

Tigresses seek better fortunes in T20 WC

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh side embarked on a new journey yesterday as they left for South Africa to participate in the Women's T20 World Cup, slated to begin February 10, with hopes of turning the tide and finding some joy in a tournament that has often seen them deliver below expectation.

The Tigresses have finished as champions in the Women's World Cup qualifiers thrice, but when it comes to the tournament proper, they have found the going tough. Across 17 games so far, they have won just two. This time around, they find themselves in a difficult Group 1 against Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

The last time the Tigresses won a game in the T20 World Cup was on home soil in 2014, when they produced their best-ever outing in the tournament by finishing ninth after defeating Sri Lanka in the group-stage and Ireland in a place-deciding clash.

They have failed to secure a single win since, spanning 12 games across the last three editions.



"We won a match a long time ago so everyone is hoping to break that duck. If we do well in the first game and can carry that momentum, (things may change)," skipper Nigar Sultana Joty told reporters before the team's flight yesterday evening.

"I feel it's possible to get two or three results in the group stage given the teams we have in our group. We just need a little momentum," she added.

Four players from the ongoing Under-19 World Cup will feature in Bangladesh's squad. Shorna Akter, Marufa Akter, Dilara Akter and Disha Biswas will join the team after their U-19 World Cup campaign.

"They have been playing there [in South Africa in the U-19 WC]. They are in much better flow than us. Marufa has been bowling well consistently. She did well in New Zealand too. Also Disha and Shorna," she said.

Meanwhile, batter Fargana Haque was added to the squad at the eleventh hour and flew with the squad yesterday. "We added her since we have one player in the squad who will likely be unable to play due to injury," Shafiul Alam Chowdhury Nadel, chairman of the BCB's women's wing, confirmed to The Daily Star yesterday.

The Tigresses will play warm-up matches against Pakistan and India on February 6 and 8 respectively before opening campaign against Sri Lanka on February 12.



Bangladesh players pose for a selfie at the gallery of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday ahead of their departure for South Africa for the Women's T20 World Cup, which gets underway on February 10. Bangladesh will play their first match against Sri Lanka on February 12.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Change in mindset did the trick for Hridoy

Young batter Towhid Hridoy had shown a glimpse of his potential in the first phase of the Bangladesh Premier League in Dhaka as he smashed three consecutive fifties for Sylhet Strikers, but the 22-year-old was derailed by a hand injury. The promising batter, still in recovery mode as he gears up for a comeback, spoke to The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin about his transformation, the pressure of expectations and other topics during an exclusive interview. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): What's the situation with your injury?

I haven't done anything exceptional yet in T20s either. I have had a few disappointing BPL campaigns, including even the last edition. I think I am yet to prove myself as a consistent player but I would definitely love to play in all three formats. It is my dream to become a cross-format batter for Bangladesh.

Towhid Hridoy (TH): I am recovering well, gradually. I still don't know when I will be able to return to the field, but I am hopeful.

DS: It must be disappointing to miss



out at a time when you were in such fine form?

TH: To be honest, it's not in my hands. Injuries are part of a player's life. I am not disappointed. I am looking forward to a strong return. I can't control the rest.

DS: Did you work on your batting ahead of the BPL?

TH: Well, you can't change your technique overnight but what I worked on was my mindset. I used to overthink and that put me under pressure to some extent. But now I try to have a clear mindset and play according to the situation. I am playing freely and enjoying my game and it seems to be working well.

DS: You were among the higher-rated members of Bangladesh's Under-19 World Cup-winning squad. Some of them have already made it to the senior team. Do you think the weight of expectations hampered you?

TH: Look, I bat in the same position that Mushfiqur [Rahim] bhai does for the national team. Even the selectors told me not think too much and instead continue to work on my process and improve myself. I think I have the right process and plan. I don't think about anything else.

DS: Do you think your batting is better suited to the white-ball formats?

TH: To be honest, I haven't done anything exceptional yet in T20s either. I have had a few disappointing BPL campaigns, including even the last edition. I think I am yet to prove myself as a consistent player but I would definitely love to play in all three formats. It is my dream to become a cross-format batter for Bangladesh.

DS: Do you think you played with a lot of freedom under skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza for Sylhet in the ongoing BPL?

TH: Mashrafe bhai allows me to play my natural game and gives me the freedom to go out there and express myself. We all know he is an inspirational captain and he motivated me a lot. Shakib [Al Hasan] bhai also supported me in the previous season, when I played for Barishal. I remember I was not performing and failed in the last few games with the bat. Before the final, I told Shakib bhai that he could drop me from the playing eleven because I was not performing. But Shakib bhai told me that I would play and trusted that I would do well. That boosted my confidence a lot.

'New volleyball players more technically sound'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national volleyball team captain, Horosit Biswas, highly praised the promising prospects of the U-20 and U-23 national sides, who punched above their weights in the recently concluded Dhaka Metropolitan Premier Division Volleyball League.

Horosit's Power Development Board (PDB) clinched the prestigious title five times in a row on Friday, courtesy of scintillating performances from Tanvir, Rakesh, Rifat, Shafin and Titas, who were part of Bangladesh's winning team in the Asian Central Zone U-23 Men's International Volleyball Championship at home. They also dazzled in the 21st Asian Men's U-20 Championship to end up with a commendable fifth-place finish, ahead of China.

"This time the league was very competitive among the participants because as the players from the national U-23 and U-20s, who had long



been in training following their two internationals, played in different clubs," PDB captain Horosit said.

"However, with the inclusion of a few national players, PDB had the last laugh with an all-win record.

"To be honest, I gained fresh experience alongside these new players, who are more technically sound than the older ones and motivated enough to give their best on the field. Ball receiving has drastically elevated, and the style of the game also improved a lot among the new players," said Horosit, adding that the current players are getting more training facilities compared to the previous time.

The Bangladesh captain believes the emergence of the new crop of players will strengthen the national team in future as the federation and clubs are providing good training facilities, having acquired new instruments for practice which were unavailable once.

"The national U-20 team had beaten China, Qatar, and Australia, which is still a dream for me because beating those strong teams in volleyball is not a joke," Horosit further said.

"If the training continues for the boys and they play the international matches frequently, then they will be sharper and strengthen the national team. Thus, we can look to beat India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in future."

Horosit informed that the federation is considering introducing franchises-based volleyball league as well as start the national U-16 Volleyball Championship in a quest to bolster the national team's pipeline.

Arsenal have history on their side

REUTERS

Arsenal confirmed they are deadly serious about winning the Premier League title by beating Manchester United 3-2 on Sunday to reach 50 points at the halfway mark of the season - a tally which usually leads to ending the season as champions.

The victory, clinched by Eddie Nketiah's stoppage-time strike, saw Arsenal become only the fifth team in Premier League history to hit 50 points from their first 19 games. Three of the previous four teams to hit that milestone went on to lift the crown.

Manchester City romped to the title in 2017-18 after taking 55 points in the first half of the season, a record Liverpool in 2019-20, while Chelsea became champions in 2005-06 after hitting 51 points.

Only Liverpool in 2018-19 failed to take the title after hitting 51 points from 19 matches, being edged by Manchester City after squandering a seven-point lead.

Arsenal have a smaller advantage over City than Liverpool did, leading Pep

Guardiola's side by five points, and they have played one game fewer.

Arsenal visit City in the FA Cup on Friday before a league showdown between the two teams at the Emirates Stadium on Feb. 15 which could have a huge say in whether the Gunners lift their first Premier League crown in 19 years or are pegged back by City, who have won four of the last five titles.

City lost some momentum by losing the derby to Manchester United last weekend but proved they will not easily surrender their crown by storming back from two goals down to beat Tottenham Hotspur 4-2 on Thursday before Sunday's thumping 3-0 win over Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Former United midfielder Roy Keane said Arsenal were in the driving seat.

"The momentum is with them, there's good experience, youth and pace. They had good options off the bench - they're in a great place," Keane said on Sky Sports.

"If you had said at the start of the season they'd be where they are, you wouldn't have believed it. It will take a lot to stop them."



Novak Djokovic celebrates his straight-sets victory against Australia's Alex De Minaur during their fourth round match of the Australian Open at the Melbourne Park on Monday. Despite playing with a hamstring injury, the Serb romped to a 6-2, 6-1, 6-2 victory to move a step closer to a 10th Australian title and 22nd major crown.

PHOTO: AFP