

RECORDS KEEP TUMBLING

Liton Das played his career-best T20I innings, scoring 83 runs off 41 balls while bagging the record of the fastest fifty scored in this format for Bangladesh. He took only 18 balls to reach the personal milestone as he went past Mohammad Ashraful’s 20-ball fifty against West Indies in 2007.

Openers Liton and Rony Talukdar stitched the biggest opening stand for the country as they added 124 runs in just 9.2 overs, surpassing the 102 which Mohammad Naim Sheikh and Soumya Sarkar tallied against Zimbabwe in 2021. This was also the Tigers’ second-highest partnerships for any wicket in T20Is, eight behind Tamim Iqbal-Mahmudullah Riyad’s unbeaten 132 for the second wicket against West Indies in Mirpur in 2012, where Bangladesh lost by 18 runs.

Captain Shakib Al Hasan’s second T20I fifer took him past Tim Southee [134 wickets] to become the highest wicket-taker in the format. The left-arm spinner, who now has 136 wickets in 114 matches, also became the first Bangladeshi to pick two five-wicket hauls in T20Is.

Bangladesh achieved their record of scoring the fastest team fifty and fastest team hundred in T20Is, courtesy of Liton and Rony. The Tigers raced to their 50 in 3.3 overs and 100 in 7.1 overs.

The 77-run win was Bangladesh’s second-largest margin of victory in terms of runs, seven runs short of the one achieved against Papua New Guinea at the 2021 World Cup in Oman.

‘Playing on sporting pitches will definitely help us’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh continued to showcase an aggressive brand of cricket in the shortest format of the game courtesy of a record opening partnership between Liton Das and Rony Talukdar, clinching the three-match T20I series against Ireland after a comprehensive 77-run win in the second T20I in Chattogram yesterday.

Liton and Rony paired up to register the highest opening partnership for the Tigers, stitching together 124 runs. It was also the fastest that Bangladesh as a team had reached the 50 and 100-run mark. In a rain-curtailed 17-over-a-side game, the Tigers also posted their highest Powerplay score, reaching 73 runs in the first five overs after some blistering hits.

Although Rony was dismissed after scoring 44 off 23 balls, Liton, who had missed out on a half-century in the first game, went on to smash the fastest fifty by a Bangladeshi in T20Is.

After a cautious start, the elegant right-hander added a touch of flourish with some delightful stroke-making and reached his tenth T20I fifty off just 18 deliveries, surpassing Mohammad Ashraful’s record for the fastest fifty by a Bangladeshi, which took him 20 deliveries.

Liton termed the flying start exceptional, but the 28-year-old reminded that it would not be the same when asked whether the sporting track had helped batters express themselves freely.

“First of all, a good wicket doesn’t you will score fifty every game. It’s not like that. You have to score runs consistently on tough wickets and you may even have to work hard on good pitches. Obviously, it will be good for both the batters and bowlers if we play on good pitches. We have seen that the bowlers are also getting help while batters are getting opportunities to play big knocks. Playing on sporting pitches will definitely help us,” Liton told the media yesterday.

The dashing right-hander was nearing a maiden T20I hundred at one point before being dismissed on 83 off just 41 deliveries with the help of three sixes and 10 fours.

“I think I was hurrying a lot and the spinners also bowled well in the middle and the pitch favoured them. If had taken some time, I think I could have converted the 83 into a hundred,” he said.



Argentina talisman Lionel Messi skips past two opposition players during a 7-0 thrashing of Curacao in Santiago del Estero on Tuesday. The seven-time Ballon d’Or winner, who reached 102 international goals in this match, opened the scoring on 20 minutes, the goal coming 17 years after he opened his Argentina account. The 35-year-old soon added another just after the half-hour mark to make it 3-0, and then completed his hat-trick on 37 minutes with the fifth as Argentina toyed with their overmatched opponents.

PHOTO: AFP



Rony Talukdar (L) and Liton Das laid the foundation for another 200-plus score for Bangladesh in the second T20I against Ireland at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. Then skipper Shakib Al Hasan and Taskin Ahmed took care of the Ireland batters as the hosts cruised to a 77-run win and 2-0 series victory over the visitors.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

The signs of growing T20I mentality

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Is this really a new Bangladesh?

The ongoing T20I series against Ireland has seen Bangladesh turn their dismal T20I record on its head and the disparity in the team’s approach compared to past matches has not only been a thing of beauty but also amazement.

Inevitably, that begs the question of what desirable changes have occurred to facilitate this change.

One key aspect and perhaps most crucial is how the players have been enamoured to be playing alongside star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, the captain fantastic who seems to be turning over a new leaf. His devotion to the cause and hands on approach -- in building the side from the England T20Is -- has seen the rest show a keenness to shoulder responsibility.

The approach itself had come from Shakib, who would go about his power-hitting drills at the centre pitches during whatever practice session he found himself in. It started from the BPL two years ago, continued in the last BPL and by the time the team went to Chattogram, the likes of Najmul Hossain, Towhid Hridoy, Liton Das, Rony Talukdar and Shamim Patwary were lining up alongside Shakib at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium to see who was getting the most effective connection to clear the ropes.

It may have seemed like a fun practice drill, but those sessions had an impact. And when the captain, along with an experienced coach such as Chandika Hathurusingha, emphasises the need for aggression inside the dressing room, that approach becomes clearer in the players’ minds. The belief that they can do more has been gaining ground since a historic T20I clean

SCORES IN BRIEF
BANGLADESH VS IRELAND
Bangladesh: 202 for three in 17 overs (Liton 83, Rony 44; White 2-28, Adair 1-52)
Ireland: 125 for nine in 17 overs (Campher 50, Tector 22; Shakib 5-22, Taskin 3-27)
Result: Bangladesh won by 77 runs
Player-of-the-match: Shakib Al Hasan

sweep against England.

After a convincing 77-run win yesterday, where individual records and team records tumbled again, the aggression factor and the need of the hour was expressed by the captain again.

“We’ve discussed our aggressive approach and need to do it to be an aggressive, competitive side. Luckily it’s coming off,” he said at the post-match presentation yesterday.

He sent his squad the message that there would be no let-off in terms of approach in the last T20I. “We will not be complacent. Maybe try new guys,” he said about the team selection for the third T20I, expecting similar intensity.

While players are being given confidence, the selection has been done with intent. Hridoy and Rony got into the side because they carried their approach from the BPL to the England T20Is, even if they did not manage big scores. Afif Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad had to make way, with the message being to improve on certain aspects according to roles.

The third biggest factor has been a lack of power hitting. There was always a smart solution at play which the Tigers have often floundered at as they looked to make up for a lack of power.

The way Liton goes about things shows it can also be about technique. The way Liton and Rony began in both T20Is saw Bangladesh put up big Powerplay scores and yesterday toppled the record for Tigers’ fastest fifty.

The fact that timing and intent is just as crucial as power was showcased by the top order. There is a nuance there and although it may not always bear fruit, it is an approach which will also bring more success. But only time will tell if it can find consistency.

Renard leaves Saudi Arabia job

REUTERS

Herve Renard has resigned as Saudi Arabia coach, the Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF) said on Tuesday.

The federation agreed to terminate Renard’s contract at his request, it said in a statement on Twitter.

“A legal settlement has been reached to end the contract between the two parties. The President and Board of Directors of SAFF wish for Mr. Renard every success in his future career,” it added.

Renard took over Saudi Arabia in July 2019, and led the team to a famous 2-1 win over eventual winners Argentina at the World Cup in Qatar last year.

“I would like to thank everybody in Saudi for their support during almost four years,” Renard told reporters after a 2-1 defeat to Bolivia on Tuesday.

‘Belgium have new energy’

REUTERS, Cologne

Belgium captain Kevin De Bruyne says new players in the squad are injecting energy into the team after the failure of their “golden generation” to live up to their number one ranking over the last four years.

Belgium began a new era over the last week with two impressive wins – beginning their Euro 2024 qualifying campaign by beating Sweden 3-0 away and then triumphing 3-2 on Tuesday in a friendly against Germany in Cologne.

It was a positive start for new coach Domenico Tedesco, who replaced Roberto Martinez after Belgium’s surprise early elimination at the World Cup in Qatar last year.

Belgium had spent some three years top of the FIFA rankings in the period between the 2018 World Cup in Russia and the 2022 finals but never came close to a major title, being eliminated in Euro 2000 quarter-finals and then the first round in Qatar.

“You can see that the young players give us new energy,” said De Bruyne, who explained the difference with Tedesco’s predecessor was that Martinez mainly relied on the older guard.

“They come here now with the feeling that they will have opportunities and they fight for the national team. If all the players are in the right place, the quality comes through,” De Bruyne told reporters.



BFF pulls out of Women’s Olympic qualifiers

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) announced that it would pull out of the 2024 AFC Women’s Olympic Football Qualifying Tournament just six days before the start of the first round in Myanmar, citing financial constraints.

Bangladesh had been drawn in Group B alongside the hosts, Iran, and Maldives on January 12 and were preparing until the sudden reversal.

“As it is the Olympic Qualifiers, we have to bear expenses like airfare, accommodation and conveyance, which is not required for some other tournaments. How can I send the team to Myanmar? We did not get a positive response after seeking financial support from the Bangladesh Olympic Association and Youth and Sports Ministry,” BFF president Kazi Salahuddin told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked how the amount provided by Dhaka Bank as sponsorship for the women’s team was being spent, the BFF president replied: “Whatever Dhaka Bank pays for the women’s team is spent on players’ wages and nutrition. No money is left for other purposes.”

Interestingly, a couple of weeks ago the BFF sent the men’s national team to Saudi Arabia to prepare ahead of March’s FIFA-sanctioned friendlies, with Salahuddin informing that they had virtually no expenses in Saudi Arabia due to an agreement between the two federations.