

Pakistan 'hope for the best'

AFP, Sydney

Gutsy Pakistan kept their slim Twenty20 World Cup hopes alive with a 33-run win over South Africa in a dramatic rain-affected match at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday.

South Africa, who are still on course for the semi-finals, came out blazing after a rain delay saw their initial target of 186 adjusted down to 142, meaning they needed 73 runs in five overs.

But the asking rate was too much and they finished on 108-9 at the end of a captivating match that had a bit of everything, from bad weather to good bowling and dropped catches.

Their win means Pakistan can still reach the World Cup semi-finals if they win their last match against Bangladesh on Sunday and other results go their way.

But they must rely on India or South Africa losing their final games. India face Zimbabwe and the Proteas play the Netherlands.

Ifthikhar Ahmed and Shadab Khan had rescued Pakistan with the bat with a superb 82-run partnership, their World Cup having looked dead and buried prior to that.

Captain Babar Azam, who failed with the bat once again, was full of praise for his fighting side.

"These are our best players and everyone is ready to play," Azam said.

"Everyone is a match-winner. Our first two matches were close losses, but we've given 100 percent in the last two matches and you never know, cricket is a funny game. "We hope for the best."

Ifthikhar, who came to the crease with Pakistan in big trouble at 43-4, scored 51 off 35 balls and Shadab blazed 52 from 22 as Pakistan finished their innings at 185-9.

Pakistan had looked headed for a certain early exit from the tournament as the South African seam attack tore through the top order.

But Ifthikhar stayed firm, sharing a 52-run partnership with Mohammad Nawaz before he and Shadab took the much-vaunted South African attack apart, taking the score from 95-5 to 177-6.



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SCORES IN BRIEF

Pakistan: 185-9 in 20 overs (Haris 28, Ifthikhar 51, Nawaz 28, Shadab 52; Nortje 4-41)

South Africa: 108-9 in 14 overs (Bavuma 36, Markram 20, Klasaen 15, Stubbs 18; Afridi 3-14, Shadab 2-16)

Result: Pakistan won by 33 runs (D/L method).

Player-of-the-match: Shadab Khan.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS & GTV
Ireland vs New Zealand
Live from 10:00 am
Australia vs Afghanistan
Live from 02:00 pm
T SPORTS
Hockey Champions Trophy
Live from 06:30 pm & 08:00 pm

Contrasting scenarios for Trans-Tasman rivals

AGENCIES

Both Australia and New Zealand will eye victories on Friday in their group stage matches against Afghanistan and Ireland, respectively, in order to make the semifinals from Group 1 in the ongoing T20 World Cup.

However, for defending champions Australia, the equation remains much more complex than their neighbours. Australia, New Zealand and England all have equal five points from four matches in Group 1 but the Kiwis are in pole position with a healthy 2.233 net run rate.

Australia, who have a net run-rate of -0.304, must win big and make huge net run rate gains against Afghanistan to have any hope of progressing. But even if Australia achieve both those things, their destiny could still be decided by the outcome of England's match against Sri Lanka on Saturday.

England, who have a net run rate of 0.547, would go into Saturday's clash knowing what they need to do exactly, meaning they would know by how big a margin would they need to win against Sri Lanka in order to pip their Ashes rivals.

Australia also face injury issues ahead of their pivotal clash against Afghanistan as skipper Aaron Finch and explosive batter Tim David are both struggling to be fit for the clash.

Meanwhile, courtesy of their net run rate, just a victory against Ireland in Adelaide should guarantee a semi-final spot for Kane Williamson's New Zealand.

Will Bangladesh take right lessons from India loss?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh seemingly lose the plot in tight contests and, even more desperately, they often see the tide turn against them when things are going their way, such as during the Super 12 game against India in Adelaide on Wednesday.

Skipper Al Hasan said that the Tigers were not used to close games, highlighting that a lack of experience of closing out tight situations had led to the result.

Can Bangladesh now at least use the loss as a lesson and learn from their mistakes?

With 10 wickets in hand and 85 needed off nine overs, the match was in Bangladesh's hand. But perhaps more clarity was needed about how to approach the target. Instability in terms of their roles often breeds new scenarios the players have not faced before.

Bangladesh entered the World Cup after many failed experiments

with the opening combination. While true that Bangladesh cannot prosper without experimenting with team combinations, especially in T20Is where the concept of a batting order is loosely defined, some stability was required to give the players a more even footing in the World Cup.

The experiment with Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Sabbir Rahman in the opening slot did not go far. Thus, backup opener Najmul Hossain Shanto seemingly became a solution at this World Cup.

Ironically, the opener who has created the most impact during this World Cup is Liton Das, who had been played as the anchor at number three.

Because Bangladesh picked five specialist bowlers in the playing eleven for the first time, they dropped Soumya Sarkar and not Shanto since the latter had scored runs in the previous game against Zimbabwe.

It was the safe option and it meant they also had to plan on

sending Liton as the opener. Conversely however, they might have shifted the role of anchor to Shanto.

Liton created the necessary impact, showing the application needed and scoring quickly. On the other hand, Shanto closed the face of his bat repeatedly during his knock and played the ball a lot further forward without using the crease to get more time against the pace and bounce on offer.

It is pivotal to hand the role of anchor to someone who can make up for a lack of runs in the early overs. So the solution at the top is yet to have clarity, although technical consultant Sridharan Sriram has a different opinion regarding the opening slot.

The Tigers have flexibility regarding their bowling combination. With Ebadot Hossain also in the mix, it is a positive to focus on bowling strength.

The batting approach and application needed more attention. Apart from Liton, most other batters tried to force the issue instead of using the pace on offer. The Tigers can go a long way to sealing tight contests if they improve their shot selection and read scenarios better.



Rajshahi thrash Barishal

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi Division put on an all-round performance to thump Barishal Division by an innings and 68 runs in their Tier 2 National Cricket League (NCL) encounter at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna on Thursday.

Barishal, who were asked to follow on after being bundled out for 273 in pursuit of Rajshahi's mammoth first innings total of 508-8d, started the fourth and final day at 57-1 with Abu Sayem Chowdhury and Fazle Mahmud at the crease on 31 and four, respectively. They were still trailing by 178 runs at the start of the day.

Sayem's 56 and a 49-run knock from Moin Khan were not enough to see Barishal eke out a draw. Barishal were restricted to 167-9 with their last batter, Rafsan Al Mahmud, unable to come out to bat.

Rajshahi's Jahurul Islam was adjudged player of the match for his 177 in the first innings.

Meanwhile, the Tier 1 affair between Chattogram Division and Sylhet Division ended in a draw at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

Chattogram, who were also made to follow on after being skittled out for 237 in reply to Sylhet's 481, managed to rescue a draw as they finished the final day at 256-5 on the back of fifties from Pinak Ghosh (62) and Shahadat Hossain Dipu (58).



AC Milan players celebrate with their fans at the San Siro after ensuring a spot in the Champions League knock-out stage for the first time in nine years with a 4-0 victory over Salzburg on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'These kinds of nights are what Milan wish for'

AFP, Paris

AC Milan reached the Champions League knock-out stage for the first time in nine years on Wednesday with a 4-0 victory over Salzburg, while RB Leipzig also qualified by thrashing Shakhtar Donetsk.

Paris Saint-Germain will be the team group winners want to avoid in Monday's last-16 draw after missing out on top spot in Group H despite a 2-1 win at Juventus, as Benfica hammered Maccabi Haifa 6-1 to snatch first place on total away goals. Possible last-16 opponents for PSG include 14-time champions Real Madrid, Manchester City, Bayern Munich, Chelsea and in-form Napoli.

Seven-time European champions Milan knew a point would be enough to send them into the last 16 for the first time since the 2013-14 season after a group-stage exit last term.

"These kinds of nights are what we wish for," Milan coach Stefano Pioli told Sky Sport.

"We wanted to show we improved compared to last season in the Champions League. We're ambitious now, so let's see what happens next."

Pioli's side eased any nerves at the San Siro inside 14 minutes as Olivier Giroud

headed home.

Milan's return to the knockouts was all but confirmed less than a minute after half-time when Giroud headed the ball across goal for Rade Krunic to nod past Philipp Kohn in the Salzburg goal.

Giroud added his second before the hour mark, allowing the home fans the opportunity to celebrate for the remainder of the match and Junior Messias added further gloss to the scoreline in added time.

Milan qualified from Group E in second place behind Chelsea, who came from behind to beat Dinamo Zagreb 2-1 at Stamford Bridge with goals from Raheem Sterling and debutant Denis Zakaria.

Leipzig also only needed to avoid defeat to go through against Ukrainians Shakhtar in Warsaw.

Shakhtar, playing their home matches in Poland and having seen most of their foreign players leave due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, had stunned Leipzig 4-1 in their Group F opener.

But the Bundesliga side were too strong to beat on Wednesday as they wrapped up a 4-0 win.

Meanwhile, Holders Real Madrid secured first place in the group by hammering Scottish champions Celtic 5-1 at the Santiago Bernabeu.

TEAMS THAT QUALIFIED TO THE LAST 16

Spain: Real Madrid.
England: Liverpool, Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City.
Italy: Napoli, Inter and AC Milan.
Germany: Bayern Munich, Eintracht Frankfurt, RB Leipzig and Borussia Dortmund.

France: PSG.
Belgium: Club Brugge.
Portugal: Porto and Benfica.
**The draw for the Champions League Round of 16 will take place on Monday, November 7.