

Joty masterminds Tigresses' first win on SL tour

SPORTS REPORTER

Captain Nigar Sultana Joty led from the front with a smashing 75 as Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka by six wickets in the first T20I at Colombo on Tuesday.

In chase of a competitive 145 for six posted by the Lankans, the Tigresses lost openers Shamim Sultana and Rubya Haidar early but Joty made her presence felt even in the limited Powerplay action when she came on, smashing three fours on the trot in the sixth over.

Sobhana Mostary departed after a 51-run stand with Joty and then the rest of innings saw Ritu Moni and Joty accomplish a brilliant chase.

Needing 25 off the last two overs, Joty finished things off with a flourish during a 51-ball 75 and took the Tigresses over the rope despite Ritu's run-out in the last over after a 23-ball 33.

The Tigresses had lost the ODI series 1-0 so Joty was happy to get back to winning ways on their tour of Sri Lanka in the first of three T20Is.

"It feels good to win the first game of the series and to be able to contribute. I am very hopeful about my side and we will try to play good cricket in the next game as well," she said.

She added that those few late boundaries in the Powerplay were cru-



Bangladesh batting mainstay Mushfiqur Rahim marked his 36th birthday with a team-high 61 that enabled the Tigers escape a precarious situation in the ODI series opener against Ireland in Chelmsford yesterday. Mushfiqur appears to be relishing his new role, at number six in the batting order, introduced in the preceding ODI series against the Irish at home. Thanks to his half-century, Bangladesh managed to post 246 for nine. Ireland, in reply, were 65 for three after 16.3 overs before rain ended the game abruptly. The ensuing no result meant that South Africa secured a direct qualifying spot in this year's ODI World Cup as Ireland needed to win all three matches of the series to overhaul the Proteas in eighth position. [Bottom] Following a zipping inswinger that must have pleased Bangladesh bowling coach Allan Donald, pacer Hasan Mahmud celebrates with teammates after leaving Irish skipper Andy Balbirnie clueless.

PHOTO: CRICKET IRELAND

Mushy staves off complete batting failure

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh rode on a gritty half-century from the experienced Mushfiqur Rahim as the visitors posted 246 for nine in 50 overs in what was a disappointing showing from the visiting batters in the first ODI against Ireland in Chelmsford yesterday.

It was a tricky task for Tamim Iqbal and Co. after they were asked to bat by Ireland skipper Andy Balbirnie in overcast conditions.

Mushfiqur, who turned 36 yesterday, was the only Bangladeshi to score 50 in the innings after an early batting failure saw the Tigers lose openers Tamim and Liton Das inside four overs.

Najmul Hossain Shanto showed a glimpse of his fine recent form but was dismissed after scoring 44 while Shakib Al Hasan paid the price for trying to play too aggressively and managed 21 runs.

The visitors were struggling after losing half their side for 122 in the 27th over, but managed to motor on to a competitive total on the back of Mushfiqur's 70-ball 61, which featured six fours.

Although Mushfiqur was also lucky to be dropped early in the innings when he was on 19, the right-hander batted till the 45th over and ensured the Tigers would post something competitive.

Mushfiqur added a valuable 65-run partnership with No.7 batter Mehedi Hasan Miraz to give Bangladesh momentum later in the innings. However, Miraz also missed out on a big score and was caught after



scoring 27 off 34 balls with four boundaries.

Ahead of the series, Tamim spoke about Mushfiqur's batting position and the fact that the veteran would have to take up the challenge of batting at No. 6 instead of regular spot at No. 4.

"He is batting at six but nothing is permanent. Whether he will bat at four or five will be determined by match situations. We will see as we have a few more series to go. But for now, his position is at number six," Tamim told the media on Sunday.

"Of course, he is a very experienced cricketer. Experience matters a lot, especially in 50-over cricket. He has played more than 250 matches. He is a very important part of the team. When we told

him about batting at number six, he said 'okay'. If someone does not want it from the inside, it's very difficult. We have seen how well he has played in the last series."

Mushfiqur's knock yesterday also reflected how the cricketer had to change his role from facing the new ball after early wickets compared to how he now has to play the role of a finisher and navigate the innings towards bigger totals.

Taijul Islam and Shoriful Islam's valuable contributions lower down the order eventually helped the visitors post something close to 250 mark.

The visitors also struggled to cope with the conditions after rain abandoned their only practice game ahead of the series.

MSC KO Kings to reach Fed Cup final

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan booked their first Federation Cup final in 14 years as the Black and Whites bested favourites Bashundhara Kings in a semifinal at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj yesterday.

Nigerian forward Emanuel Sunday gave Mohammedan a third-minute lead before Brazilian striker Dorielson Gomes equalised for Kings in the 43rd minute. However, Malian forward-cum-captain Souleymane Diabate restored Mohammedan's lead in the 55th minute to inflict Kings' first defeat of the season and end their 24-match unbeaten run in all competitions.

The defeat to Mohammedan also means that Kings failed to make it to the Federation Cup final for the first time since their top-flight debut in the 2018-19 season.

It also marked the first time in 10 years that Mohammedan had reached the final of any tournament since a Super Cup triumph in 2013. The Black and Whites last played in a Federation



Cup final in 2009, when they defeated archrivals Abahani on penalties to emerge as champions.

"Our strategy was to not concede in the first half and then play attacking football. But the early goal gave us an advantage," said Mohammedan coach Alfaz Ahmed.

"If you want to win, you need to hard work as well as a bit of luck. I believe both were part of today's success. The players toiled really hard in the month of Ramadan, some even trained while fasting. All credit goes to the players," added Alfaz, who was appointed the team's head coach following Shafiqul Islam Manik's departure after the mid-term transfer window.

The legendary striker was welcoming of either of the other two semifinalists, Sheikh Russel and Abahani, but conceded that he would prefer a final between country's two traditional foes.

There is absolutely nothing with any club for next year. The decision will never be made before Lionel finishes the league (season) with PSG. Once the season is over it will be time to analyse and see what is out there, and then make a decision ... We can assure you that there is nothing with anyone. Neither verbal, nor signed, nor agreed, and there will not be until the end of the season.



Messi's father **Jorge Messi** said in a statement on Instagram after reports on Tuesday linked the Paris St Germain forward with a move to the Middle East.

Milan reaching fever pitch

AFP, Milan

Milan is gearing up for its biggest local derby in a generation as two of Europe's grand old clubs face off on Wednesday in a blockbuster Champions League semifinal.

Two clashes full of colour, noise and drama await in one of the continent's football capitals, AC Milan and Inter Milan battling at the San Siro for the chance to take the Italian city's European trophy tally to 22.

Milan and Inter are no longer true giants like the other semifinal's contenders Real Madrid and Manchester City but Wednesday's match will be unbeatable for atmosphere and played in one of football's most evocative arenas.

"The atmosphere at the stadium is incredible... Everyone here is a fan, men and women alike. The pressure is there all the time," said AC Milan defender Pierre Kalulu in an interview with AFP.

"When you first arrive here you don't feel all that involved, but after a while you begin to feel that passion. You can feel that it's a match which can change your season.

"You kind of go back to being a kid scoring a goal in the playground. You put all that in the Champions League and I can't imagine what these matches will be like."

Both team's seasons hinge of the result of the all-Italian tie,

with qualification for next year's competition far from certain thanks to disappointing league campaigns which left last season's main Serie A title challengers miles behind newly-crowned champions Napoli.

Inter, though, come into the match in blistering form and with a previously misfiring attack suddenly



banging in the goals left and right. Simone Inzaghi's side have won five on the bounce, scoring 14 times in that run.

Milan meanwhile are sweating on the fitness of Rafael Leao, who in recent weeks has shown just how important he is to Stefano Pioli's attack but picked up a thigh injury in the weekend's win over Lazio. Of the eight matches this season which Leao has either missed through injury or not started, Milan have won only one.

The Portugal winger has started

every single one of Milan's 10 continental matches and was crucial to their getting past newly-crowned Italian champions Napoli in the last eight. Leao played the crucial pass for both Milan's goals in the tie and his burst downfield for Olivier Giroud's decisive tap-in in Naples exemplified the difference he brings to the team



when he's in the mood.

"We need to enjoy everything that will surround us up until the minute before kick-off, then we need to unload everything we have," said Pioli at the weekend.

"Inter are in great form right now, and they're a great team. I don't think we're favourites but it doesn't matter, we're in good shape. "We're in a Champions League semifinal, for almost all of us it's the first time. We need to feel the electricity, the excitement of the occasion."



Lionel Messi signs on the Montblanc Signing Wall after winning the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year 2023 award at Cour Vendome in Paris on Monday.

PHOTO: TWITTER