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SPORT

BATTLE FOR ASIAN SUPREMACY

ASIA CUP 2022



The two sides of Mushfiqur's T20I COIN

SPORTS REPORTER

Nicknamed 'Mr. Dependable', Mushfiqur Rahim has undoubtedly lived up to the billing in Tests and ODIs for Bangladesh. However, the same can not be said of his T20 career as the 35-year-old has had a rather fluctuating one, spanning over 15 years and 102 matches, in the shortest format of the game. As the cricketer called time on his T20I career on Sunday, The Daily Star looks at two major highlights from his T20I career, depicting the ups and downs.

THE HERO OF BANGLADESH'S RECORD CHASE

With 115 required off 63 deliveries and eight wickets in hand, Mushfiqur had arrived at a crucial moment in their T20I against Sri Lanka at the Nidahas Trophy back in 2018. Building on the platform laid by Tamim Iqbal and Liton Das, Mushfiqur went on to play his career-best unbeaten 35-ball 72-run knock to help Bangladesh as

BATTING STATS

Matches:	102
Runs:	1500
Average:	19.48
HS:	72*
SR:	115.03
50s:	6

sail a daunting 215-run target, which still remains as the highest chase by the Tigers in the format. In an innings laced with five boundaries and four maximums, it was Mushfiqur who never let the run-rate spiral out of reach for the Tigers that night in Colombo.

THE INFAMOUS PREMATURE CELEBRATION

Neither Mushfiqur nor any Bangladesh fan will ever forget what had transpired that night in Bengaluru in 2016. Bangladesh had the chance to knock India out of the T20I tournament in their own backyard and the chance to seal their first win in the format against them. Mushfiqur, having struck Hardik Pandya for two successive boundaries, celebrated with fist pumps and bat swings. However, it only deepened the sadness for the entire nation as Bangladesh went on to lose the game by 1 run, with Mushfiqur caught at midwicket and Mahmudullah Riyad and Mustafizur Rahman following suit in the final three deliveries of the game.

Modern T20s a thorn on off-spinners' side?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM DUBAI

The recent pattern of the T20 game has seen wrist spinners gain more ground but the dearth of off-spinners in the shortest format has seen their roles come into question, whereas in ODIs the off-spinners are called to stem the flow of runs and also to lull batters to take chances against them, resulting in their dismissals. As teams have begun to bolster their batting line-up with a healthy dose of both left and right-handed batters, the matchups for off-spinners have become a bit steeper. Off-spinners, turning the ball away from left-handers had been one of the best matchups for some time but their numbers in the T20 game have been unimpressive. India coach Rahul Dravid talked regarding off-spinners' diminishing role during the press conference on Saturday, a day before the Pakistan-India match. "We are lucky to have Ash [Ravindra Ashwin] who probably is the best in the world. I don't think there are too many...the offspinner from Hong Kong bowled brilliantly against us. He bowled upfront and then he bowled couple of overs at the death. He had a really good game," Dravid said about Hong Kong's Ehsan Khan. "But yeah, you are right, not many people are playing the off spinners and they sort of prefer leg spinners or wrist spinners, who have obviously become very valuable in the T20 game for obvious reasons," Dravid agreed with



the journalist asking the question. "The fact that they [wrist spinners] can spin it both ways, doesn't expose them to the left-handers or the right-handers as much as the finger spinners," Dravid added. The presence of spinners like Afghanistan's

Mujeeb Ur Rahman or Maheesh Theekshana, known as 'mystery spinners', have gained serious traction around the world due to many batters failing to read their release from hand. Those kinds of spinners now play a big hand in matches going in their side's favour. Mujeeb and Rashid Khan's success against Bangladesh in the ongoing Asia Cup further reinforces that belief. Bangladesh, on the other hand, plays off-spinner Mahedi Hasan. While Mahedi is certainly not a mystery spinner but has the death bowling skill that gives him an edge in selection. Overall, however, off-spinners simply have a reduced role in current T20s. Dravid was not sure whether it is a phase that will pass with time but from Bangladesh's perspective, it would be a positive to wise up on spinning options. For now, Dravid was happy to have the Ashwin option, even as the right-arm off-spinner is not playing too many T20Is for India. "Maybe it's [lack of off-spinners] just a cycle or phase. Bangladesh plays Mahedi Hasan a little bit around the squads. Not really played the West Indies but they didn't have an off-spinner. England plays Moeen Ali. There are a few around, it's not like they are completely gone. We got one and we're lucky to get to play him. We know we got the quality and anytime we know someone like Ash can step in if required," Dravid said.



A timely decision that resonates with fans

SPORTS REPORTER

Mushfiqur Rahim's announcement to retire from the T20 format for Bangladesh yesterday was welcomed by the Tigers' fans as a timely one.

There were mixed reactions from the Bangladeshi supporters on social media. However, the majority of them were seen praising Mushfiqur's decision.

In the recent past, the 35-year-old has found himself in the firing line for his dismal performances in the shortest format of the game, and the wicketkeeper-batter received ample criticism during the ongoing Asia Cup 2022, where he failed to make his presence felt with the bat and also remained ineffective behind the stumps.

Mushfiqur scored five runs in two matches and was guilty of putting down the opportunity to remove player-of-the-match Kusal Mendis early in the second game against Sri Lanka. Moreover, he did not attempt to convince the skipper Shakib Al Hasan of a caught-behind dismissal after Mendis nicked an Ebadot Hossain delivery later in the game, which Bangladesh lost by two wickets to end their Asia Cup campaign.

Previously, Tamim Iqbal announced his retirement from T20 format through a Facebook post earlier this year after Mahmudullah Riyad retired from the Test format, in a rather mysterious fashion, the year before.

Mahmudullah officially announced his retirement four months after he was given a guard of honour in his 50th Test, played against Zimbabwe in Harare last year.

Following that Test, a number of Bangladesh players paid their tribute to Mahmudullah through social media, but Mahmudullah, or anyone else for that matter, made no official announcement in

this regard at the time.

Mushfiqur, however, followed protocols and had officially sent a letter to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) before announcing his decision publicly, the chairman of the cricket operations committee, Jalal Yunus, confirmed the news to The Daily Star.

"Mushfiqur has given an official letter to the board regarding his retirement from the T20 format. Obviously, his contribution to Bangladesh cricket is something we all have to accept. However, the board will sit and inform the decision regarding his retirement later," said Yunus.

However, even though Mushfiqur sent a letter to the BCB informing of his decision beforehand, it can be argued that his methods lacked proper communication with the board as well. It certainly was

in stark contrast with the way the ECB announced Ben Stokes' decision to step aside from ODIs in July.

It only reflects the lack of trust that persists between the BCB and the players, regardless of the cricketers in question. In fact, Bangladesh's most successful skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is still not officially retired from cricket even though it has been a common knowledge for a while that the cricketer is not draping the red and green in the future.

Many are blaming the BCB for not providing the platform to the players to make a smooth transition, terming it as part of lacking the right process and culture in Bangladesh cricket. However, an influential board director requesting anonymity said that it's the players who need to make the call at the right time.

"Look, we notice the fact that the board often faces media trials in social media, which is not right. I think it's the players who should come forward and call it a day as only they know better when is the right time to say goodbye," the BCB official said.

Apart from Mushfiqur's poor performance in the Asia Cup that prompted him to retire from the T20 format, it was also learned that both Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah are not in the long-term plans of Sridhar Sriram, the Tigers' newly hired Technical Consultant, which the wicket-keeper batter also took that into account before making the call.

Since the retirement of Mushfiqur from T20Is, the focus has now shifted towards Mahmudullah for his string of below-par performances, leading to many fans now demanding his retirement from the format ahead of the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup later this year.

Only time will tell whether Mahmudullah follows the same route as his brother-in-law.

Rizwan takes a leaf out of Pandya's book

SPORTS REPORTER

With momentums shifting hither and thither, viewers kept at the edge of their seats and a nail-biting finish – the India-Pakistan Asia Cup Super 4 clash on Sunday in Dubai offered everything that fans expect from these two arch-rivals.

Pakistan came out as winners at the end, winning the contest by five wickets with just a ball to spare. Pakistan opener Mohammad Rizwan was the embodiment of calmness and composure throughout, the two qualities most needed to neutralise the hype of a high-pressure game of such stature and stay ahead.

Rizwan had said before the game that the 'brave and calm' would come as winners of this contest. Pakistan, especially, Rizwan, were exactly that. They were brave and calm. And interestingly, Rizwan said he had taken a leaf out of his arch-rivals' book to do that.

"Just as [Hardik] Pandya had said in the last game that he always stayed easy and relaxed and was just looking for one over to take the game away, I employed the same mindset today. I also tried to stay easy and stay till the end. Obviously, it

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA
181/7 in 20 overs
(Rahul 28, Sharma 28, Kohli 60; Shadab 2-31)

PAKISTAN
182/5 in 19.5 overs
(Rizwan 71, Nawaz 42)

Result
Pakistan won by five wickets.

Player-OF-THE-MATCH
Mohammad Nawaz.



was a big target on the board. So, I tried to take the opportunities whenever offered and the almighty helped me in my pursuit," Rizwan said at the post-match presentation.

Hardik's lusty blows in calm demeanor made the difference when the two sides last met in the same competition exactly a week ago at the same venue.

Asked if Rizwan, who played an anchor innings – a 51-ball 71-run knock – before he got dismissed in the 17th over, had ever doubted their chances of winning the game after he got out, the wicketkeeper-batter said: "No, no, no. I was never worried about that. We know about our strengths. We had the confidence that the power-hitters that we have in our side are very well capable of taking 40 or 45 runs in the last four overs. We plan these things beforehand that we can leave last 40 or 45 runs to be taken by our batters at the death."

One other trick that worked for Pakistan in the game was the gambit of promoting Mohammad Nawaz to number four. Left-hander Nawaz ended up playing his career-best 20-ball 40, laced with six boundaries and two maximums, to help shift the game towards Pakistan.

"I thought Nawaz could execute because they had two leg spinners operating, so we send him up the order as he is a left-hander," Pakistan skipper Babar said.



Mohammad Nawaz played a gem of an innings (42 off 20 balls) after a terrific bowling (1-25) and fielding (three catches) display that helped Pakistan achieve a five-wicket win against India in an Asia Cup Super-4 thriller in Dubai yesterday.

PHOTO: TWITTER