

Tigers in need of ‘collective approach’

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a lot of drama both on and off the field since Tamim Iqbal's retirement saga, Bangladesh's seven wicket victory in the final ODI against Afghanistan came as a relief to the Tigers' camp, especially considering how the Tigers conceded the three-match series with successive losses in the first two matches in Chattogram.

However, the Tigers will now be hoping to move forward, with a change in mindset and in leadership – Shakib Al Hasan leading the T20I side – as the Bangladesh team reached Sylhet for the two-match T20I series against the Afghans yesterday.

The chemistry between Shakib and head coach Chandika Hathurusingha is now the highlighting factor, especially after the hosts managed to beat Afghanistan in the third ODI as the two were seen discussing their plans for the T20I series.

In fact, both Shakib and Hathurusingha went straight to the ground to inspect the pitch right after the team reached Sylhet on Wednesday ahead of the first T20I scheduled for tomorrow.

It is expected to be an even tougher challenge for Bangladesh when they take on Afghanistan in the T20I format given the Tigers managed to win just three games in their nine meetings with the Afghans so far.

For Bangladesh, the main test will be



In absence of a number of key players, Bangladesh will rely on the likes of Sanjida Akter and Krishna Rani Sarkar when they host Nepal in the first of two friendlies in Dhaka today. (Bottom) Nepal's prolific striker Sabitra Bhandari, meanwhile, will grab most of the attention for the visitors.

PHOTO: BFF



to take on the challenge of negotiating world-class T20 players Rashid Khan and Muejeb Ur Rahman, and also pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi. It will also be a huge challenge for Shakib to regroup the team after the sudden shock that they went through following Tamim's retirement incident.

The Tigers, however, can take heart from the last home series against England earlier this year in which the Tigers, despite losing the preceding three-match ODI series 2-1, the hosts went on to whitewash the world champions in the three-match T20I series.

According to prominent coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, it will be crucial for Bangladesh players to forget about the external pressure and bank on their strength to overcome the ODI series defeat and focus on the T20I series.

"Sometimes, we forget who we are as external pressure influences us, rendering us unable to express ourselves. Also, we tend to look at opposition's strength rather than focus on what we possess. If we doubt our strength and feel they are better, that is when problem arises," Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

Bangladesh have garnered a reputation of being a solid ODI unit over the years but the same can not be said of the Tigers' approach in the shortest format of the game. And according to the mentor of Shakib, the Tigers can play better if they come up with a collective approach.

"Look, we do have some suitable players in team who can pressurise opponents throughout 20 overs. We are a good fielding unit and I think our strength will be to play collective cricket as a unit."

SAFF title a distant reality as Bangladesh host Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

The mood that gripped the Bangladesh women's football team the last time they played an international football match is a far cry from the one that currently pervades in the team.

A confident Bangladesh team, having beaten South Asian powerhouse India in group stages, had taken on Nepal in the final of the SAFF Championship on September 19 in Kathmandu. The charges of Golam Rabbani Choton had then romped their way to the first title in the region with a comprehensive 3-1 win, setting off a nation-wide celebration.

Close to 10 months from that day, Bangladesh will meet Nepal again today – first of two matches of a FIFA friendly series in Dhaka, but there is hardly any excitement within the team, instead there is palpable sadness in the team as well as fear.

The team that led Bangladesh to their historic first SAFF title has been decimated by the departure of two key players – striker Sirat Jahan Swapna and centre-back Akhi Khatun as a consequence of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) failing to arrange a single international match for them and failing to meet their demands for a franchise league and salary raise.

Anuching Mogini, another defender, was also earlier dispelled from the camp over poor performance while Shamsunnahar Jr and Sajeda Akter – two other members of that squad – are out of reckoning due to sickness.

The biggest drawback for the team, though, is that they will be playing

without their long-time head coach Golam Rabbani Choton who recently resigned from the BFF job. In his absence and with technical director Paul Smalley not involving himself over 'negotiation of contract', the team is morally down and face a real challenge against the team from the Himalayas, whom they had beaten only that one time in nine



matches, six times and drawing on two other occasions.

Understandably, yesterday's pre-match press conference over the two FIFA friendly matches – the first off which will kick off at 5:30pm today at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur – concentrated more on the team environment and its weaknesses rather than its strengths.

Mahbubur Rahman Litu, a long-term understudy of Choton, has been handed the responsibility to guide the team as the BFF looks for a new foreign coach.

"Every family goes through troubled times. We have also gone through a crisis, but I wanted to stitch the whole team together. Myself and the players have all been hungry for this match," Litu said, trying to put a positive spin on things.

"The team at SAFF Championship was a complete one, but we will try to do our best despite the absentees," Litu added.

Captain Sabina Khatun said they will accept the reality that Choton, whom she said was like a family member, is no longer with them.

However, she felt the long gap in match practice might have an impact on performance.

"There is an obvious difference between being in training and playing matches. We would probably see some difference in performance after the first match," Sabina said.

While Bangladesh team lamenting over the absentees, the Nepal team, which played four competitive matches since the SAFF Championship, will have two of their best players – Sabitra Bhandari and Preeti Rai, both of whom missed the SAFF final through injury and sickness.

One positive for the home team is that they will be staying at a five-star hotel in Dhaka for the first time, in an attempt from the federation to cheer them up. The BFF has also made entry for spectators into the stadium free to make sure the home team receive maximum support.



Ons Jabeur is ecstatic as she ousted defending champions Elena Rybakina yesterday and exacted revenge for her defeat in last year's final. The Tunisian surged back from a set down to beat third-seeded Rybakina 6-7(5), 6-4, 6-1 to set a Wimbledon semi-finals clash with Aryna Sabalenka.

PHOTO: REUTERS

‘Can’t wait to play my second semifinal’

AGENCIES

World number two Aryna Sabalenka roared into the Wimbledon semi-finals with a 6-2, 6-4 win over American Madison Keys on Wednesday.

The Belarusian, who has a tiger tattoo on her left arm, powered to victory on Court One and will face Ons Jabeur in the last four.

"I can't wait to play my second semifinal at Wimbledon and hopefully I can do better than last time. It was a really tough match, really great player and super happy I was able to win the second set, (and the) game," Sabalenka said on court.

"Thank you so much for the atmosphere, even though you support her more!," she added with a smile, which drew applause from the crowd.

Along with all Russian and Belarusian players, Sabalenka was banned from the 2022 tournament following the invasion of Ukraine.

Belarus is a key ally of Moscow.

She was defeated in three sets by Karolina Pliskova in the last four in 2021. "When I was a little girl I dreamed of winning Wimbledon. It's something special here," she said.

MCC suggests limiting ODIs

REUTERS, London

The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) has recommended limiting the number of one-day internationals after the 2027 World Cup to improve quality and create space in the calendar, as well as establishing a fund to help smaller nations play Test cricket.

The custodian of the game's laws also called for more funds to be directed to women's cricket, saying "significant transformation" was needed to protect the sport overall.

"The suggestion is that a scarcity of ODI cricket would increase the quality, achieved by removing bilateral ODIs, other than in the one-year preceding each World Cup," the MCC said in a statement on Tuesday.

The suggestions would only be able to be accommodated after cricket's 2023-27 cycle.

While the MCC's World Cricket Committee (WCC) panel welcomed more money flowing into the game, it noted the financial disparity among members and voiced "particular concern" for the survival of Test cricket outside India, Australia and England.

Sprinters skip heat to aid Imranur's cause

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh sprinters skipped the heat of the 4x100m relay event at the 25th Asian Athletics Championships in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday to help Imranur Rahman's cause in today's 100m event.

"After reaching Bangkok, Imranur also suggested that participating in the relay, a day before his 100m sprint, would not be better for him," the Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) executive, Abu Talha, told The Daily Star.

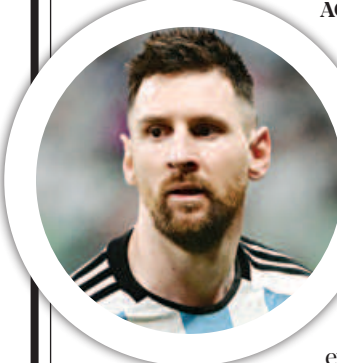
He further informed that the 100m was "our main focus" in the prestigious quadrennial event, hence the relay team – comprising Mohammad Ismail, Jahir Raihan, Rakibul Hasan, and Imranur – "decided to skip event" so that the latter gets to perform at his best.

Imranur, who won a 60-meter gold medal at the Asian Indoor Athletics Championship this year, will compete in Asian Championships for the first time since the London-based sprinter made international debut for Bangladesh in early 2021.

Apart from Imranur, Ismail will take part in long jump while Jahir and Rakibul will compete in 200m sprint today.

‘Ready and eager for new challenge’

AGENCIES



Lionel Messi has no regrets about his decision to join Inter Miami and said he is eager to face a new challenge.

The 36-year-old arrived in the United States on Tuesday ahead of his presentation as an Inter Miami player at a special event on Sunday.

"I'm happy with the decision we made. I'm ready and eager to face the new challenge," Messi said in an interview with Argentinian TV on Tuesday.

"My mentality and my head are not going to change and I will try, wherever I am, to give the maximum for myself and for the club, to continue to perform at the highest level."

The club is preparing a to hold a special event for the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner's presentation at the DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale.

"Fans will be able to enjoy an exciting night of entertainment, on-the-pitch speeches and more," the club said in a statement, adding tickets would be free of charge for season ticket holders.

The World Cup winner will be reunited with former Barcelona team mate Sergio Busquets at Inter Miami as well as former Argentina coach Gerardo Martino.

Messi is expected to make his debut for the club on July 21 in a Leagues Cup clash against Mexican side Cruz Azul.

Messi is the biggest name to ever move to MLS and the greatest player to head to the United States since Brazilian great Pele signed for the New York Cosmos in 1975.

MLS hope that Messi will massively increase the profile of the league and boost subscriptions to their streaming broadcast deal with Apple TV. Ticket prices for games likely to involve Messi have already sky rocketed. Messi's arrival will also add to the momentum around the sport ahead of the 2026 World Cup, which will be hosted by the United States along with Canada and Mexico.