



Almost-deceived Lankans have the last laugh

KHALID HOSSAIN

The Asia Cup encounter between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka yesterday in Dubai became an Asia Cup classic as the game lived up to its billing, triggered by a war of words and mind games from the two sides leading into the do-or-die fixture with the winner promised a place in the Super 4.

Bangladesh's batters rose to the occasion and tallied 183 after being asked to bat first, courtesy of the lesser-established players -- the likes of Mosaddek Hossain, Afif Hossain, and Mehedi Hasan Miraz -- making the most effective contributions to outshine the seniors.

Although the Tigers had set an above-par target, the job was still not even halfway done as the team batting second usually have the edge in the T20 format. Moreover, the inconsistent Bangladesh bowlers were under serious pressure, apparently more so after the war of words that surfaced before the heated encounter.

After Sri Lanka lost to Afghanistan in their tournament opener in convincing fashion on Saturday, the Sri Lanka captain had somewhat of a dig at the Tigers.

"Afghanistan have a world-class bowling attack. But when it comes to Bangladesh, I know that Mustafizur [Rahman] is a very good bowler and Shakib [Al Hasan] is a world-class bowler. But other than these two cricketers, they do not have any more world-class bowlers in their squad. That's why I think the match against Bangladesh will be less challenging than the game against Afghanistan," Shanaka had said.

That triggered a strong reply from the Bangladesh



A fan wears a dejected look, an expression shared by many Bangladesh supporters following another heartbreak in Asia Cup as Sri Lanka batters held their nerves towards the end of the thriller in Dubai yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



camp, led by team director Khaled Mahmud.

"I don't know why Dasun Shanaka said such a thing. I heard that he said Bangladesh do not have [quality] bowlers other than Shakib and Mustafizur. In fact, I do not see a single [quality] bowler in the Sri Lankan side," Sujon said during the pre-match press conference on Wednesday.

Even Mahela Jayawardene engaged in the war of words. The Lankans great shared what Mahmud said on social media and urged the Lankans to show their class and prove themselves on the pitch.

Ultimately, Sri Lanka had the laugh as the tense encounter went down to the wire.

The Tigers' wayward bowling at the death, coupled with them conceding 12 runs off wides and no-balls, tilted the game in the Lankans' favour. All in all, however, it was a total team effort from the Tigers, right up there as one of their best performances in recent memory.

Earlier, it was pacer Ebadot Hossain who had given Bangladesh ample hope by picking up two wickets in his first T20I over. In Ebadot, Bangladesh had the trump card to catch the Lankans by surprise, presenting an out-of-syllabus problem, in the two teams' battle for survival in the marquee tournament. "All warfare is based on deception," wrote renowned Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu in a famous military treatise "Art of War."

And indeed, this cricketing battle between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was almost decided by deception. The Tigers got lucky by saving Ebadot to feature for the first time in the crucial encounter.

However, being deceptive alone was not enough since the end game demanded holding nerves, where Sri Lanka surfaced as the superior artist.

'We feel sorry for our fans'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh were knocked out from the Asia Cup despite posting a challenging target of 184 runs, with Sri Lanka eventually sealing a two-wicket win to qualify for the Super 4 at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Sri Lanka became the second team from Group B, after toppers Afghanistan, to qualify for the Super 4 while the Tigers return home empty-handed.

Bangladesh supporters, who once again came out in numbers to cheer their team in Dubai, received only agony and skipper Shakib Al Hasan admitted that he felt sorry for them.

"We feel sorry for our fans. Everywhere we go, we get such superb support. I hope they will continue to support us in the coming days," Shakib said during the post-match presentation ceremony.

Bangladesh had only themselves to blame for their downfall after some wayward bowling and poor fielding cost the Tigers dearly. Their bowlers gave away 17 extras, which included eight wides and four no balls, which made a drastic difference, especially as Sri Lanka gave away no extras at all.

Kusal Mendis, who scored a team-high 60 off 37 balls, was fortunate to be dropped by Mushfiqur Rahim

when he had made just two runs off the bowling of Taskin Ahmed.

The right-hander continued to ride his luck, being caught behind off Mahedi Hasan on 29 before being called back after replays showed it was a no ball. Mendis was third time lucky the very next over, when Mushfiqur Rahim did not go for a review despite an appeal for a caught behind. Although the

SCORES IN BRIEF

Bangladesh: 183 for 7 in 20 overs (Miraz 38, Shakib 24, Afif 39, Mahmudullah 27, Mosaddek 24 not out, Taskin 11 not out; Hasaranga 2-41, Karunaratne 2-32)

Sri Lanka: 184-8 in 19.2 overs (Nissanka 20, Mendis 60, Shanaka 45, Karunaratne 16; Taskin 2-24, Ebadot 3-51)

Result: Sri Lanka won by two wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Kusal Mendis.

umpire turned down the appeal, replays revealed a thin edge.

The Tigers did manage to bounce back, with Taskin Ahmed taking a brilliant catch off the bowling of Mustafizur Rahman to dismiss Mendis before Mahedi removed the dangerous Lankan skipper Dasun Shanaka, who had made 45 off 33 balls.

Those efforts meant the Tigers

were sensing a win, especially with Sri Lanka needing 25 runs off the last two overs with three wickets in hand.

But Ebadot, who had a dream T20I debut by picking up three wickets in his first three overs of the innings, conceded 17 runs off the penultimate over as the game slipped away from the Tigers. Needing eight runs off the last over with two wickets in hand, Sri Lanka reached the target with four balls to spare.

"I think a few poor overs cost us the game. They were 8 down in the last over, but they got there with four balls in hand. That shows we aren't bowling well at the death, but credit to Sri Lanka for the way they batted. I think Dasun did very well. We wanted to pick wickets early, but the bowlers couldn't execute their plans and that's why a spinner bowled the last over," said Shakib.

Given the Tigers' struggles in the shortest format of the game and with the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup just around the corner, Shakib informed the mega-event would pose an altogether different challenge.

"The last six months we haven't played well, but we have been competitive in these last two games. The World Cup will be a different challenge. We have to improve," he added.

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 Suryakumar'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-of-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.

INFO ZONE

PAKISTAN

M	W	L	NR
3	3	0	0

HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

HONG KONG

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

KEY PLAYERS



Babar Hayat (Hong Kong)

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

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 sparked 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."