

## ‘Enjoyed Rohit’s wicket more’

SPORTS REPORTER

The way India’s Rohit Sharma took guard to face the first delivery of the game, bowled by Pakistan’s Shaheen Shah Afridi, during the two sides’ Asia Cup Group A game in Pallekele yesterday, it was clear what was going in the mind of the Indian skipper.

Standing with legs not covering the line of the three stumps, Rohit’s strategy must have been to avoid what had happened two years back in Dubai during the T20 World Cup in 2021 – an LBW.

Rohit seemed to have the upper hand for a while, flicking Afridi for two boundaries. But the Pakistan quick still had the last laugh when he got through the defenses of one of the best ODI batters after the first of many rain breaks throughout the game. A quick fuller delivery that nipped back ever so slightly beat the inside edge of Rohit and crashed onto his stumps.

Afridi quickly followed it up with yet another crucial wicket – that of Virat Kohli – in his very next over.

And it was not at all surprising to discover which of the two Afridi enjoyed the most. “I think both were crucial wickets, but I think I enjoyed Rohit’s more,” said Afridi, who returned figures of four for 35 in 10 overs that included two maidens.



Pakistan pacer Shaheen Afridi leaps into the air as he celebrates the dismissal of India stalwart Virat Kohli during the Asia Cup match at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Desperate Tigers ‘to bring A game’ against Farooqi and Co

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are expected to face a stiffer challenge in their do-or-die Asia Cup match against Afghanistan at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore today.

Batting remained the biggest area of concern – as evidenced by a lacklustre performance in the first game which saw the Tigers get bundled for a meek 164 against a relatively inexperienced Sri Lankan bowling attack. When it comes to Afghanistan, who possess two world-class spinners in Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman, they are always in contention to make even the in-form teams work for their runs.

However, it appears that Fazalhaq



“Both are good teams and we can’t say Bangladesh are not good. I think both Afghanistan and Bangladesh are the favourites but I think our team will do good. But whichever team plays good, positive cricket, the result will go in their favour.”

Hashmatullah Shahidi,  
Afghanistan captain

Farooqi could pose a greater threat for the Tigers’ vulnerable top-order. Farooqi, 22, has been lethal against Bangladesh in recent times, having contributed with eight scalps and two three-wicket hauls in their 2-1 away

series win against the Tigers in July this year.

Overall, Farooqi had 14 wickets in six games against Bangladesh, at an economy of 4.46. The left-arm seamer not only provided the early breakthrough but also left the Tigers batters perplexed with his lethal full-pitched deliveries swinging both ways.

Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha is well-aware of the Afghan bowling unit’s threat, but is optimistic that the Tigers batters will be able to emerge unscathed in the vital Asia Cup match.

“Afghanistan’s bowling attack is one the best in the world and definitely it’s a challenge. We have played against them recently and our players had some success. So, it all depends on the day

how you perform. We are very much aware of the challenge that we are going to face,” Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha told the media yesterday.

As the game will be played in Lahore’s Gaddafi stadium, where pacers have historically enjoyed a clear edge over spinners in 64 ODIs – having registered 519 scalps against 239 – it would be intriguing to see how the Bangladesh batters negotiate someone like Farooqi.

Given the conditions against Afghanistan in store, it will be fascinating to watch if the Bangladesh team management chooses a different team combination.

“We just arrived here and we haven’t seen the wicket yet. Definitely if the condition and pitch here is different, we will definitely think about a different combination,” Hathurusingha said.

Bangladesh will need to beat Afghanistan to keep their dreams of qualifying for the Super Four stage alive, but they will also need to rely on the net run-rate to progress.

“Before we think about the final, we need to get to the second round. So, this game is very important because of what happened in the last game against Sri Lanka.

“So, we know this is a must-win game for us and we certainly didn’t play to our potential in the last game and we didn’t represent ourselves well enough. But we are confident to bring our A game against Afghanistan tomorrow [today],” said the Bangladesh coach.

## Depleted NZ to visit a different Bangladesh?

SPORTS REPORTER

Following the Asia Cup, Bangladesh will host New Zealand for a three-match ODI series in Mirpur, for which the Kiwis announced a 15-member squad yesterday.

A lot of big names – Tom Latham, Devon Conway, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Mitchell Santner, and Tim Southee – were rested by New Zealand, who will be led by Lockie Ferguson as regular ODI skipper Kane Williamson is recovering from a knee injury. Their head coach Gary Stead will also miss the tour.

The series is set to work as a prelude to the ODI World Cup the following month.

For a Bangladesh fan, all the aforementioned things might seem familiar. Just two years ago, a second-string New Zealand visited Bangladesh ahead of the T20 World Cup only to lose to the Tigers for the first time in a bilateral T20 series.

At that time Bangladesh used low and slow Mirpur surfaces to their advantage and took a false sense of achievement to the T20I World Cup which eventually backfired on the Tigers horribly.

However, according to national selector Habibul Bashar, Bangladesh will not be employing a similar tactic this time around.

“We have a very good bowling attack now. I don’t think we will be going with that type of pitch anymore as we already have a good bowling unit – both spin and pace,” Bashar said of the type of surfaces that might be prepared for the New Zealand series.

Bashar also mentioned that the Tigers may even rest a few key players in the series to keep them fresh for the World Cup which will involve a hectic traveling schedule. However, that will depend on how far Bangladesh can go in this Asia Cup.

“Also, a lot will depend on how far we can make it into this Asia Cup. If we can qualify for the Super Four then we will have played a lot of games. In that case, we might even opt to rest a few of our key players against New Zealand,” Bashar added.



Novak Djokovic saw his US Open hopes nearly sunk by a fellow Serb but after dropping the opening two sets to compatriot Laslo Djere, he lifted himself up off the floor to claim a 4-6, 4-6, 6-1, 6-1, 6-3 win. It marked the 38th time Djokovic has won a five-setter and kept alive the 36-year-old’s quest for a fourth US Open crown that would pull him level with Margaret Court’s record haul of 24 Grand Slams. “It was one of the toughest matches I have played here in many years,” said Djokovic.

PHOTO: AFP

## Focus on qualifiers as Bangladesh face Afghanistan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will hope to beat Afghanistan for the first time as the two teams face off in the first of two FIFA friendly matches at the Bashundhara Kings Arena today.

The match, which will kick off at 5:00pm, will be the first international match to be hosted by a sporting private club, the first time in the history of Bangladesh football.

In the previous eight meetings, the central Asian nation have beaten Bangladesh twice while the six other encounters ended in draws. The last meeting of this two teams ended in a 1-1 draw during a FIFA World Cup Qualifier in Doha in 2011.

The hosts, who will play their first match since an impressive SAFF Championship campaign two months ago, are hoping to show the same spirit and performance in the two matches against the Afghans, with the ultimate aim being October’s World Cup Pre-qualifiers against Maldives.

Bangladesh have played eight times against the Lions of Khorasan, losing twice and drawing on six occasions. The last of those matches was during the Qatar World Cup



Qualifiers in 2021 in Doha, with the game ending in a 1-1 draw.

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera said they want to continue the good work from the SAFF Championship and show everyone that they are an improving side.

“The attitude from the players in training has been very high. I’m very positive with the level of training and the standard of the team. It’s a very exciting challenge ahead of us, and an opportunity for us to show

all of our fans that we can continue the performance we did in SAFF Championship,” the Spaniard said at the pre-match press conference at the Kings Arena yesterday.

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan, who only returned from his club duty in Argentina a couple of days earlier, echoed the coach’s sentiment while saying that a good outing against a strong Afghanistan side will prove that they are on the right track.

“Most Afghanistan players play in



Europe, some play in India, Malaysia and Indonesia. So they are a strong team, which is good for us because our main match is against the Maldives,” the midfielder said.

The Bangladesh skipper also said that playing at the Kings Arena instead of other venues in Bangladesh will give them an advantage in terms of crowd support.

“I can’t remember the last time we played in Dhaka. I’m looking forward to playing in Dhaka and for

the first international match at the Bashundhara Kings Arena, which is a big thing for everyone.

“What’s great about the Kings Arena is that fans are much nearer to the players. So we will feel the atmosphere which is a positive thing,” the Bangladesh captain opined.

Afghanistan coach Abdullah Al Mutairi, who was previously coach of Nepal when the Himalayan side drew 1-1 against Bangladesh during the 2021 SAFF Championship, brought his charges to Dhaka on August 26 to prepare for these two matches and one against Philippines next week. However, like his Bangladesh counterpart, Mutairi said his team’s target is next month’s World Cup Pre-qualifiers where they will face Mongolia.

“Don’t ask me who will win,” the Kuwaiti national said. “These are just friendly matches. We have come here to prepare for the World Cup Pre-qualifiers...I changed 80-85 percent players when I took charge. So we will take these two matches, especially the first one tomorrow, to judge where we stand as a team.”

SAFF U-16 CHAMPIONSHIP

## Bangladesh start with a defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh started their SAFF U-16 Championship campaign on a negative note, losing 1-0 against India at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu yesterday.

The boys in red and green, who won the event twice out of six times, conceded the only goal of the game in the 74th minute of the match.

The game was a fairly even affair but a dreadful error from defender Siam Omit led to the goal. Siam made heavy weather of a long-range ball from the Indian midfield, first misrouting his header under no pressure and the failing to clear the ball on second attempt. India forward Manbhakupar Malngiang got hold of the loose ball and attempted at goal. Bangladesh goalkeeper Nahidul Islam could only parry the effort in front of goal, with Usham Singh smashing home the rebound.

Coah Saifur Rahman Moni rued the mistake, but hoped his team would do better in their next match against Nepal. “I told my boys, if you make mistakes India can win. Unfortunately, we missed a lot of chances,” Moni said.

Bangladesh will take on Nepal in their second and final group game tomorrow. India and Nepal will play the last match of the group on September 6, with top two teams from each of the two groups slated to advance to the semifinals.