the Asia Cup Twenty20 tournament on Wednesday.

India's bowlers restricted Hong Kong to 152-5 as they won by 40 runs to sail into the Super Four of the six-nation tournament, which acts as a precursor to T20's showpiece event in October-November.

Suryakumar's batting blitz stood out and was acknowledged by star batsman Virat Kohli who had the best seat in the house at the non-striker's end as the two put on 98 runs off 42 balls.

Kohli, who is enduring a long batting slump, made 59 off 44 balls but looked amazed with Surykumar's show as he allowed the batsman to lead the walk back after the innings ended.

Suryakumar struck six sixes including four in the last over to pulverise a hapless Hong Kong attack, who had India on the defensive early on.

A product of the IPL, Suryakumar, who loves his tattoos and carries a soothing smile under his gelled hair, made his debut for India last year and quickly became the team's go-to man in crunch situations with his aggressive approach.

But on Wednesday his freakish display of batting with audacious shots including the sit-down lap hit over the fine-leg region for six to the flick-off the wrist hit over deep mid-wicket were jaw dropping. "Some of the shots are pre-determined because this format is about how you prepare when you go into bat," a smiling Suryakumar, known as SKY for his initials, told reporters after the win.

Pakistan eye super-four spot

AGENCIES

Having opened their Asia Cup 2022 campaign with a defeat against India in Dubai last Sunday, Pakistan face Hong Kong today in a must-win match with qualification for the Super 4 stage at stake.

While Pakistan are clear favourites to clear the group stage with a win today in Sharjah, the way Hong Kong played in their first game against India showed they can spring a surprise and challenge any side on a given day.

Hong Kong, who made the main draw after winning all three of

their matches in the qualifiers in Oman, had largely kept India in check before losing their way once Suryakumar Yadav started teeing off. Yadav's rapid 68 off 26 helped India post 192 for two, chasing which the 20th ranked T20 side eventually fell short by 40 runs.

Moreover, Pakistan already have few issues in their side which makes things a bit trickier for the Babar Azam-led side. Pakistan pacers Naseem Shah, who debuted against India in their opening game, and Harris Rauf struggled with cramps in the extreme heat in the UAE.



Businessmen to delivery boys

AFP, Dubai

Hong Kong batsman Kinchit Shah usually handles the family diamond business and he

sparkled in a losing cause against India, studding an innings of 30 with two fours and a six in the T20 Asia Cup.

The Mumbai-born vice-captain, who proposed to his girlfriend after the match in Dubai on Wednesday, is part of an eclectic mix of pizza delivery

men and university students representing Hong Kong against Asia's cricket giants in the UAE this week.

The talented band of expatriates have been on the road since June, culminating in a berth in the main draw of the six-nation Asia Cup after winning all three qualifying matches.

They lost to top-ranked India by 40 runs on Wednesday, but only after a fight in their chase of

193.

Their next match against Pakistan on Friday in Sharjah could be their last in the tournament, but skipper Nizakat Khan said they had been flooded with praise from loved ones in their adopted home.

The team's media manager Smita Chhetri told AFP that three players, Babar Hayat, Ehsan Khan and Yasim Murtaza, have recently become fathers but have

only seen their newborns on video calls.

For most players in Hong Kong, cricket is not the only means of livelihood as opportunities for the national team are few and far between.

"A few of our players are doing food delivery service part time," Chhetri said. "And few of them are teachers as well as handling family businesses like Kinchit Shah."