

Fine-tuning a settled group the need of the hour

SPORTS REPORTER

The Ireland series provided big lessons in terms of the mentality required at the global stage regardless of Bangladesh's dominance in the ODI format and the Tigers ended things on a positive note in two tight contests. The series will serve as a boost to World Cup preparations with a few matters left to be resolved, most importantly the squad for the World Cup in India.

A return to runs for Tamim Iqbal was a positive despite the captain not finding his flow in that third ODI during a 69-run knock. Youngsters have come through in the shape of Najmul Hossain Shanto, Towhid Hridoy and Hasan Mahmud. Shanto especially has gone through every possible step that Bangladesh cricket had to offer to be where he is and it is a credit to the BCB and their show of faith despite criticism.

Belief in the process must be showcased throughout if the Tigers are to go into the World Cup with a settled group of players.

That is where the outside noise has been having an effect. Talks of Mahmudullah Riyad at the World Cup are growing, but if process is to be maintained, Riyad should



have been playing the recent series that he was 'rested' for.

If there was faith lacking in Mahmudullah before the last T20 World Cup, by what criteria can he make the side this time? His performances had seen him out of the side and the experience being talked about may not be the end all and be all.

After all, Bangladesh had suffered the bitter experience of experienced stars not leading through performances in the 2019

ODI World Cup. Experience not backed up by performances may be disastrous once again. More importantly, the noise from outside will not help the players who are looking to carve out a place through performances.

"I can't say this is the World Cup team. There will one or two spots where we are thinking who suits us best. Afif [Hossain] is there, Yasir [Ali] too, who was extremely unlucky not to get a game here and Riyad bhai is there too," skipper Tamim Iqbal

had said after the second ODI on Sunday.

Bangladesh will feature in a series against Afghanistan, the Asia Cup and a series against New Zealand before the World Cup to test bench strength. "I have an open mind and we will go for whoever suits our team best," Tamim added.

The team management can resolve such issues discretely without hampering the progress made by younger performers. The number seven spot is one key area where change can come.

Mehedi Hasan Miraz at seven is likely to be key if Tigers are to play at least three pacers. If aggression is the means for success, that aggression will have to shown through attacking team selection. Thus, being one batter short may not be a negative but a requirement.

The upcoming series will see the focus on that batting order and the responsibility of the top-order. Mushfiqur Rahim has already given Bangladesh more options by playing the number six position so well. The task now will be to settle issues in the available time. Will Riyad be playing in the next series? What will his inclusion signal to the youngsters? Only time will tell but it will be a big cue around the process of building the team.



A couple of Bangladesh players try to avert an Indian offensive during the last group match of the under-19 women's teams of the Bangabandhu IHF Challenge Women's Trophy at the Shaheed M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday. Bangladesh's under-19 and under-17 teams lost against their Indian counterparts in the dress rehearsals for the finals, which will be held tomorrow.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Very real possibility' of Pakistan boycotting WC

REUTERS

There is a "very real possibility" that Pakistan will boycott this year's World Cup in India if they lose hosting rights to the Asia Cup, the chairman of the country's cricket board Najam Sethi told Reuters.

India, citing safety concerns, have ruled out travelling to Pakistan for the Asia Cup in September and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has offered to let them play their matches in the UAE in what has been dubbed a "hybrid model".

While the BCCI has yet to deliver a formal response to the offer, Sethi said India wanted the entire tournament moved out of Pakistan. That could have serious ramifications for the 50-overs World Cup in India this year as well as the 2025 Champions Trophy in Pakistan, he added.

"India should not be looking at a situation where we end up boycotting the Asia Cup and also the World Cup, and then India ends up boycotting the Champions Trophy. That will be a huge mess," he said in a zoom interview.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have also come out against playing in the UAE, heightening speculation that the ACC may look to move the entire tournament out of Pakistan.

Sethi said that was "not acceptable" and reaffirmed that Pakistan may boycott the World Cup if that happened.

"That's a very real possibility, of course," he added.

No more soft signal

STAR SPORT DESK

The International Cricket Council has announced changes to its playing conditions after the Chief Executives' Committee ratified recommendations from the Men's Cricket Committee, with the changes slated to come into effect on 1 June 2023 with the Lord's Test between England and Ireland.

SOFT SIGNAL: Umpires will no longer be required to give a soft signal while referring decisions to the TV umpires.

HELMETS: Helmet protection will be mandatory in international cricket for the following high injury risk positions: (i) when batters are facing fast bowlers, (ii) when wicketkeepers are standing up to the stumps, and (iii) when fielders are close to the batter in front of the wicket.

RUNS OFF A FREE HIT: Any runs scored off a Free Hit when the ball hits the stumps will count as runs scored.

HC directs ACC to probe allegations against BFF officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to conduct an inquiry in to the corruption allegations raised against the officials concerned of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) and to submit the probe report in four months.

The court also issued a rule asking the respondents to explain why their inaction to conduct the inquiry into these allegations should not be declared illegal.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khizir Hayat Lizu issued the order and rule following a writ petition filed seeking its directive on the ACC.

Syed Sayedul Haque Suman, a Supreme Court lawyer, submitted the petition as public interest litigation to the HC on Sunday requesting it to order the ACC to probe the allegation against BFF officials including its president Kazi Salahuddin, senior vice-president and finance committee chairman Abdus Salam Murshedy and former general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag of committing "corruption", "money laundering", "forgery" and "embezzlement of money".

Secretary at the Ministry of Youth and Sports; Bangladesh Bank governor; ACC chairman; head of Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU); National Board of Revenue chairman; Salahuddin; Murshedy and Shohag have been made respondents to the required rule.

'Main target is to play the World Cup final'

Injury and Taskin Ahmed have been the close associates of each other ever since the pacer made his international debut.

Taskin who is recovering from a side strain injury is gearing up to return even stronger as the 28 year old who has been a revolution in the Tigers pace bowling unit spoke about his bowling, plans over the upcoming World Cup along with a few other topics during an exclusive interview with **Mazhar Uddin of The Daily Star**

The excerpts of the interview are given below:

The Daily Star (DS): What is the latest on your recovery process?

Taskin Ahmed (TA): Alhamdulillah the recovery process is going well. I have already started bowling from this week.

DS: Were you disappointed to miss yet another couple of series due to injury despite being I good rhythm?

TA: Definitely it feels bad if I miss any series and if it is for injury then as a player it obviously feels bad. But this is also part of a cricketer's career and I believe whatever happens its for good. I try not to keep that disappointment in my mind for long and stick to my process.

DS: You have successfully overcome injuries in the past. How difficult it is for a fast bowler to return with full rhythm after recovering from injury constantly?

TA: To be honest its not easy to back in full rhythm after any injury as it starts to improve once you get the match fitness. But obviously its challenging and wait patiently rather not become disappointed if things doesn't go well at the start and focus on the process. So patience is very important after recovering from the injury.

DS: What are the aspects you work with your personal mind trainer?

TA: Well we all have different mindset and emotions as a person and the topic of work is very confidential with the mind trainer. Basically it's a confidential thing but yes this is very helpful aspect of a sportsman and maybe it is not as regular



in Bangladesh than the other countries. It doesn't matter whether you are going through a bad or good time it's important to have a mind trainer in various phase of our life.

DS: How did you see the performance of our fast bowlers in the Ireland series?

TA: I think we did reasonably well overall in the Ireland series but I belief we are better than this. But its okay since there will be different experiences in different conditions and the more we play in such conditions we will learn more. I won't say we did too bad it was not very good too and it's a good learning experience for us.

DS: Apart from your bowling skills the young pacers in the team are also following your footsteps to improve their batting skills.

TA: Well the main skill of the bowlers is bowling but if we can improve our batting it will eventually help our team. In world cricket if you notice most the tail enders are now contributing and we have been

talking about this among the bowling group. There is no hard if we can work on our batting a little bit and we get the help from our batting coaches and players. So this is the main aim to contribute if there is any early collapse and support the set batsman at the crease. I am trying that and but still I have a lot to learn and I think keeping the modern day cricket in mind it is important for the bowling unit to also be able to bat.

DS: Since the ODI World Cup scheduled later this year do you have any personal target for the flagship event?

TA: I am not going to share about my world cup plan at the moment but I will tell once it's the right time. But the main target is to play the final of the World Cup if the almighty keeps us healthy.

DS: Since you are now one of the experienced bowler in the Tigers side what are your expectation from the pace bowling unit in India for the World Cup?

TA: I have played a T20 World Cup and a Test match in India. India has always got sporting wickets however there are few grounds which is batting friendly so its going to be challenging for the pacers. But at the same time the bowling unit we have if we can execute properly we will be able to give a tough fight against any team. We are improving and we still have four-five months before the world cup so we will try to take our skill levels one step further and I have big hopes to do something extraordinary in the World Cup.

Can Pioli conjure '11 lions'?

AGENCIES, MILAN

AC Milan will come into the second leg of their Champions League semifinal against Inter Milan tonight nursing the bruises from a 2-0 loss in the first leg, the woes of which were only worsened after an embarrassing defeat at lowly Spezia on Saturday which ended with team and coach Stefano Pioli gathering in front of the away crowd and having an animated discussion.

Pioli and his players had their heads bowed in remorse while Milan's hardcore ultras bellowed encouragement in the hope that their words might add something which was missing in the first leg. The Milan squad then headed to the dressing room as the Curva Sud chanted "we want 11 lions" in their native Italian.

While this season's progress in Europe has been better than their previous 15 campaigns, Milan's are at risk of missing out on Champions League football next season due to their slide in Serie A. There are real fears that there could be a repeat of the 3-0 Supercoppa final loss against Inter.

Pioli remained optimistic, especially after the news that Rafael Leao would be fit



to the return to the side. Leao assisted both of Milan's goals in the two ties against Napoli in the quarterfinal to secure a 2-1 win on aggregate and without him last week the seven-time European champions were painfully short of cutting edge.

"We're playing a match which could

make history for us, we need to believe that we can beat Inter," said Pioli on Saturday. "We haven't been good enough in our last two matches, but we can play much better."

However, Inter remain better-placed to become the first Italian finalist since Juventus faced Real Madrid six years ago, with the Nerazzuri having won seven in a row.

Simone Inzaghi would not allow room for complacency, underlining the significance of the second leg by saying it would be 'one of the most important matches' in the club's history.

"As a coach I treat every game in the same way. Tomorrow we know it's one of the most important matches in Inter's history. Tomorrow we know we have a well-deserved advantage, but we won't just have to manage it, we'll have to play the Inter way, knowing that we have a strong team up front."

"Tomorrow I have no doubts, the supporters have always been with us in the bad times and the good."

"We know who we're going to face, but we also know that we're in an excellent run of form. We're ready for a match of this magnitude."



FC Barcelona wrapped up this season's LaLiga title with four games to spare after two first-half goals from Pichichi frontrunner Robert Lewandowski spurred them to a 4-2 win against city rivals Espanyol on Sunday, taking an unassailable 14-point lead over second-placed Real Madrid. Barcelona's 27th league triumph, ending a four-year drought for the Catalan giants, was a fitting farewell to captain Sergio Busquets, who last week announced that he will be leaving Barca after 15 years at the end of the season. Meanwhile, head coach Xavi Hernandez became the 11th name in Spanish top-flight history to win the league as both player and manager.

PHOTO: TWITTER