

A necessary change in approach

SPORTS REPORTER FROM SYLHET

Bangladesh usually target a score of around 270-280 in ODIs and while that has worked for them in the past, the ODI World Cup in India will see sporting wickets and the need for change in approach will be necessary.

The ODI team for the Ireland series featured a few changes and the fresh approach from batters saw them reach their highest ODI score. If a fresh approach is needed, Bangladesh showed they are moving in the right direction.

Bangladesh had lost Tamim Iqbal early and Liton Das, although he got a good start, departed too. The ball was bouncing a little high on occasion and Najmul Hossain Shanto and Shakib Al Hasan rebuilt the innings. The Tigers were 81 for three in the 17th over when Shanto too departed.

Often, the innings have slowed down in the middle overs, but Shakib and Towhid Hridoy had other ideas.

During the half-way point of Bangladesh's innings, Shakib appeared to be trying to force the issue by taking some risks. It seemed pretty early for that so soon after doing recovery work, but Shakib had gotten a feel of the pitch at that point and recognised the need for a big score.

Meanwhile, Hridoy was pushing for ones and twos to push the run-rate. After his fifty, Shakib slapped Curtis Campher straight down the ground to signal his aggressive intent. Shakib followed it up with five fours off a Harry Tector over to show his class and nous in understanding when to hit.

However, he departed without completing his ton, edging one to the wicketkeeper after scoring an 89-ball 93 following a 135-run stand with Hridoy.

Mushfiqur Rahim came in at number six and was in full flow very early on, smashing Campher for six. Along with Hridoy, the Tigers again dominated proceedings during an 80-run stand off just 49 deliveries.

At one point, Bangladesh were on course to post 350 but both were dismissed in the 46th over. The acceleration in the 30 to 45-over mark still allowed Yasir Ali and others to help post 338 for eight.

It might have been that change in approach that was needed in ODIs and it led to a convincing win against Ireland yesterday. If the Tigers are to make a big case for themselves in the upcoming World Cup, that approach will be necessary.

“We batted exceptionally. Wasn’t the best wicket to bat in our first 20 overs. Shakib was brilliant. Mushy’s innings made the difference, shoutout to him. Very pleased with the way we bowled under lights.”

Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal



Bangladesh's batting stalwart Shakib Al Hasan gives a few tips to debutant Towhid Hridoy during their 135-run fourth-wicket stand, which helped the Tigers post their highest-ever ODI total of 338 for eight in the opening game of the three-match series against Ireland at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

‘Without courage, you can’t do it at this level’

Towhid Hridoy’s performances have often gone under the radar, but having attained the highest score by a Bangladeshi batter on ODI debut yesterday against Ireland, they can be ignored no longer. The fluency and touch he displayed in BPL 2023 saw him get a national team call-up and brought his clean-hitting transformation to the limelight. In an interview, Hridoy talked about what helped turn disappointments into strengths with The Daily Star’s Abdullah Al Mehdi.

The Daily Star (DS): Was it a struggle to play the Under-19 World Cup twice?

Towhid Hridoy (TH): Of course it was tough, but I understood that the more time I gave myself, the better I would be able to prepare for the national team. People used to ask me why I wasn’t playing, but because of where I bat, there were a lot of variables. Even I couldn’t explain it to people. But I knew the process and particular areas that needed improvement.

DS: What did you work on?

TH: Of course, there were technical changes to my batting, but the biggest thing was a change in my mental set-up. I used to think of many things before, but now I don’t do that. The change came in terms of courage. Without courage, you won’t be able to do it at this level. It’s a game of courage. If someone has that and can execute, success will come.

DS: But that change doesn’t come to everyone so how was that possible?

TH: I used to think of getting out a lot before, but getting out is part of the game. The mindset change was wanting to dominate till I got out.

DS: Players lose confidence during bad

patches. So how did you raise your confidence levels?

TH: As a batter, you need runs to get confidence in your game. After the U-19 World Cup, I scored everywhere but that went under the radar. My runs are being noticed now. In the BPL before the last one and also the DPL, I didn’t get runs. That season went badly, but after that I tried to do something different. The question was what was that something different which I could do. I felt that I had to score aggressively and show good hitting ability.

DS: Was there disappointment in that BPL? Khaled Mahmud Sujon seemed disappointed at a nets session during the 2022 edition of the tournament.

TH: If he didn’t back me, I wouldn’t have come to cricket. I lost my interest in cricket after being defrauded in Banasree. He backed me when I was at the U-16 level. He noticed me and the backing was rare. He gave me opportunities and batted me in a good position in the Dhaka League, which helped me progress. That BPL, I told him not to play me but to instead play others in my position. Sir scolded me and said I didn’t need to

think of so many things. He said that my job was to play. Knowing that had seen me from my childhood, I wanted a second opinion. Thus, I asked Shakib [Al Hasan] bhai [Barishal skipper] and he told me the same thing. When you get that backing from coach and captain, that’s a big thing for a young player. At this level, when you do badly, you have to make way. I was poor across 10 to 11 matches straight and those opportunities were a big gain.

DS: Do you remember that BPL final with Fortune Barishal? Do you still have regrets?

TH: I was sick and, before the semifinal, I asked sir to drop me. I haven’t forgotten that pain. At one time, it was what ignited my fire because I wasn’t able to score a boundary in that vital over. I was upset for a long time and often couldn’t sleep. Shujon sir just told me one thing: ‘you couldn’t hit one boundary’. Those words still hit me. In that one over, there were deliveries which could be hit. In the national-team camp, Shakib bhai told me: “it doesn’t matter, you were young then. Because you did badly in that BPL, you did well in this BPL [2023]”.

BD-IRELAND 1ST ODI HIGHLIGHTS

****Shakib Al Hasan is now part of another elite club as the third player in ODI history to register 7000 runs and 300 wickets after Sri Lanka’s Sanath Jayasuriya and Pakistan’s Shahid Afridi.**

****Towhid Hridoy became the third Bangladeshi batter to hit a fifty on ODI debut after Farhad Reza and Nasir Hossain and went on to surpass their scores.**

****Hridoy joins the likes of Eoin Morgan and Stephen Fleming as one of the seven debutants in ODI history who could not cross the nervous nineties barrier.**

****The 135-run stand between Shakib and Hridoy is the highest fourth-wicket stand in Sylhet, which has hosted five ODIs so far.**

****The 183-run victory is Bangladesh’s biggest margin win in ODIs.**



SAFF C’ship in Bengaluru?

SPORTS REPORTER

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) is today likely to officially announce Bengaluru, the capital of southern Indian state of Karnataka, as host for the next SAFF Championship, scheduled for June 20 to July 3 this year.

Nepal made the sole bid to host the 14th edition of the regional biennial football event, but as per the wish of commercial partner company, Sports Partner International, it was decided to be held in India during a SAFF executive committee meeting last month.

The new committee at AIFF, which came to office last year, has reportedly decided to host the event in Bengaluru, known as the Silicon Valley of India, instead of traditional football hubs such as West Bengal, Kerala or Goa, keeping the commercial aspects of the event in mind.

“We have been informed that AIFF will announce the venue of the SAFF Championship today, and though it is not official, we’ve heard that Bengaluru might be the venue,” SAFF’s general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal told The Daily Star yesterday, adding that the decision might have been made to meet sponsors’ demand while the new committee’s wishes might also be reflected.

Hosts India will start the championship as defending champions and record eight-time winners. The other participating teams are: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Maldives.

Pakistan will be back in the event for the first time since 2014 while Sri Lanka will miss out on participation due to a FIFA ban on the country’s football.

SAFF U-17 WOMEN’S CHAMPIONSHIP

Russia’s presence adds intrigue

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When Nepal kick off their title defence of the SAFF U-17 Women’s Championship against India in Dhaka tomorrow, it will not probably be the defending champions neither the hosts that will grab the most attention. Instead, the majority of focus will likely be on an outsider – Russia – who have been invited to participate in the event in a first of its kind initiative in South Asian football.

That the invited team is Russia adds intrigue to the competition since Russia have been suspended from participating in any form of competitive football under the jurisdiction of its parent confederation, UEFA and world football’s governing body, FIFA. The irony is, the SAFF U-17 Women’s Championship is partially funded by UEFA Assist programme – a project undertaken in 2017 to develop football in the five other confederations.

What’s the catch then? It is believed that Russia’s participation in this event is part of the process of switching from the UEFA to Asia’s 47-nation confederation to allow the Russian teams and clubs continued

international competition.

For AFC, under which the SAFF operates, it is an opportunity to expedite the process of wooing a high-profile European member.

Although Russia has not yet said yes to the proposal of joining AFC, Russia men’s team have already played three friendlies last year, against Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. They are scheduled to



face Iran and Iraq this month and are also supposed to participate in a tournament hosted by the Central Asian Football Federation in June.

SAFF’s general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal, when asked about Russia’s participation, said UEFA Assist sent them Russia’s name as an entry and SAFF saw no issues in welcoming them. BFF’s women’s wing chairman and AFC executive member Mahfuza Akter Kiron also welcomed the move.

Meanwhile, the Russian under-17

team arrived in the capital yesterday morning and they will play their first match on Wednesday against hosts Bangladesh, who will, however, play their first match against Bhutan on the opening day tomorrow.

The Bangladesh team’s preparations and expectations regarding the five-team tournament were discussed yesterday at a press conference, the focus of which was Russia’s presence.

Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton welcomed SAFF’s decision to invite Russia and hoped that this trend will continue in future.

“We play most of our matches against South Asian opponents. So, this is a good move from SAFF that we will get to play against a team like Russia,” Choton said.

“Russia will definitely be favourites for the championship and it will be challenging for us but we will get to learn a lot from playing against them. We thank SAFF for this decision and hope that teams from outside the region will be invited in future too,” the coach added.

The five teams will play against one another once in round-robin format and the highest point-getters will emerge as champions. The championship will conclude on March 28.



Barcelona players were in a jovial mood while [Inset] Real Madrid players trained with some intensity yesterday ahead of Sunday’s ‘El Clasico’. La Liga leaders Barcelona, who have a nine-point lead over Real Madrid, can virtually clinch the title if they beat the defending champions tonight.

PHOTO: AFP

