



Domingo to return for India series

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's conclusion to their ICC T20 World Cup journey also signalled the end of technical consultant Sridharan Sriram's contract, but there is optimism in the Bangladesh Cricket Board that the former Indian all-rounder will continue although head coach Russell Domingo will return for next month's India series.

The Tigers returned home from Australia yesterday after Shakib Al Hasan and Co. sealed two hard-fought wins over the Netherlands and Zimbabwe in the main round of the T20 World for the first time. Statistically, it was their best performance in the T20 World Cup.

Their next assignment will be against India at home next month, when the teams meet for three ODIs and two Tests.

Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo's future is still in limbo, with the South African yet to arrive later this month. However, BCB's cricket operations committee chairman

Jalal Yunus confirmed that he would be part of the team for the India series.

"Since we still have a contract with Domingo, he will obviously be part of the team for the upcoming India series," Jalal told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to the influential director, the board will decide on Sriram's future in the coming days.

"He [Sriram] knows his job very well and it seems he had a good influence on the cricketers. He is able to mesh well. He is also a good planner, so Sriram definitely had a positive impact on the team," he said.

It will be interesting to see whether the board will continue with Domingo as head coach after the India series, especially with rumours swirling about Sriram being poised for a long-term contract.



Pacers to take centre stage in first semifinal

AFP, Sydney

Pakistan's best is yet to come and struggling skipper Babar Azam is due "something very special" in their Twenty20 World Cup semi-final against New Zealand on Wednesday, team mentor Matthew Hayden warned.

Former Australia opener Hayden, who was batting coach for Pakistan at the last World Cup and appointed team mentor for this edition, said they planned to make the most of their second chance.

"When the Netherlands beat South Africa it was a significant moment for us, a very significant moment for the team in general around reaching its potential," he said on the eve of the semi-final in Sydney.

"It has been a roller-coaster... but I really believe we have yet to play our best game, which is a huge threat to oppositions."

While Pakistan's bowling, led by Shaheen Shah Afridi, has been improving, their batting has been fragile, a concern against a top-class New Zealand attack led by Tim Southee, Trent Boult and Lockie Ferguson.

Azam's form in particular remains a worry with the opener managing just 39 runs in five matches.

Hayden said the skipper was due some "fireworks" and predicted they could come on Wednesday.

"There's no question Babar has been under some adversity but that will only make him an even greater player," he said.

"We know with the weather that when there's a lull, there's often a storm that follows, so look out rest of the world because I think we're about to see something very special from Babar."

HIGHLIGHTS

- Pakistan have scored at a run rate of 5.93 in the Powerplay overs in this World Cup, bettering only Zimbabwe and the Netherlands since the start of the Super 12s stage.
- Pakistan have taken on New Zealand in 27 T20Is and come out on top on 17 occasions while suffering 11 losses. Pakistan have a 4-1 record against the Blackcaps in T20 World Cups.
- Openers Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan are yet to come to the party. Babar has batted at a strike rate of 61 while his partner has managed to score at exactly 100. With 63 and 103 runs amassed across five matches, Babar and Rizwan will look to make it count in the semifinal.
- With the exception of Mohammad Nawaz, all Pakistan bowlers have bowled at an economy rate of under seven runs an over.
- Leg-spinner Shadab Khan has risen to the occasion, boasting the best economy rate (6.22) among spinners in the Super 12. New Zealand spinner Mitchell Santner places third on that list behind Rashid Khan.

New Zealand started their campaign this year with a massive 89-run win against the defending champions, also in Sydney, and Hayden said Pakistan were wary of the Black Caps.

"They got 200 on this particular wicket against Australia... New Zealand have some really destructive players and they can put you under pressure with the bat," he said.

"They've also got a terrific, well-balanced bowling attack.

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson played down any significance in his team making 200-3 on the Sydney wicket, noting that they only managed 167-7 against Sri Lanka when they returned to the ground later in the tournament.

"We'll just be looking to focus on our cricket really and the plans that we are

looking to execute and make sure we adjust to the conditions and try and play smart."

New Zealand followed up that first Sydney win with a six-wicket victory over Sri Lanka, with a washed-out game against Afghanistan in between. They lost by 20 runs to England before hammering Ireland to secure a semi-final place.

Williamson said the results counted for little when it came to the knockouts.

"Finals sport can go any way," he said. "Both teams match up pretty well, there's some similar trends, we've both been playing some good cricket.

"They've got an outstanding pace attack," he added. "Some really experienced players throughout their side, match winners, so real strength in their team."

Agrani Bank turns its back on football

ANISUR RAHMAN

State-run Agrani Bank Ltd decided to discard 50 years of its footballing heritage, saying in a letter that its club, Agrani Bank Ltd SC, would not be involved in any tournaments organised by the Bangladesh Football Federation due to cost-cutting measures.

The Bangladesh Championship League outfit, which made significant contributions to developing football in the nation, did not take part in the just-concluded transfer window, citing instructions to cut costs from the financial institutions division of the finance ministry.

Agrani Bank SC began its footballing journey in 1972, soon after the liberation war. Habib Bank and Commercial Bank merged and became Agrani Bank and the football team eventually climbed the ladder all the way to the top flight. During a memorable journey, they also stunned crowd favourites like Mohammedan, Abahani and Brothers Union and earned the tag of giant killers in the late 90s.

After the introduction of the second-tier BCL in 2012, the bankers played all 10 editions till last season, thereby providing jobs to 30-35 footballers each season.

Agrani Bank also produced many talented footballers on their journey, grooming the likes of Rajani Kanta Barman, Iqbal Hossain,



Rokonuzzaman Kanchan, Matiur Munna, Alok, Zahid and others who represented the national team.

Agrani Bank's sports, culture and national days' celebration committee oversees the football, cricket, chess and taekwondo teams under the Agrani Bank Ltd SC banner.

Interestingly, they did not decide to pull out of any other sport and even approved an immense budget of approximately four crore taka for their cricket team for the upcoming season of the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League.

On the other hand, the concerned authorities spent only Tk 78 lakh on their football team last season and proposed a budget of one crore taka for 2022-23 season. That was turned down by the newly-appointed managing director.

"It was almost a single handed decision from the former managing director and the current one stuck to it even though the Agrani Bank football team completed the club licensing, hoping to get approval from the board of directors," an Agrani Bank SC official said on condition of anonymity.

"We are about to waste one season due to this decision. None of the 35 players can find a club this season," Abu Tarek told The Daily Star. "We want the bank management to reverse their decision and form a squad."

Former national team captain and Agrani Bank player Iqbal Hossain, who is now the manager of the national team, was also hopeful that the decision would not stick. "One after the other, public institutions are turning away from football, which is really disappointing for football. The decision has closed a door for footballers even though Agrani Bank SC was once a place where footballers could truly be satisfied. I still get admiration from different corners as a former Bank player. I will request the concerned authorities to reverse the decision and keep that door open for footballers," he said.

‘Best-ever T20 World Cup’ blown out of proportion

NABID YEASIN

The Bangladesh team management is probably experiencing a very rare phase as of late. There is no doubting its claim that the Tigers have enjoyed their 'best-ever T20 World Cup campaign' in Australia this year.

From a statistical vantage point, the statement is indeed true. In about a fortnight, Bangladesh went from not winning a game in the main phase of the T20 World Cup in 15 years to winning two games and coming within one match of making the semifinal for the first time in their history.

In fact, Bangladesh surpassed their previous best in T20 World Cups inside a week in the land down under, beating the Netherlands in their tournament opener before bouncing back from a thumping by South Africa with a thrilling win over age-old foes Zimbabwe in their third game.

Achieving all that in a campaign that was not even deemed a primary focus by the team management is indeed a grand achievement. And that is exactly how everyone in the team is portraying this campaign.

"In terms of results, this is the best performance we had in T20 World Cups," skipper Shakib Al Hasan said after their final Super 12 match against Pakistan in Adelaide. T20 technical consultant Sridharan Sriram had said the exact same



thing prior to the Pakistan game.

It is clear that Bangladesh has surpassed the bar they had set for themselves. Instead of having to search for positives from defeats as they often resort to following most series and tournaments played in the shortest format, they can actually now boast about wins against teams termed as 'minnows' in cricket. Kudos!

Interestingly, these lightweights issued a far more searing warning to cricketing powerhouses. The Netherlands knocked out an in-form South Africa while Zimbabwe had the last laugh against Pakistan. The Dutch even finished above Bangladesh in their group.

If their successes were tied to Bangladesh's, it would only intensify the

stature of the Tigers' already acclaimed 'best-ever T20 World Cup' as both the Netherlands and Zimbabwe were defeated by Shakib and Co.

It is actually funny how the same faces from the Bangladesh leadership have now suddenly turned to point at the outcome when asked to summarise this World Cup campaign instead of talking about

'positives' from a certain knock, a bowling display or the approach in a game.

Ironically, if Bangladesh's gameplay is scrutinised in detail, a lot of positives would probably not come to the fore. They would most likely revolve around Liton Das, Taskin Ahmed and, to an extent, the pace department.

Najmul Hossain Shanto did end up as the Tigers' highest run-getter in the tournament, with 180 runs at an average of 36, but his performances were as questionable as the approach from the team management -- which decided not to let Liton open the innings in the first three matches -- and the ability of the middle-order -- which was able to post 150 runs only in one instance throughout the tournament.

And if the team management's eyes have been on the next T20 World Cup, in the USA and the West Indies in 2024, all along, satisfaction with such a result only indicates two further years of dreary performances in the shortest format.

It would perhaps act in Bangladesh's favour if they opted for introspection and started working on their shortcomings now instead of letting the bubble of the 'best-ever T20 World Cup' consume them. Otherwise, it may be too late when they realise the next T20 World Cup is knocking at the door.