

Can Mustafizur revive the fizz?

MAZHAR UDDIN

Mustafizur Rahman being nowhere near his usual best is no longer a topic of debate, but the left-arm quick will still remain the most vital component in the Bangladesh pace battery in the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup in Australia next month.

The 27-year-old is undoubtedly an auto-choice as the most experienced bowler in the Tigers T20I setup. However, he now has the additional responsibility of guiding the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Mohammad Saifuddin, Hasan Mahmud and Ebadot Hossain – who are certain to feel the heat at the biggest stage.

Mustafizur emerged as a mystery bowler since making his international debut back in 2015. With his unique cutters and slower deliveries, he made a strong impression in the franchise-based T20 leagues around the world.

Unfortunately, for Bangladesh, the cricketer from Satkhira just could not live up to his expectations as his growth-curve had apparently flattened over the past few years. Mustafizur's economy-rate has remained a big concern and his inability to absorb pressure in critical situations had wounded the Tigers on several occasions, as was evident in the recently concluded Asia Cup.

“Mustafizur is very effective in Bangladesh but I don't think he will get such assistance in Australian conditions,” senior pace-bowling coach Sarwar Imran told The Daily Star yesterday.

“Another very important aspect is that Mustafizur lacks accuracy which is required at the international



circuit. He has turned predictable as his lengths and his cutters are not as effective as before.

“At the beginning, his unique slowers surprised the batters. But since every team have computer analysts nowadays, they can do their homework on him,” he added.

It will be important for ‘Fizz’ to involve variety in his armoury but Imran also pointed at the tendency of Mustafizur and Co's over-reliance on coaches.

“He was unable to add variations in his arsenal, and one of those were making the ball cut in to the right-hander. Mustafizur might do that with the new ball but it seems tough for him at the moment with the old ball in the death overs. I haven't seen him trying those yorkers for a long time now.

“I think our main problem is that we are fully dependent on the coaches, officials and the god fathers. Every time a new coach comes from abroad and starts imposing their own philosophy on Mustafizur. But what is important is whether Mustafizur follows his own training method and prepares himself accordingly to make him better,” Sarwar continued.

“Mustafizur and the South African pacer Kagiso Rabada made their international debut at the same period and look at the difference. Look, he has reached the peak and became one of the top bowlers in world cricket in T20 format but he never developed his personality to that level,” he added further.

Imran also urged Mustafizur to develop his reading of the game, as someone who could set his own field positions and bowl according to his plan in the Australian conditions.

“A good bowler will always set his own field positions. Tell me which bowler in our team sets his own fielding? I think this is one of those areas we need to fix as well,” Sarwar concluded.



We have experience of performing in front of a crowd. Usually the hosts will get support from their own crowd, but the local crowd won't bother us [to perform and win the final].

Bangladesh captain
Sabina Khatun.

Bangladesh were better than India as they came into the final beating India, but we will give our full effort to make this final successful. We are confident about winning the tournament.

Nepal captain
Anjila Subba.

History in the air as ‘Bangladesh arrive as favourites’

SPORTS REPORTER

Having posed with the shiny trophy at the Dasharath Stadium yesterday, just the day before the final of the SAFF Women's Championship, Bangladesh captain Sabina Khatun smiled big after raising the trophy and the Nepal captain Anjila Thumbapo Subba did the same.

Who will have the final laugh will be known today in Kathmandu as both Sabina's Bangladesh and Anjila's Nepal are on the verge of creating a piece of history as the sixth edition of the competition is all set to welcome a maiden champion after five-time winners India failed to make it to the final for the first time in history.

While the rampant Indian side continued to bag all the glory, Nepal had to be content with four runners-up finishes while Bangladesh had suffered the same fate once. However, this time both Bangladesh and Nepal raised their bar by beating India, with Bangladesh handing India their first defeat in the tournament's history, which was followed by Nepal knocking India out.

The women in red and green are on the brink of creating two pieces of history with a win – lifting the SAFF Championship trophy and beating the Himalayan nation. As Bangladesh are yet to overcome the

The match will be streamed live from 5:15pm at www.elevensports.com

FIFA RANKING				
Bangladesh	147			
Nepal	102			
TOP SCORERS OF BOTH SIDES:				
Sabina Khatun (Bangladesh)	8 goals			
Anju Tamang (Nepal)	4 goals			
HEAD TO HEAD				
	M	W	D	L
Bangladesh	7	0	1	6
Nepal	7	6	1	0

hurdles of Nepal in the past seven meetings – with only a goalless draw coming in their previous meeting in September last year – it will be a daunting task for Sabina and Co, especially considering the advantage hosts Nepal would have in front of their home crowd and familiar environment.

“No doubt, Nepal is a strong side physically, technically and tactically, and they have played the SAFF championship final four times. Besides, they have also been playing good football in the tournament in front of a big home crowd,” Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton said yesterday.

“Before coming into the Championship, we have told you about the transformation of our team, who have also reflected it in their last four matches. I think Bangladesh arrive [in the final] as favourites as they are ahead of Nepal in terms of performance.”

Having shrugged off all pressure ahead of the final, Choton is also expecting the repetition of performance against Nepal.

“The girls were used to playing many finals at different age-group international tournaments, where they once lifted the AFC U-14 regional trophy in front of the Nepal crowd in 2015. They also beat Nepal in the final of the SAFF U-18 Women's Championship in 2018.

“We are waiting to repeat the performance of the last four matches. If we can do it, I think we will win the final,” said Choton, whose counterpart Kumar Thapa appears confident to keep the SAFF title home.

“It is new history for both teams who are in the final. So, we don't want to miss this chance and we are very happy to play the match at our home ground and expect our fans won't be sad after 90 minutes. The Cup is already here and we don't want to let it go anywhere,” said Thapa while adding that his charges are ready to prove that Nepal are better than Bangladesh.

Juve lose again as Udinese go top

AGENCIES

Argentine midfielder Angel di Maria saw a straight red card as Juventus fell to a 1-0 defeat away to bottom-placed Monza in a Serie A fixture on Sunday.



Di Maria got the marching order after elbowing Monza defender Armando Izzo in the 40th minute of the game. To make matters worse, Christian Gytkjaer scored in the 74th minute to inflict a first defeat of the season on the Turin giants.

The defeat saw Juventus remain on 10 points from seven games in eighth position while Monza moved up to 18th position with four points.

Meanwhile, Udinese became provisional leaders after beating Inter Milan 3-1 to claim their fifth win in a row.

Andrea Sottile's surprise package continued their impressive start to the season after Milan Skriniar's 22nd-minute own goal and late headers from Jaka Bijol and Tolgay Arslan earned them the three points.

Udinese are two points ahead of Napoli, Atalanta and AC Milan after bouncing back from Nicolò Barella's superb early free-kick opener for Inter.

The chasing trio all play on Sunday and have the chance to claim the summit.

Champions Milan host Napoli at the San Siro in the weekend's headline match, while Atalanta head to fifth-placed Roma hoping to maintain their unbeaten record.



Arsenal midfielder Fabio Vieira makes his Premier League debut with a spectacular strike from outside the box during his side's 3-0 victory over Brentford on Sunday. [Inset] Fifteen-year-old Ethan Nwaneri became the youngest player in Premier League history when he came on as a substitute for Arsenal.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Sharma considering Kohli as third opener

AGENCIES

India captain Rohit Sharma, ahead of the T20I series against Australia, has made it clear that Virat Kohli will be India's third opener in the upcoming T20 World Cup.

“It is always nice to have options available for you, especially if you are going into a tournament such as T20 World Cup, you want that flexibility. It's an option for us, and since we have not taken the third opener, he can obviously open,” Rohit told reporters in Mohali ahead of their first T20I against visiting Australia.

“He opens for his franchise, and he has done really well. It's a definite option for us.”

Virat Kohli, while opening for India, has recorded his first international hundred in nearly three years against Afghanistan in the Asia Cup. He was also the highest run-getter for India.

“I had a word with Rahul Dravid and we have decided that we might have to open with Virat in few matches. We have seen that in the last match and we are happy,” he added.

Although Rohit maintained that Virat

is a definite option, but KL Rahul is going to open for India.

“I don't think we are going to experiment. KL Rahul is going to be our opener for sure. His performance for India has always gone unnoticed. One or two bad game doesn't overshadow his past records.

We know what KL brings to the table, his presence at the top is very crucial for us,” said Sharma.

That leaves India with the same top three as the one in the last World Cup in the UAE in 2021. In that World Cup, India failed to make it out of the group stages, and again failed to make the final of the Asia Cup at the same venue. Rohit, though, said this time was different because India battled with their new approach and came close even in defeats.

“We will continue to play like that,” Rohit said of their new, aggressive batting style.”

The Indian team will be playing its first T20 against Australia on Tuesday in Mohali, followed by second and third T20 in Nagpur and Hyderabad on September 23 and September 25.

