

Brilliant Babar pumped up for ‘high intensity’ clash

AGENCIES

Brimming with confidence, Babar Azam and Co reached Sri Lanka yesterday for Saturday’s blockbuster showdown against arch-rivals India.

Babar led from the front to kick off their campaign with a comprehensive victory against Nepal on Wednesday and Pakistan skipper said the victory gave them confidence ahead of the vital clash.

“India-Pakistan will always bring high intensity. We want to give 100 percent in every match, hope to do that there as well,” said the prolific right-hander, who made a masterly 151 off 131 deliveries during their 238-run victory against Nepal, their third-highest in ODI.

After his 19th ODI hundred against Nepal, Babar is now just one century away from equalling Saeed Anwar’s record of 20 ODI centuries – the most by any player from Pakistan. Will the stylish batter be able to reach another milestone for his country when they meet India? Although Babar has mostly featured at the key number three position but, given his form which is in stark contrast to that of opener Fakhar Zaman’s – who averages below 20 in last seven ODI appearances – the Pakistan think-tank could ponder on enabling him to play maximum deliveries as an opener. Former cricketer-turned-commentator Ramiz Raja said that sidelining Fakhar for the India encounter could prove to be beneficial for the 2012 champions.

“His [Fakhar] body language is suffering, and Pakistan need an in-form opener. If Imam also gets dismissed cheaply, it creates pressure. Pakistan need to assess Fakhar,” said Raja on his YouTube channel.

I believe they should rest him, give him some time out. Sidelining him is better for him as well as the Pakistan side. He’s a good player, Pakistan has given him chances. But against India, with the form that he has, that chance is not worth being taken.”



LIST OF RECORDS BABAR ACHIEVED WITH CENTURY AGAINST NEPAL

- He became the quickest player in the history to score 19 ODI centuries (102 games), surpassing South Africa’s Hashim Amla who achieved the feat in 104 matches.
- The 151 was the second highest score achieved at the Asia Cup, only bettered by Virat Kohli’s 183 against Pakistan in 2012.
- It was the first time a captain has scored 150 or greater at an Asia Cup, beating the previous best from a skipper when Kohli compiled 136 against Bangladesh in 2014.
- The innings boosted Babar’s ODI average to an astonishing 59.47, which is the fourth highest of all time in men’s ODI cricket and the best of any player with a minimum of 2000 ODI runs
- It was Babar’s 31st international century, drawing him level with Pakistan legends Javed Miandad and Saeed Anwar with Younis Khan (41), Mohammad Yousuf (39) and Inzamam-ul-Haq (35) the only players from the country in front of him.



Having gloved back a Matheesha Pathirana delivery, Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan walks back to the pavilion after scoring just five in their opening Asia Cup game against co-hosts Sri Lanka in Kandy yesterday. Pathirana starred for Sri Lanka with four wickets but it was the Bangladesh batters who orchestrated their own downfall, failing to show any sort of resilience except for Najmul Hossain Shanto, who scored 89.

PHOTO: BCB/AFP

Shanto and middle-order can’t always be the answer

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh’s batting effort in their Asia Cup opener against Sri Lanka yesterday struck a familiar chord with the two side’s memorable outing in the tournament’s 2018 edition, the last time the Tigers beat the Islanders in an Asia Cup fixture.

In the game dating back to 2018, it was Mushfiqur Rahim who set up the victory with a massive 144 run-knock while the bowlers all contributed to restrict Sri Lanka to 124. Barring Mohammad Mithun, who struck 63, only three other batters reached double figures and all three came in at eight, nine and eleven respectively. Later, Tamim Iqbal came out with a broken hand to partner Mushfiqur during a 32-run stand.

Yesterday, however, only Najmul Hossain Shanto, who once again got amongst the runs, procured an important 89. Despite the gap in the scores from the two matches, what threaded the batting effort from both games together was that no other batter played around Shanto this time to make a more substantial total as Bangladesh fell away for just 164 with 7.2 overs to spare.

Bangladesh’s recent success in ODIs have mostly come

down to the bowling attacks potency, with the pacers often shining for the team. But the batters’ contribution has been a headache. The team often depends on one or two batters on form. Currently, it is either Shanto, Tawhid Hridoy or Mushfiqur while Shakib often turns up.

The opening pair has remained unstable this year with Tamim Iqbal falling prey to injuries, and coupled with the fever that eventually led to Liton Das being ruled out of the Asia Cup, meant that a very new opening pair started the Asia Cup. Of course, a new pair was going to face difficulty but what about the rest?

It may not have been a brilliant batting track but there was enough of a platform during the 59-run stand between Shanto and Hridoy to put up a suitable score.

First up the Powerplay battle. When Sri Lanka brought on mystery spinner Maheesh Theekshana in just the second over, it was to arrest any momentum the opening duo might have gathered seeing there was no sideways movement for the pacer Kasun Rajitha. Theekshana was also a matchup for the two left-handers as they kept guessing on whether the

ball was coming in or going away. When both openers departed and with Shanto at one end, Shakib kept up the chain of left-handers – a questionable decision in hindsight – by coming to bat at number four. The situation did not get better when Shakib departed.

Hridoy for his part, showed intent with singles but once he departed, followed by Mushfiqur a little later, Bangladesh appeared to have no answer.

In winning causes this year, Shanto, Shakib, Mushfiqur and Hridoy average at 48.20, 58.25, 65 and 65, respectively. In losing outcomes, on the other hand, the same players from number three to six average 17.75, 26.50, 22.50 and 33.50, respectively. The difference in average is pretty big and it means that when number three to six do not put in a commendable effort, Bangladesh often find themselves out in deep water and sink.

Key point is that consistent performances have not come from lower middle-order and opening slots recently. While opening problems may be solved when Tamim and Liton return, it is contributions from elsewhere, one that has to be guided by proper batting plan, that the Tigers too must procure.

‘Zhang can be a threat for years’

REUTERS

Last year’s U.S. Open runner-up Casper Ruud said China’s Zhang Zhizhen would be a threat for years to come after falling to the world number 67 at Flushing Meadows on Wednesday in a rematch of their French Open meeting.

World number five Ruud had rallied to beat Zhang in four sets on the red clay of Roland Garros in June but the Norwegian found the 26-year-old’s forehand too hot to handle in New York, suffering a 6-4 5-7 6-2 0-6 6-2 second-round loss.

“He plays really aggressive,” Ruud told reporters. “I think today he played better forehand than in Roland Garros, was more mistakes from the forehand last time. That was my gameplan, try to play heavy to his forehand and make him run on the forehand.

“He was just slapping winners crosscourt, down the line, coming to the net. Made it really uncomfortable for me, played fast. Credit to him. I think he played really good, honestly.”

Ruud said Zhang was the better player in the match’s key moments.

“That was different from Paris. In Paris I was the one who stepped up when I had to. It’s a different surface, of course,” he added.

“He has a great serve, beautiful backhand and forehand also. When it’s on, it’s on and really dangerous. I was impressed in a way how he played. He’s going to be a threat for many years.”



David in WC contention after maiden ODI call-up

ICC

Australia have made a late addition to their ODI squad for the upcoming series against South Africa, and added a dynamic middle-order option to their line-up. This puts the young batter in contention for the upcoming ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup 2023.

The Singapore-born Tim David provides an added option in Australia’s middle-order.

The 27-year-old is yet to make his debut in the ODI format, but has impressed in the shortest format of the game. He has scored 804 runs at an average of 38.28 and a strike-rate of 163.41.

His latest exploit in the opening T20I against South Africa, where he scored 64 off merely 28 balls, in a 111-run win for Australia had grabbed eyeballs. Arriving in at 77/4, David joined skipper Mitchell Marsh for a 97-run stand, which came off merely 50 balls.

David hit seven fours and four sixes during his scintillating knock.

Marsh spoke of David’s importance to the Australia team after the game. “The great thing about Tim is he’s very level-headed. He knows his role in T20 cricket can be inconsistent. But his ability to win us matches is why he’s in this team and we’ve got full faith in that.

His biggest selling point is the ability to conjure fireworks as a finisher.

‘We must keep the SAFF C’ship spirit’

SPORTS REPORTER

Having undergone a recovery session on Wednesday, Bangladesh national team returned to a full-fledged training session at the practice ground of the Bashundhara Sports Complex ahead of two FIFA friendlies against Afghanistan.

The men in red and green and Afghanistan face off on September 4 at the Bashundhara Kings arena before playing the second game three days later at the same venue.

Although head coach Javier Cabrera began preparations for two FIFA friendly matches against Afghanistan in the third week of last month, he did not get his full squad as the players of Bashundhara Kings and Abahani joined the camp on Sept 25 and 27, respectively.

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan was the last player to join the camp following his engagement with Sol de Mayo in Argentina’s third division football league.

“Afghanistan have been a strong team as most of their players play in Europe. They are 30 to 35 places ahead of Bangladesh [in FIFA ranking], so they are strong, I think,” Jamal told reporters following yesterday’s training.

“However, we have the home ground advantage. We have to keep the spirit we showed in the SAFF Championship. I think we can produce a good result,” said the 34-year-old midfielder, adding



that he was happy to join training after returning home from Argentina.

Jamal shared his experience of playing in Argentina as the captain of Sol de Mayo.

“I was surprised [to get the captaincy] there. The club president gave me the captain’s armband, so I was happy. First of all, they helped me a lot and I liked it. Playing style and people have been different there and it has overall been a good experience,” Jamal said.

“Everything like food, weather is different there. It is now a chilly winter in Argentina and I am now adapting to the conditions here.”

SPORTS REPORTER

European heavyweights will be on their toes to execute eleventh-hour acquisitions as the summer transfer window for Europe’s top five leagues is set to close tonight, from 10pm to 4am (Bangladesh Standard Time).

Manchester United appear as front-runners to stay the busiest on the deadline day, despite having made three big-money signings this window: Danish striker Rasmus Hojlund from Atalanta, English midfielder Mason Mount from Chelsea, and Cameroonian goalkeeper Andre Onana from Inter Milan.

With Erik ten Hag’s squad still seemingly lacking mettle to push for the title race based on three unconvincing displays in the new Premier League season, it is likely that the Red Devils will go all in to rope two players in key positions – Moroccan midfielder Sofyan Amrabat from Fiorentina on a loan deal and Spanish left-back Marc Cucurella from Chelsea.

Fiorentina reportedly have no qualms with the loan transfer, but the Italian side want Manchester United to end up



buying the player when his contract ends at season’s end.

The red half of Manchester are not unfamiliar to successful signing of big names, having acquired the services of

Wayne Rooney from Everton in 2004 and Dimitar Berbatov from Tottenham in 2008, among others.

Meanwhile in Spain, FC Barcelona reportedly seek to secure two Portuguese players with identical first names in their ranks: full-back Joao Cancelo from reigning European champions Manchester City and forward Joao Felix from Chelsea.

Elsewhere, Paris Saint Germain are set to splurge for French forward Randal Kolo Muani from Eintracht Frankfurt for a whopping 80 million euros.

The PSG superstar Kylian Mbappe to Real Madrid saga has appeared to have come to a halt, for now at least. As Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti mentioned, Los Blancos have already shut the doors despite multiple persisting injury concerns in the side.

However, grating the cheese of Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp, Saudi outfits Al Ittihad are reportedly interested in Egyptian star Mohamed Salah as the Saudi league continues to attract more talents out of Europe with their transfer window set to run till the 20th of this month.

Deadline day upon Europe’s big guns