

SPORT

Relieving to see plans pan out: Shakib

MAZHAR UDDIN FROM SYLHET

Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan was in a rush when he arrived at the post-match press conference after the hosts clinched their maiden bilateral T20I series against Afghanistan, beating the visitors by six wickets in the second T20I, as the champion cricketer had to catch a chartered flight to Dhaka from Sylhet later in the night along with Taskin Ahmed and Rashid Khan.

But despite the rush, Shakib did not forget to point out the fact that it was a relief for him to be able to stamp their authority over a strong Afghan side who were the clear favourites prior to the series.

"It's relieving to see things we have been trying to have worked. There is nothing better than seeing the plan reflected in the way the players executed things and for the result to go our way. It feels good as we did not have a good record against them in T20s till now. As we were able to win the series, especially in such conditions, it

SCORES IN BRIEF	Afghanistan: 116 for 7 in 17 overs (Omarzai 25, Zadran 22; Taskin 3-33, Shakib 2-15, Mustafizur 2-30)
	Bangladesh: 119 for 4 in 16.1 overs (Liton 35, Afif 24; Omarzai 2-17, Mujeeb 2-28)
	Result: Bangladesh won by 6 wickets and took the series 2-0
	Player-of-the-match: Shakib Al Hasan
	Player-of-the-series: Shakib Al Hasan

will give us confidence for the coming days," said Shakib, who was player of the series having led the team from the front.

Bangladesh looked a totally different unit in the shortest format as the Shakib-led Bangladesh ensured their third consecutive T20I series.

The likes of Towhid Hridoy and Shamim Hossain have provided the energy and variety in the T20 set up, and according to Shakib, they will have different challenges waiting in different conditions.

"Towhid Hridoy and the others have been with the team and players coming in and going is a continuous process. We still have a lot left to find the best combination but the way we are heading so far, I can say we are on the right path. But there will be new challenges in different conditions and we need to adjust accordingly," Shakib added.

Under Shakib's captaincy, Bangladesh have come up with the approach of providing different roles to the players which paid dividends in the last one year or so. Afif Hossain was seen opening the innings yesterday with Liton just as a part of that plan.

"It's good to have the flexibility in the team, especially in T20s where the number seven batter may have to do the same job as the opener. If an opener bats till the 15th over in one way then he would have to approach the final five overs in a different manner. So, if everyone is able to adjust to different situations then it will not be difficult for batters to cope when a different and more difficult situation arrives. Same goes for the bowlers as well," Shakib opined.

The Tigers might have lost the three-match ODI series 2-1 but with the upcoming Asia Cup and World Cup in mind, Shakib informed that the confidence of the T20I series win against Afghanistan will help.



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan hugs young Shamim Hossain after the two applied the finishing touches on a six-wicket win over Afghanistan in the second and final T20I at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. (Bottom) Earlier, pacer Taskin Ahmed's fiery first spell set the tone for the Tigers' first series victory over the Afghans in the shortest format.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Not another pyrrhic success spell

NABID YEASIN

When Shamim Hossain pulled debutant Waladar Momand of Afghanistan for a boundary through the midwicket region in Sylhet yesterday, it did more than just settle the nerves of Bangladesh contingent, who were jolted by a first-ever ODI series defeat against the visitors just five days ago in Chattogram.

That shot from Shamim seal the Shakib Al Hasan-led Bangladesh seal a six-wicket win, ensuring the Tigers' maiden bilateral T20I series triumph against Afghanistan.

Bangladesh swept the two-match series clean and, by doing so, had completed three T20I series wins on the trot for only the second time. Bangladesh whitewashed reigning world champions in the format, England, in a three-match series at home in March, followed it up with a 2-1 win at home against Ireland later the same month before seeing their hot streak continue till this series in Sylhet.

The only other time that the Tigers were on such a roll in the format – one that saw them never quite establish a stable footing – was back in 2021 when Bangladesh beat Zimbabwe 2-1 away from home before thrashing Australia 4-1 and New Zealand 3-2 at home to boost their confidence just ahead of

the T20 World Cup that year.

From a statistical vantage point, the winning streaks of then and now might seem similar – or some might keep the streak of 2021 ahead as it involved the Aussies and the Kiwis, two giants of the game – but in reality there lies a stark difference.

The T20I series triumphs over Australia, the eventual winners of



the 2021 T20 World Cup, and New Zealand on low and slow Mirpur surfaces were labelled as 'historic' achievements. However, that spell of success apparently gave a false sense of confidence to Bangladesh, later verified by their disastrous exit from the T20 World Cup in Oman and the UAE with five defeats and zero wins in the main phase of the marquee event.

However, things are different this time around as the T20 unit, under the guidance of coach Chandika Hathurusingha and skipper Shakib at

the helm, seems to be finally on the right track to change the country's abysmal T20 records. To sustain the upward trajectory, more of what they did against England, Ireland and Afghanistan in recent times must continue.

Rarely seen before in the shortest format from Bangladesh, the Tigers apparently had a specific plan and approach in their successful chases in both the games against a top T20 side like Afghanistan.

Not giving away wickets to star leggie Rashid Khan and mystery spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman bore fruits in the first T20I that was coasted home by the young guns – Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain and Shoriful Islam – while Liton Das taking on the bowlers in the Powerplay to give the Tigers a solid start and aid the run-rate in a rain-interrupted 17-over-a-side second T20I looked to be a part of a thought-out plan.

Bangladesh did have moments of shakiness in the series – the last over hattrick from Karim Janat in the series opener and the struggle to maintain the tempo set by the openers in the second game. And those jittery moments only indicate that there lies further room for improvement. If done correctly, however, Bangladesh might go on to finally stabilise themselves in the shortest format of the game.

What to WATCH

Sony Sports 2
Sri Lanka vs
Pakistan
1st Test, Day 2
Live from 10:30 am

Marufa stars in historic win

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Marufa Akter produced something special as Bangladesh women's side stunned visiting India with a 40-run (via DLS) victory in the first ODI at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Despite the historic feat – their very first win over India in ODI format – the Tigresses will be intent on tightening up loose ends in their batting following another subpar display.

Low-scoring matches in the T20Is continued into the ODI series in Mirpur. However, after Bangladesh posted just 152 in a rain-curtailed game reduced to 44 overs per side, Marufa got bounce and movement accounting for star batter Smriti Mandhana and other opener Priya Puniya.

Marufa would then come back in the middle overs to pick wickets in back-to-back deliveries to leave India reeling. Rabeya Khan also bagged three wickets.

The visitors were eventually bowled out for 113 in 35.5 overs as Tigresses continued on their winning ways following their victory in the final T20I on Friday.



"We used the momentum from the win in the T20I series but I feel the batting is still a concern. I don't think we lost our wickets in very good deliveries," skipper Nigar Sultana Joty said in the press conference after the game.

The Tigresses were off to a slow start before rain halted proceedings. After the rain break, Fargana Hoque (27) and Joty (39) strung together a 49-run stand. However, the latter said a bigger partnership was required.

"A bigger partnership could have allowed us to get to 200 since we had the opportunity, but the girls bowled excellently," Joty said.

"Whatever we do becomes part of history. A win against India took a long time to come. Of course, it's part of history but we will try to add more to that history," she added.

With Shorna Akter retired hurt following a pain, Sultana Khatun and Fahim Khatun eventually added a vital 26 runs in the eighth-wicket stand.

Marufa shook India after that. It was the head coach Hashan Tillakaratne's idea to bring on Marufa in the middle overs, resulting in the end of a crucial 30-run stand between Deepti Sharma and Amanjot Kaur.

"She's one of the top bowlers in the world right now. Also, the batters were handling the spinners very well. So, we wanted to dig the momentum. That's one of the reasons we wanted to bowl Marufa," Tillakaratne said.

Bangladesh lose to Nepal on penalties

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh lost their two-match FIFA friendly series against Nepal in tiebreaker after the second match ended in a goalless draw at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

The women in red and green, who were held to a 1-1 draw in their first match on Thursday, lost the decisive penalty shootout 4-2 as the visitors celebrated the bragging rights to the keenly



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

contested series.

Sheuli Azim and Maria Manda failed to convert their spot-kicks for the hosts while Shamsunnahar and Monika Chakma converted theirs. For Nepal, only goalkeeper Anjali Thmbapa Subba saw her spot-kick saved by Bangladesh goalie Rupna Chakma while Sabitra Bhandari, Hira Kumari, Deepa Shahi and Anita KC converted theirs.

The record books will say that this was a drawn match between the two sides, with Nepal leading head-to-head by 5-1 and five other matches ending in stalemate.

While the first match offered quite a few chances at both ends, with the hosts taking a 65th minute lead through skipper Sabina Khatun before Sabitra scored a stoppage-time equaliser, there were hardly any clear-cut chances throughout the second match.

Bangladesh will now look to turn their focus on training again for September's Asian Games.

It is amazing, says Alcaraz

AFP, LONDON

Carlos Alcaraz defeated seven-time champion Novak Djokovic to claim his first Wimbledon title on Sunday, shattering the Serb's dream of a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam crown.

World number one Alcaraz recovered from dropping the first set and saving a set point in the second to win 1-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 after four hours and 42 minutes on Centre Court.

It was a second major for the 20-year-old Spaniard following his US Open title last year as he became Wimbledon's third youngest men's champion.

The result will also spark feverish speculation over the start of a generational shift, with 36-year-old Djokovic carrying the torch of the 'Big Three' now that Roger Federer is retired and Rafael Nadal is sidelined, perhaps permanently.

Australian Open and French Open champion Djokovic had been bidding to equal Federer's record of eight Wimbledon titles, match Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Slams and become the All England Club's oldest men's champion.

When he won his first major at the Australian Open in 2008, Alcaraz was still three months shy of his fifth birthday.

"You inspire me a lot," Alcaraz told Djokovic after becoming the third Spanish winner of the title, following in the footsteps of Manuel Santana in

1966 and Nadal in 2008 and 2010.

"I started playing tennis watching you. Since I was born you were already winning tournaments. It is amazing," he added with a smile after firing 66 winners past the Serb, off-setting his 45 unforced errors.

Djokovic was playing in his ninth



final at Wimbledon and 35th at the majors, while for Alcaraz it was just a second in the Slams following his US Open triumph.

The Serb, who was on a 34-match winning streak at Wimbledon, went into the final not having lost on Centre Court since his 2013 defeat to Andy Murray in the title match.

Alcaraz, who had been crippled by

body cramping in his loss to Djokovic in the French Open semi-final in June, was unable to settle in the first set and let a break point slip away in the seven-minute opening game.

Djokovic took advantage and raced into a 5-0 lead on the back of a double break before the Spaniard got



on the board.

It was too little, too late as Djokovic claimed the opening set with a smash.

But Alcaraz finally freed himself of his shackles and broke for 2-1 in the second set.

Djokovic hit straight back in the third game before saving a break point in the fourth, coming out on top of a 29-shot rally.