

Shakib lauds 'all-round' show from his troops



Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed celebrates with his teammates after removing Afghanistan's last batter Rashid Khan during their Asia Cup encounter at the Gaddafi Stadium on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS REPORTER

Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mehedi Hasan Miraz laid the platform for a huge score before the bowlers turned up with a spirited display to allow Bangladesh confirm their Asia Cup Super Four spot with an 89-run win over Afghanistan on a batting friendly wicket at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium yesterday.

The Tigers needed to tick a few boxes in their crucial last group game to overcome the five-wicket loss to Sri Lanka in their campaign opener. Their plans looked awkward in the first game but they passed the Afghan test with flying colours.

The Tigers' net-run rate has climbed to 0.373, meaning the outcome of the Sri Lanka-Afghanistan game on Tuesday will have no impact on their Super Four qualification.

Miraz, not a regular opener, was asked to do the job up top and he answered the team management's call. Skipper Shakib Al Hasan said they "played very well all-round".

"He [Miraz] got his chance up the order and proved himself, we always knew he had the ability. We executed our plans really well; the fast bowlers, especially, bowled their hearts out. This wasn't an easy wicket to bowl on," Shakib said at the post-

match ceremony following the win.

They needed to revamp their batting plan which crumbled so easily in the last game against Sri Lanka. Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman were a big threat in that regard but Miraz and Shanto notched 112 not out and 104, respectively, to ensure a score of 334 for five.

The Tigers also needed a big win and the bowlers carried out the plan. Taskin Ahmed and Shoriful Islam bowled with fire early with the latter getting one to tail in to catch Rahmanullah Gurbaz out leg before for one. Yet, three fifty partnerships had seen Afghanistan threaten to make a game out of it but Taskin and Shoriful snuffed out the chances, bagging four and three wickets each, to bowl Afghans out for 245 in 44.3 overs.

"Actually, the wicket was very good for batting and the margin [of error] was really small for the bowlers.

Always tried to mix up the length, slightly fuller or back of a length short ball. Good thing is that if I can bowl well on such a surface, it will boost my confidence," Taskin said.

"The length is the key in any surface. My strength is the length ball with some seam movement. Today the wicket was very flat and only the length ball may not work so I mixed it up. Overall, our team performance was very satisfying."



Miraz brings his versatility to opening slot

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Mehedi Hasan Miraz made it count in just his second appearance as an opener in one-day cricket with an authoritative century against Afghanistan in the Asia Cup in Lahore yesterday.

The Bangladesh team management were all at sea after a disastrous batting display in the first game against Sri Lanka, and as has often recently been the case, Miraz turned up during a crisis. The team management could not keep faith on Tanzid Hasan Tamim after just one game, giving away the frailty of their usual plans but in Miraz they found a



saviour. The determination was once again at display.

Earlier in the match, Miraz came away, retired hurt on 112 after a hand cramp. During that knock he showed the flexibility he can provide in his roles because his role has transitioned drastically.

Earlier he may have been asked to avert crisis scenarios down the order, as he did

against Afghanistan last year during the highest seventh-wicket partnership for Bangladesh with Afif Hossain. This time the crisis was at the top simply because of the lack of stability in the opening slot.

The last time a Bangladesh opener had struck a ton was 27 matches ago when Liton Das dictated proceedings in Chattogram with a 136-run knock. In the last series at home, when Liton's bat did not talk as much, the Tigers fell to a 2-1 loss against Afghanistan. It was apparent that he was the only option that worked recently in countering Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Rashid Khan's threat while Fazalhaq Farooqi terrorised the top order.

Without Liton, Bangladesh needed a right-hander to counter Mujeeb's early spells given that the Afghan spinner is a brilliant matchup against lefties. Instead of picking Anamul Haque -- a specialist opener -- the team management preferred Miraz's all-round capabilities.

The pitch was a flat one, but the Afghan bowlers recently have had an edge over the Bangladesh batters. Miraz played well within himself, which is one of his key abilities as a batter. He understood the role of being able to see off Mujeeb and stick it out till the 30th over. Miraz never overreached.

He played with the straight face of the bat when required, and as Farooqi sprayed it around during a wayward spell, Miraz punished. Soon the glorious cover drive against Mujeeb showed that he didn't need to force the issue. The glides, the cuts and drives soon came into view as Miraz got in with the acceleration from the Powerplay, already having a telling impact on the team. He came down the crease to hit Mohammad Nabi for a six, then waited for Rashid's delivery to glide one through backward point.

The inside-out drive for six off Mujeeb, having secured his second ODI ton, was probably the best of the lot. Miraz now has his second ODI ton along with as many fifties but most importantly, he gives Bangladesh an option at the top -- one they can rely on. Miraz's ability to be that versatile adds a different dimension to the team, and the launchpad he enacted with Najmul Hossain Shanto let Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim play freely. The move also opened up slots for Shamim Hossain and Afif Hossain's inclusion at seven and eight.

More importantly, as Shanto -- his partner during a massive unbroken 194-run stand -- put it, "Coming into the top of the order wasn't easy but he showed his character."

That character of taking on a challenge was once again on view.



Streak joins THE ANGELS

REUTERS

Former Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak has died of colon and liver cancer at the age of 49 on Sunday. Streak was the all-time leading Test wicket taker for his country, bagging 216 wickets and scoring 1,990 runs in 65 Tests between 1993-2005.

He had been undergoing treatment in Johannesburg.

"In the early hours of this morning, Sunday the 3rd of September 2023, the greatest love of my life and the father of my beautiful children, was carried to be with the Angels from his home where he wished to spend his last days surrounded by his family and closest loved ones," his wife, Nadine, wrote on social media.

Streak was appointed Zimbabwe's bowling coach after his retirement, followed by spells with Bangladesh and twice Indian Premier League champions Kolkata Knight Riders. He returned to coach Zimbabwe in 2016 but resigned after his team failed to qualify for the 2019 World Cup.

In 2021, Streak was given an eight-year ban from cricket after admitting breaches of the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption code. He took "full responsibility" for his actions but said he was never involved in any attempts to fix matches.

"This is a very sad day for Zimbabwe and a sad day for cricket," Zimbabwe Cricket chairman Tavengwa Mukuhlani said in a statement.

Must-win for India, Nepal as rain looms

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The Asia Cup Group A game between India and Nepal in Pallekele today is a do-or-die contest for both sides. A win for either of the teams today will see them join Pakistan in the Super Four stage of the six-nation tournament.

However, rain could once again play spoilsport in Kandy today, just like it did two days ago when the blockbuster India-Pakistan clash was washed out after just one innings of play.

With chances of precipitation of up to 80 percent, the India-Nepal game is also at risk of being washed out. If that happens, it will confirm a Super Four place for the Rohit Sharma-led India, who already shared points with Pakistan in their first game.

Meanwhile, Asia Cup debutants Nepal, who received a drubbing by Pakistan in their previous game, will definitely like to take their chances by playing it out on the field despite it being their first encounter against mighty India and only their fifth ODI against a full-member nation.

The Indian top order was rattled by Shaheen Shah Afridi and Co in the first game, and the record seven-time champions of Asia will look to get some runs and boost their confidence ahead of the business end of the tournament.

Goalless draw at festive Kings Arena

SPORTS REPORTER

An hour after the end of Bangladesh's FIFA Friendly against Afghanistan at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday, a group of supporters formed a large chain, with their hands on each other's shoulders, and continued to scream for Bangladesh even as the match ended in a goalless draw.

They kept the environment a vibrant one throughout the match and backed the men in red and green from the galleries by waving the national flag, beating drums and dancing in the stands. It was the first international match at the Kings Arena, country's first-ever private stadium, and the festive mood that the spectators created was reciprocated by the men in red and with smiles and wave of hands following the final whistle.

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera was elated to see the support for the home team.

"Especially in the second half under the lights, the support was very good and hopefully we can get this type of support every time we play at home," said the Spaniard, who saw the performance in a positive light.

In the residential area behind the eastern side of the stadium, there were a few national flags hoisted on the buildings and people



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

from those buildings watched the match from the rooftop as the occasion gripped the entire region.

With the spectators cheering on, the charges of Cabrera continued their momentum from the SAFF Championship even though they were unfortunate not to register a second ever victory over the central Asian nation since the 1980 Asian Cup Qualifiers.

"Definitely we kept the same spirit after two months following a few training sessions. We competed against a good opponent who have high quality players. They were physically stronger than us. I think this kind of scenario was quite difficult to achieve but today we were able to create chances and defend also," said Cabrera.

The Spaniard fielded the same playing eleven that played against Kuwait in the

semifinal of SAFF Championship in Bengaluru two months ago. The two forwards -- Rakib Hossain and Sheikh Morsalin -- played with much purpose but also wasted the two easiest chances of the match to deprive Bangladesh from a rare victory against the Afghans.

However, Cabrera felt it was a good performance against Afghanistan, who are 32 places ahead of Bangladesh in FIFA ranking.

"It was a positive performance. We played a strong side today and dominated for almost half of the time as we were able to play in the opposite half," said Cabrera. "Afghanistan did well with defensive blocks but we were able to connect inside the box which we wanted, but they adjusted defending much better in latter parts."

Afghanistan coach Abdullah Al Mutairi, however, was upset with the outcome but was happy with the performance of his side, which saw a number of players making their international debuts.

"Today we did not just play against 11 players but also played against the fans because it is not our home ground," said Almutairi.

"The most important thing was that the two teams were very good, which I expected," added the Kuwaiti.