



Lankans’ dynamism their biggest weapon

HIGHLIGHTS

Five-time Asia Cup champions Sri Lanka are set to battle it out against two-time winners Pakistan in the final of the continental tournament’s 15th edition in Dubai on Sunday.

In 22 T20Is featuring the two teams, Pakistan have won 13 and lost nine matches against Sri Lanka, with their latest defeat having occurred in the tournament’s penultimate game on Friday as the Lankans won by five wickets.

When it comes to head-to-head records in T20Is played in tournament finals, it is one apiece in two games. Sri Lanka beat Pakistan by five wickets in the final of the four-nation Canada T20 tournament in Ontario in 2008, a year before Pakistan defeated Sri Lanka by eight wickets in the T20 World Cup final at Lord’s.

In terms of top run-getters in the tournament so far, Mohammad Rizwan (226) and Pathum Nissanka (165) lead the way for their respective sides. On the bowling front, Mohammad Nawaz (8) scalped the most wickets for Pakistan while both Dilshan Madushanka and Wanindu Hasaranga picked six wickets for Sri Lanka.



“As a Bangladeshi, I feel proud for getting the chance to represent my country on such a huge occasion of a mega event. I’m thrilled and looking forward to finishing my job successfully, so that I’m able to uplift my country’s image and create opportunities for others in future. I can dream big from here on. Please pray for me.”

Bangladeshi umpire Masudur Rahman Mukul, who will be conducting the Asia Cup final between Pakistan and Sri Lanka in Dubai today as one of the two on-field umpires, told the Daily Star yesterday.



ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM DUBAI

Sri Lanka exude confidence at the moment, having secured four back-to-back victories that begun with the win over Bangladesh. They geared for the final with a win in the dead-rubber Super Four stage game against Pakistan in what was a dress rehearsal for the final. Their plans have been like clockwork, especially with the bat.

The batting had already clicked during four successful chases but the bowling only found its mark in the last game against Pakistan, where the Lankans bundled out the Babar-Azam led side for 121.

But it is in their batting that Sri Lanka have found their greatest strength, the most crucial aspect of which has been that their plans, individually and collectively, have changed to fit the scenario.

After being bundled out for a meagre total against Afghanistan in the group stages, Sri Lanka’s batting clicked into gear in the Super Four stage against the same opponent.

Curiously, none of the batters scored more than the 36 off 19 by opener Kusal Mendis. Yet, three others that reached 30-odd scores all did so in quick times. There was no reluctance to keep scoring quickly despite wickets falling.

And when this reporter asked captain

Dasun Shanaka at the press conference ahead of the India game about this approach, it revealed the team’s dynamic nature.

“If a batsman can carry on at the top, he can be the finisher. At other times, all the batters can go for quick fire runs. The plans depend on the day. There could be a batting-order change too, with one of the guys from below coming further up,” he said when asked if the intent to keep hitting was a plan for just the Afghanistan match.

There are no set roles as anchors for openers Mendis or Pathum Nissanka. If one does carry, it does not mean he will not go after the bowling while others keep playing their shots. In the game against India for example, both openers had identical approaches.

What matters for this side is the plan – which bowler to target, what match scenario to do it in and who can make the most out of a situation.

They targeted Ebadot Hossain against Bangladesh, knowing that he might not have the experience of handling the death overs. Then they channeled aggression towards Arshdeep Singh against India and the first two Hasan Ali overs in the Pakistan match. One was lacking in experience and the other was playing his first match of the tournament.

Along with middle-order hitters like

Danushka Gunathilaka and Bhanuka Rajapakse, their lower-middle order also goes pretty deep. That makes them a potent threat. The bowling from Mahesh Theekana and Wanindu Hasaranga has been tight, while Dilshan Madushanka has been fiery with pace and swing.

Meanwhile, Pakistan are in the other category in terms of their batting plan although their hitting approach has been pretty similar to Sri Lanka’s.

Both Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan are key anchors when it comes to holding the innings together. With the former still looking for big runs, it is Rizwan’s form that has kept Pakistan intact.

Fakhar Zaman too has struggled to get going and so a vacuum has been created that may be filled by Khusdil Shah, Mohamad Nawaz and Asif Ali – who are capable of the big hits at the risk that they throw away wickets while going for such hits.

Thus, Pakistan are in a spot of bother regarding the start they make to their innings. However, they have the upper hand with the ball and Naseem Shah, Mohammad Hasnain and Haris Rauf will be eager for early wickets with the new ball in the final today in order to make a considerable dent in the long Lankan batting order.

Double delights await Alcaraz, Ruud

REUTERS, New York

With poise beyond his 19 years and enviable stamina, Carlos Alcaraz faced down the crowd and Frances Tiafoe on Friday night to collect another thrilling win and reach the US Open final.

Despite wrapping up the latest-finishing match in tournament history in the early morning hours on Thursday, the Spaniard had plenty more in the tank on Friday, sprinting to drop shots, pounding forehands and coolly holding serve in the tense fifth set.

“I feel great right now,” a beaming Alcaraz told reporters after the win, which set up a final with Norway’s Casper Ruud on Sunday.

Alcaraz’s run at the tournament last year came to a jarring finish when he retired from his quarter-final with a leg injury he said came from playing long matches in his previous rounds.

That turn led some to wonder if the highly-touted teenager possessed the endurance needed to win a Grand Slam given its gruelling, best-of-five format. But he has more than silenced the doubters with three consecutive five-set victories on the sport’s biggest stage.

The stakes of Sunday’s final could not be higher. The winner will walk away with their first Grand Slam trophy and the world number one ranking.

Ruud, who defeated Russia’s Karen Khachanov 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, 5-7, 6-2, has an enjoyed a more straightforward and less talked about route to the final but will be the underdog against Alcaraz, who is 2-0 against the Norwegian including a win at the Miami Open final in April.

Ruud will be appearing in his second Grand Slam final of the season after finishing runner-up to Nadal at the French Open in June.

Robinson five-for puts England on top

REUTERS, LONDON

Seamer Ollie Robinson took 5-49 as England skittled South Africa for 118 inside 37 overs in their first innings on day three of the third and final Test at The Oval on Saturday.

South Africa had been put in to bat by the home side on Thursday morning, but no play was possible on day one due to rain, while the second day was cancelled as a mark of respect following the death of Queen Elizabeth.

The Test is now limited to three days with the series poised at 1-1, but England have given themselves a chance of victory, with Stuart Broad also impressing with 4-41 in a dominant bowling performance from the home side.

All rounder Marco Jansen top scored for the tourists with 30 before he became Robinson’s fifth wicket, caught at first slip by Joe Root.



“Being a bit over 12 months out from the 50-over World Cup, I thought the timing was right now. I could have tried to play another series, the (ODI) series against England post the World Cup and that would have been a fairy tale finish at the MCG. But that’s never been my style, to be self-indulgent in any kind of way.”



Australian white-ball captain Aaron Finch said after calling time on his one-day international career.

‘Father, can’t I play anymore?’

MINTU DESHWARA

Born against the backdrop of a picturesque tea garden, Sowrovi Roy dreamed of becoming an accomplished footballer. She would go on to earn plaudits throughout her teenage years, but despite all the hopes she raised, that light is now fading.

After nurturing and developing her talent in spite of unimaginable hardships, Sowrovi’s dreams are in disarray due to lack of money and proper nursing. Her father aimed to make her one of the best footballers in the country, but could only afford to send her to BKSP for six months in 2022.

Now, the 12th-grader is back at the Begum Khan Tea Garden in the Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj.

Nipen Paul, general secretary of Bangladesh Tea Workers Union central committee said Sowrovi had played football in the morning and afternoon since her childhood. At the time, there were not many female players, so she became accustomed to playing with boys.

From 2016 onwards, she began to play more seriously, including in local tournaments, before showing her mettle as a striker as her institution, the Taher Shamchunnahar High School, became champions of Sylhet Division in the 46th Summer School National Championship and the 2017 Madrasa Sports Competition.

In 2019, Sowrovi captained upazila and district teams in the first Bangmata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib National Gold Cup



Football Tournament (U-16), finishing as champions at the upazila level as she took home the player of the tournament crown. At the district level, her team finished as runners-up from Sylhet, but she was again

named player of the tournament.

In 2020, dealing with the setbacks of Covid-19, she continued to practice. It seemed that her destiny was about to change in January of 2022, when she impressed the staff at BKSP and secured a place there.

Not only did that sojourn provide technical guidance, it showed her a new world. Although she finds great comfort in football, that was her first chance to watch the game.

“We are poor people, so we don’t have a television. I want to watch Bangladesh at the SAFF Women’s Championship, but I can’t. Due to limited opportunities, I never developed an interest in watching football. But at BKSP, the other players and I would watch games.”

Sowrovi’s father Surjo Kumar Roy, a permanent tea worker, has always encouraged his daughter. But he struggles to even provide the fare for her to go and practice at the Surma Tea Estate to practice. Those financial constraints meant that Sowrovi’s journey at BKSP would be cut short.

“We can’t eat three proper meals. I can’t educate my only daughter properly. I can’t even fulfill her wishes. I brought my daughter this far with great difficulty. I can’t anymore. I have exhausted all my resources. I feel helpless,” he added.

Surjo may still harbour that dream of his daughter becoming one of the best footballers in the nation, but, ever so often, Sowrovi’s restless takes the shape of a question, one that makes both her and her father’s hearts sink: “Father, can’t I play anymore?”



‘Experienced’ Sabina on a roll

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Sabina Khatun said she felt the experience she gained through playing in the national team for over 12 years helped her score a hatrick against Pakistan in a SAFF Women’s Championship fixture in Kathmandu on Saturday, which helped the side book a berth in the semifinals.

The veteran forward hit three goals as Bangladesh scored six past Pakistan, who are playing in this competition after eight years. This was Sabina’s second hatrick in the SAFF Women’s Championship, the first coming six years ago against Afghanistan.

Sabina, who has also played club football in Bangladesh, Maldives and India, felt her experience of playing at the highest level helped her achieve the feat.

“It’s definitely a great honour for me,”

Sabina said at the post-match press conference. “I’ve always said experience matters a great deal. I believe my experience helped me a lot on the pitch. I tried to give my best and it worked.”

On the back of a brace in Bangladesh’s 3-0 opening game win over Maldives, skipper Sabina turned on the style and scored a hatrick after Monika Chakma had broken the deadlock in the third minute and Sirat Jahan Swapna extended the advantage in the 28th minute.

The victory put Bangladesh in second position, behind Group A leaders India, who beat Maldives 9-0 in the day’s second match to stay on top by virtue of goal difference.

Bangladesh will square off against five-time champions India on Tuesday, a match that will decide the final standings in the group and the semifinal opponents.