

# Afghan challenge awaits Tigers in Lahore

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh team were on their way to Lahore yesterday, looking to shake off their defeat against Sri Lanka following a bad day with the bat at Kandy in their Asia Cup opener on Thursday.

The Tigers now face the prospect of a must-win match against Afghanistan on Sunday.

It turned out to be a good toss to lose for the Lankans as the Tigers struggled against the two-paced wicket in their first Asia Cup game at Pallekele.

“Actually, the wicket is always good here but today that was not the case. But these things are not in our hands and we have to play our game well. We expected sporting wicket in this kind of big tournament,” Nazmul Hossain Shanto, who scored the bulk of the team’s 164-run total, told reporters after the game.

The toss may not ultimately play a hand tomorrow at the Gaddafi Stadium, where the Tigers last played an ODI back in the 2008 Asia Cup. The Tigers’ last tour to Pakistan saw them lose the T20I series in Lahore and the lone Test in Rawalpindi in 2020.

The average score for the last three games played at the stadium in Lahore is over 300 with Pakistan successfully chasing down Australia’s 348 for eight with six wickets to spare in the second ODI in 2022.

Shanto felt that they “could have batted better” against Sri Lanka, given that Bangladesh bowlers made their presence felt, picking up five Lankan wickets in defense of a low total.



The onus will be on the batting unit against Afghanistan even though the toss is not a big indicator of having the upper hand in Lahore. Out of 64 ODIs, the split was pretty balanced with 32 games won by teams batting first while 30 were won by teams bowling first.

Despite the plan being to score 250-260 as Shanto had put it, the Tigers fell way short of that score at Kandy. Hence, it would be more important to bat smarter rather than to bat for just 300-plus scores.

Bangladesh will not only have to win but also hope that other results go their way from the group stage. Their opponents Afghanistan had been able to acclimatise more with the conditions, having done their preparation camp in Pakistan.

Given the way mystery spinner Maheesh Theekshana and pacer Matheesha Pathirana dictated terms against Bangladesh in the first game, facing the likes of Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman of Afghanistan would not be an easy prospect. Pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi bagged eight wickets in the last ODI series Bangladesh played at home while Mujeeb and Rashid bagged five and four wickets each in the 2-1 series win.

“Both of our games are going to be tough. But focusing on the Bangladesh game first, we know that they’re going to be desperate to win, obviously, and it’s our job to match their intensity and also the desire to win,” Afghanistan head coach Jonathan Trott said yesterday at the press conference. “So, we all know that if we don’t come with that mindset, matching them, or better mentality and better skills, we’re going to be under pressure.”

The pressure will be felt more by the Tigers as they need to win their last group game to stay in the tournament. The defeat may have set the cat amongst the pigeons with talks of Liton Das’ return being discussed if Bangladesh make it into the Super Four despite the batter already being ruled out.



Fans with their bodies painted as national flags of India and Pakistan hold a cut-out of the Asia cup trophy in Ahmedabad on Friday, ahead of today’s marquee clash of the Asia Cup between the neighbours at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy.

PHOTO: AFP

# India to use ‘experience’ to tackle Pak pace threat

AFP, Kandy

India skipper Rohit Sharma on Friday said his team’s experienced batters were unfazed by the threat of Pakistan’s fast bowlers, ahead of the arch-rivals’ blockbuster Asia Cup clash.

Pakistan boast of one of the world’s best pace attacks including Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah, and Haris Rauf.

All three made a good start in the opener of the 50-over tournament, a prelude to the upcoming ODI World Cup in India.

Rohit’s side will play their opening match of the tournament against Pakistan on Saturday in Pallekele, the first of three potential clashes between the bitter rivals in Sri Lanka.

The captain praised the Pakistan quicks but said his team was ready for the challenge.

“We don’t have Shaheen, Naseem, and Rauf in the nets,” Rohit joked.

“So we practise with the bowlers that we have. But these three are quality bowlers and have performed well in the last few years.”

“Pakistan have always had quality bowlers,” he added. “Their strength, where they bowl and not bowl, we have seen all that. We will use our years of experience to play against them, as simple as that.”

India have a strong batting unit that includes Rohit, Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer, and Hardik Pandya.

Pace ace Jasprit Bumrah has recently returned to the Indian attack after recovering from an injury and joins fellow quicks Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj.

Rohit played down the comparison between the quicks of the two teams.



will execute what we have worked on.”

The two nuclear-armed neighbours play cricket against each other only in international tournaments, due to long-standing political tensions.

India have dominated the limited-overs rivalry in the past



decade but Babar Azam’s Pakistan has got a few T20 victories in the last two years.

“We are not focussing on the past, but looking to do good in the upcoming matches,” said Azam, who remains fresh from his match-winning 151 against Nepal.

“We will try to give our best and carry forward the momentum (from the first win). You know India-Pakistan is always a game of intensity and fans wait for it, so we are also excited for it.”

Rain threat looms large over the hotly anticipated clash, with weather agencies predicting moderate-to-heavy showers in Kandy at the weekend.

# Jabeur battles through illness

REUTERS

Tunisia’s Ons Jabeur said she feels like a “zombie” due to an illness she has been dealing with but the fifth seed is determined to soldier on at the U.S. Open after battling past Czech teenager Linda Noskova 7-6(7) 4-6 6-3 on Thursday.

The 29-year-old suffered breathing difficulties during her gritty first-round win over Colombia’s Camila Osorio and was not at her best physically against Noskova, getting through a tough match in a little over two hours.

“I’m a zombie because I have a flu,” said Jabeur, adding that she had taken a break in July following her Wimbledon final defeat to stay fresh for the rest of the season.

Jabeur said she had been struggling for about a week with the illness and was “taking a lot of medicine.”

“I’m doing everything I can with my team trying to recover,” she added. “They have amazing doctors here, so they’ve been helping me. I basically took every medication they have.”

“I’m glad it was two matches, two tests. I was trying to push myself to see what I can do, getting out of the comfort zone. Hopefully I’ll continue in better shape and feel better for the next match.”

Jabeur meets Czech Marie Bouzkova in the next round and is determined to continue her run.



# U-23 booters dream big

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite facing a lot of odds including player shortage, Bangladesh under-23 football team have set their sights on the final round of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup.

The men in red and green have been pitted against Thailand, Malaysia and Philippines in Group H, with 11 group winners and four best runners-up teams slated to join hosts Qatar for the 16-team final round to be held in 2024.

Bangladesh will play against Malaysia on September 6 before facing Thailand and Philippines on September 9 and 12 respectively in Chonburi, Thailand.

Ahead of the competition, head coach Zulfiker Mahmud Mintu had only three weeks to prepare his squad, which is missing several key players including Rimon Hossain, Faisal Ahmed Fahim, Mohammad Ridoy, Sheikh Morsalin, Dipok Roy, Mitul Marma and Mojibur Rahman Jonny due to the national team’s matches against Afghanistan.

“We worked mostly those players whose fitness was not up to mark following the completion of the league. Our video analyst analysed videos of Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines who recently played in AFF U-23 Championship. We haven’t noticed any big difference with us except for the understanding level of their players,” Mintu said at an official press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

“It is important for the players to believe that they can compete against them because the game is also mental and psychological. I think if we can avoid silly mistakes, we can produce good results and advance to the next level. However, qualifying for the next stage depends on collection of points in the first match against Malaysia,” said Mintu, who is set to guide an age-group national team for the first time after having previously worked as an assistant coach in the senior national team.

Bangladesh have never qualified for the final round of this competition, having registered only one win in 15 matches so far.

# U-16s face India

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Bangladesh will begin their campaign to regain the title of the SAFF U-16 Championship when they take on the might of India in one of two matches of the opening day at Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu today.

The match will start at 3:00pm (BST) before hosts Bhutan take on Pakistan at the same venue.

The boys in red and green got one more day to acclimatise with the chilly weather in Bhutan after the tournament was pushed back by a day. The charges of Saifur Rahman Moni had their final preparation yesterday ahead of the match against India, who beat Bangladesh 2-1 in the semifinals of the last edition in 2022.

“The first match of the tournament is always an important game, not just because of India. So, there will be pressure on the players. I believe the boys will try to do their best tomorrow for a good start,” Moni said in a video message.

Prior to their departure for Bhutan, the coach had said that Bangladesh want to ensure the semifinals first.

Captain Nazmul Huda Faisal is happy to get one more day before the start.



Five sporting clubs of Dhaka, which were under lock and key since the clampdown on casinos on September 22, 2019, opened doors yesterday following long negotiations with law enforcement agencies. However, these clubs including Victoria Sporting and Arambagh MFS, two of the oldest and most storied in the country’s sporting history, are in a dilapidated condition with pools of garbage strewn around and in front of the entrances.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED