

## Intent without the recklessness

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Bangladesh had been searching for the right batting approach in T20s for a long time, but while their ODI approach has brought positive results, the results in T20s spoke of the need for an attitude that they did not often measure up to.

Batters had eaten up deliveries trying to get set or thrown away wickets in an attempt to accelerate while a lack of power-hitting became a focal issue in autopsies following T20I capitulations.

However, when asked to chase down the 156 put on by England, the Tigers always kept themselves above the run-rate that world champions England had managed during the same phases in the innings.

Openers Rony Talukdar and Liton Das came out firing. Often when wickets fall, things go downhill fast. But here Najmul Hossain Shanto and Towhid Hridoy accelerated in an important 65-run stand that virtually took the game away from the visitors. However, the intent was clear, comfortable, neither hurried nor forced.

Shanto hit four back-to-back fours off Mark Wood in the seventh over, each boundary seemingly giving him more confidence to go for more. Hridoy had smashed Chris Woakes down the ground before classy flicks for two boundaries off the last two deliveries of the previous over – which made it six boundaries in a row.

The Sylhet Strikers duo had batted in the same manner throughout the BPL and here they were given the licence to go about their business in the same manner. Hridoy's approach is the one that also suits his



Both head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and skipper Shakib Al Hasan were delighted as Bangladesh made a great start to their quest for the 2024 T20 World Cup with a comprehensive victory in the first of three T20Is against reigning world champions England in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## 'We will build the team to do well like in ODIs'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

The way Bangladesh's bowlers thwarted England from getting a big score was commendable, but how did the 'Tigers' chase go? It was a complete chase, done with a coolness that displayed the exuberance of youth, with left-handed Najmul Hossain Shanto leading from the front.

How well the chase played out could be surmised from Shanto's confident remarks at the press conference after beating world champions England in the first of the three-match T20I series in Chattogram yesterday.

"They are one of the best teams in the world, so the win will give us a lot of confidence. We will slowly build the team, so we can do well just as the ODI team," Shanto said, with the intent in his voice suggesting the confidence that he showed when he played some smashing shots against some of the best in the business during a 30-ball 51.

The ODI team has been successful in recent years but the T20 team has struggled for a long time. A new-look team had gone to the World Cup in Australia last year but there was far more newness to the team in this series, Bangladesh's first T20I assignment since the World Cup.

Shanto himself had been at that World Cup, ending as Bangladesh's highest run-getter. However, there

was plenty of criticism as well. He had said that there was a role he needed to carry out for the national side back then, but after the BPL, where he ended as the top-scorer, he was told to carry on with the approach he showed in the domestic T20 competition.

"I wasn't given a specific plan. We just tried to continue with the momentum from the openers. We stuck to a normal plan. We tried to apply the way we batted in the BPL," he said.

He found runs in the England ODIs and the BPL performances allowed him to find a better tempo. "I

have been scoring regularly, which allows extra confidence. Game awareness gets better. I had a better understanding of building my innings," he said about being among runs.

Before the chase, the team talk had been to play normally, which sounds simple but fits well with Shanto's game, anchoring and accelerating as needed.

"They were telling me to bat in similar fashion [to the BPL]," he informed about the instructions.

But it was not just Shanto. Towhid Hridoy made his international debut while Rony Talukdar, who came out to open, returned after eight years after playing a lone T20I. Integration should not have been easy, but Shanto said it was.

"I think the team environment is great. We played together in the BPL, so they didn't take time to gel. The good thing about our dressing room is that a new player never feels like he is new."

The new faces and the returnees added electricity on the field. Put on the spot about whether they would win the series, Shanto made the following statement: "We should win the series from this position. We have to play well on that particular day."



SCORES IN BRIEF	
<b>England:</b>	156 for six in 20 overs (Buttler 67, Salt 38, Duckett 20; Hasan Mahmud 2-26, Shakib 1-26, Nasum 1-31)
<b>Bangladesh:</b>	158 for four in 18 overs (Shanto 51, Shakib 34*, Rony 21, Hridoy 24; Moeen 1-27, Rashid 1-25)
<b>Result:</b>	Bangladesh won by six wickets
<b>Player-of-the-match:</b>	Najmul Hossain Shanto



game, based on touch and timing.

"His [Hridoy's] approach and intent, in his first international match, gave me a lot of confidence. He never got nervous playing against such a big team. We just batted the way we batted in the BPL, where we had some big partnerships," Shanto said yesterday at the press conference.

Coach Chandika Hathurusingha had given them the licence to play freely.

"They [Rony, Hridoy and Shanto] have done well in domestic cricket so it is an opportunity for them to put their hands up. I think they will get a lot of opportunities to show what they can do. My message to them today was to do what they normally do, but on the international stage," Hathurusingha had said just the prior day.

But for a culture to be built, a team has to be inspired. For their insipid batting to reverse their approach, what was needed was for the captain to turn up.

Shakib Al Hasan did both, giving youngsters confidence and guiding them about tactical nous. It showed in the practice session a day ahead of the game and it showed in the method and freeness of the top-order. Whether the trend continues will be depending on developing this mindset.

Shakib himself was hopeful. "In T20s, when you don't think too much, you tend to play well. Hopefully, we can keep this in the dressing room."

## One-dimensional PSG humbled again

REUTERS, Paris

Paris St Germain were knocked out in the Champions League last 16 for the fifth time in 12 seasons under big-spending owners Qatar Sport Investment (QSI) and it came as no surprise given the lack of a club culture at the French capital club.

Poor recruitment decisions and blind faith in the talent of Kylian Mbappe and a handful of others meant PSG were not armed against a Bayern Munich side whose cohesion and strength in depth made the difference in their 3-0 aggregate victory.

PSG have been relying on the mercurial Mbappe up front, but Bayern were well prepared against such an elementary strategy, while Lionel Messi has been inconsistent since he joined from Barcelona in 2021.

Neymar was out injured on Wednesday, when PSG lost 2-0 despite a promising first half, and while the team looked more balanced with the Brazilian missing, the lack of craft in the midfield was horribly exposed.

Marco Verratti has been a key player for PSG since 2011, but suspensions and injuries have worked against the Italian.

At the Allianz Arena his blunder cost the visitors the first goal that was scored by Eric Choupo-Moting – a stinging irony after the Cameroon forward became a laughing stock at PSG before joining Bayern.

In 2019, the striker somehow



managed to stop the ball on the goal line as he tried to finish a move by PSG in a title-deciding game against Strasbourg – a mishap labelled the worst miss of all time by the media.

Choupo-Moting has improved since then and netted from close range after being set up by Leon Goretzka to put Bayern 1-0 in front before Serge Gnabry put the result beyond doubt in the closing stages, leaving PSG to reflect on what

went wrong again.

This time the joke was on the Paris side and it was not the first time after humiliating eliminations against Barcelona and Manchester United in 2017 and 2019, respectively, after they had taken a seemingly decisive advantage in the first leg.

It is now the fifth time in the last seven campaigns that PSG have exited Europe's elite club competition in the last 16.

"We have to stick together all the time. We must have pride," said Danilo Pereira, who played well on Wednesday but cannot be considered a world-class player.

The same goes for the likes of Vitinha and Fabian Ruiz, who were partnering Verratti in midfield.

While Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann sent the experienced Leroy Sane and Sadio Mane on from the bench, his PSG counterpart Christophe Galtier had to call on 17-year-old Warren Zaire Emery and Hugo Ekitike, 20 late in the game.

Former PSG great David Ginola, a pundit for Canal Plus, was fuming, pointing out that the team lacked grit.

"There has been a real problem for years. There are players in this team, I wonder about the recruitment policy," he said.

"How can we have so little strength in depth? We are still capable of living up to our ambitions and having players who are up to the task. Tonight Vitinha was not up to it at all.

"If we want PSG to win the Champions League, the players have to be more invested in the club, more committed."

Rubbing salt on PSG's wounds, Bayern president Herbert Hainer said: "You can see that you can't do everything with money alone."

In 12 years, PSG seem to have learned almost nothing from their setbacks and have failed to develop the club culture of the likes of Bayern, Liverpool and Real Madrid.

## Premier League resumes on April 7

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday decided to resume the Bangladesh Premier League on April 7, three days after the resumption of Federation Cup, which is being held simultaneously alongside the professional league.

The 13th edition of the league is scheduled to come to an end on July 22 following two breaks – the first one is FIFA window from June 12 to 20 and the second one is for SAFF Championship from June 20 to July 3. The final of the Federation Cup has been fixed for May 30 after four quarterfinals will be held between April 4 and May 2 while the two semifinals will be held between May 9 and 16.

The decisions of the league committee also indicates that the game's local governing body is setting less priorities on hosting world champions Argentina in June Window

Besides, the Bangabandhu National Stadium is not yet ready to host matches, even two years after renovation work started. The youth and sports ministry officials, who visited the venue yesterday, did not either give any deadline for completion of the remaining work before the June FIFA window.

"If we really want to bring Argentina, we will have to work intensively on the renovation work of the BNS," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said after a joint-coordination meeting.

"We will try our best to use the FIFA window for the national team. In that case, if the BNS is not ready, we can arrange international matches in Sylhet or the team can go abroad to play friendly matches as preparation for the SAFF Championship," Shohag told The Daily Star.

## FIFPRO warns against future winter WC

REUTERS

FIFPRO said that the World Cup should never again be squeezed into a November-December window, and that Raphael Varane's international retirement should ring alarm bells about the sport's smothering schedule.

FIFPRO released their World Cup 2022 Post-Tournament Review and Player Survey on Thursday, and said the results confirmed their fears around players' fatigue and injury risk.

Varane helped France reach the World Cup final – then announced on Feb. 3 he was ending his international career over a "suffocating" schedule.

"(Varane's) decision should really, really make organisers nervous, because it's ultimately those players who are creating the game, they're creating the product that is being sold by everybody... and they're the players the fans come to see," FIFPRO General Secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann said on Tuesday. "And if they're taking career choices of that drastic nature, based on their physical and their mental health, caused by the pressure that is on them, that is what we've been warning about."

Varane had just eight days between the World Cup Final and his first game back with his club Manchester United. Eighty-six percent of players want at least 14 days of preparation time, 61% would like 14-28 days of post-World Cup recovery time.

Baer-Hoffmann said a repeat of 2022 would be unacceptable.

"If you want to pursue a winter World Cup again, you need (the leagues) to completely change their schedule and provide appropriate training and recovery time pre- and post-tournament," he said. "(It is) unlikely that they will agree to that."