

Shakib emphasises on teamwork to end on a high

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's Asia Cup hopes have already been dashed but with a host of starters unavailable, the Tigers will be keen on trying some new combinations to finish their campaign on a high against India in Colombo today.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan, however, seemed quite uninterested in entertaining the eager questions from the media when he attended Thursday's pre-match presser. In fact, he did not seem very eager to answer anything in particular.

Usually, Shakib is someone who addresses issues in a rather diplomatic way, barring the times he feels the need to be direct. In a very nonchalant manner, Shakib said that it is not only up to him to shoulder all the responsibility when asked what his message to the side was ahead of today's contest as the most experienced campaigner.

"The thing is that not all the responsibility is mine alone. I am sure everyone will work from their position and if individually they do that then our chances of doing well as a team increase. If we can combine those individual performances, maybe we will be able to do well," Shakib said during the media interaction in Colombo yesterday.

As Shakib mentioned, his only motive



is now to win against India. He also brushed aside suggestions that he will not feature in the coming series against New Zealand.

Shakib was also in no mood to divulge what areas of the team he was satisfied with or not satisfied with.

"Actually, what areas I am satisfied with and what areas I am not satisfied with are not things to be discussed in the media. These are topics for the team management to discuss and find solutions to," he said.

Some of the batters have not been in form and for that, all that Shakib had to say was: "They haven't contributed that much and they know that. They are trying

to do that."

The skipper also mentioned that he was not quite sure whether Asia Cup performances would affect the side going forward.

However, it is not true that all the batters struggled in the continental championship. Najmul Hossain Shanto is still the third highest run-scorer in the tournament even after being ruled out of the Asia Cup just after two games due to injury. Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Tawhid Hridoy have found runs as well.

But not everyone has found their feet in important moments.

Shakib himself has struck just one fifty in the tournament. He got dismissed

playing similar shots against Sri Lanka in both matches. Against Afghanistan, his cameo was useful in putting up a big score -- the only instance when collective performance was seen from the Tigers in the Asia Cup.

Against Pakistan, he had looked good but perhaps picked the wrong moment to up the ante and lost his wicket. Had he made a bigger score, Bangladesh could have been in a better position in that game.

Without the in-form Shanto, the onus was very much on veterans Shakib and Mushfiqur Rahim but they failed to make the kind of contributions that would have given the team more vitality in crucial match scenarios.

Also, Shamim Hossain and Afif Hossain continuing to disappoint at the lower middle order did not help the Tigers during crunch moments.

Amid all his snarky replies yesterday, Shakib, however, did leave a message for the team.

"I think [Abdur Razzak] Raz bhai said one good thing that day which is that those who are playing in the national team are doing so because they are capable. Here experience or inexperience or new and old doesn't come into the equation. If we can play well as a team it would be good for us," Shakib said.

U-17s 'will not disappoint us'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are all set to begin a new era under coach Mahbubur Rahman Litu in the second round of AFC U-17 Women's Championships, scheduled for September 20 to 24 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The team will fly out on Monday afternoon for Vietnam.

The national age group women's teams have not competed in a tournament since the departures of long-serving head coach Golam Rabbani Choton and technical director Paul Smalley's three months ago.

"I feel no pressure [with the absence of Choton and Smalley] because it has been my profession which is always challenging, and I have been enjoying my roles," said Litu at a press conference at BFF House yesterday.

Bangladesh, who came to the second round after getting past Singapore and Turkmenistan, have been placed along with strong Australia, Vietnam and Philippines. Two teams will advance to the eight-team final round where Japan, North Korea, China and hosts Indonesia play directly.

Bangladesh had twice qualified for the finals of AFC U-16 Women's Championships, which has now been changed to a U-17 event.

Captain Ruma Akter exuded supreme confidence. "We have been working hard since the completion of the first round and trying to play the way we want to play against Australia and Vietnam because our target is to qualify for the third round by winning all matches," she said.

Head coach Litu, on the other hand, kept his optimism in check.

"You know Australia, Vietnam and Philippines are ranked 2nd, 5th and 7th, respectively, while Bangladesh are ranked 29th. This group of girls do not possess the experience of players such as Maria [Manda], Monica [Chakma], Sanjida [Akhter] and others who had played the finals of the championships twice."

"However, this team have not been bad. I think they will not disappoint us."

Bangladesh had previously beaten Vietnam and Philippines in AFC U-16 Qualifiers. Against Australia, they held vastly superior opponents to a 2-2 draw in the final round in 2019 after having lost 2-1 in the final round in 2017.

FIXTURES

September 20 :
Bangladesh vs Vietnam
September 22 :
Philippines vs Bangladesh
September 24 :
Australia vs Bangladesh

India's sweet dilemma with bowling depth

AFP, Colombo

India face a "problem of plenty" in their bowling stocks ahead of Sunday's Asia Cup final and the ODI World Cup starting next month, coach Paras Mhambre said.

India booked their place in the final after wins over Pakistan and Sri Lanka, with their bowlers excelling in both matches. Rohit Sharma's side bowled out Pakistan for 128.

"A problem of plenty is always good, we have four quality bowlers out there, we have great options," bowling coach Mhambre said Thursday of a pace attack led by Jasprit Bumrah and also boasting Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj and Shardul Thakur. There is also all-rounder Hardik Pandya.

Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav hold the spin force.

"The option of choosing the right combination will depend on what surface we are playing and what opponents we are playing," he added.

Indian players including up-and-coming batsman Tilak Varma and T20 star Suryakumar Yadav trained in the nets on the eve of the team's last Super Four match, against Bangladesh in Colombo on Friday.

Mhambre gave little away about the line-up.

"We haven't decided on what we will do, but obviously there is an opportunity to give a game to other players since we have qualified for the final," said the former medium-pace bowler.

Bangladesh have won just one match at the Asia Cup, but Mhambre said: "They have



played very competitive cricket in the last few years. They have got some quality fast bowlers coming through."

"From our perspective everyone that we play is important, every team is going to challenge us. Bangladesh is a good team and we will have to play our best cricket."

'Clarity of role' in batting does the trick for Stokes

AGENCIES

England batter Ben Stokes revealed that the fact he was in the team as a specialist batter provided him with more clarity in regards to his role and allowed him to bat with more freedom while at the crease.

Stokes hit 15 fours and nine sixes while playing as a specialist batter as his 182 helped England thump New Zealand by 181 runs at The Oval on Wednesday. He eclipsed Jason Roy's 180 against Australia in 2018 to claim the record for the highest individual score by a men's player for England in ODI cricket.

Consistent No.3 Dawid Malan briefly attempted to steal the limelight with an excellent knock of 96 in a partnership of 199 with Stokes, but it was the record-breaking innings from the England Test captain -- in a rematch of the 2019 World Cup Final -- that stood out on a dominant day for the hosts.

"This is the first time that I've been clear in my mind that that's the one thing I can focus on," Stokes said.

"I think over the last 18 months, every day has been, 'will I bowl, will I not bowl?'



Now, I know that I can just focus on that... that's my thing for the team now. Having that clarity in my head contributes to that.

Stokes has not been bowling since July this year to manage his chronic left knee injury.

The left-hander said that his approach, irrespective of the position he bats, stays the same.

"I'd prefer not to go in that early because I want to see the other lads at the top do well. I don't think I've necessarily changed my approach in one-day cricket from all the years I spent at No. 5 or 6... I still think that batting at No. 4, I'll go out with the exact same approach I had at No. 5," Stokes said.

Stokes retired from ODI cricket last year and even told reporters at the conclusion of this year's Ashes series that he had no plans of performing a backflip on that decision and returning to action for the World Cup that commences in India next month.

However, he returned to the England set-up last month ahead of their World Cup title defence in India as he was named in England's preliminary squad.



Najmul Hossain Shanto returns to the nets yesterday for the first time since he was ruled out from the ongoing Asia Cup due to injury. Having gone through rehabilitation in the past few days for the hamstring injury, he worked with coach Sohel Islam, batting against throwdowns and spinners.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

CA makes neck guards mandatory against pacers

SYDNEY, Australia

Australian batters will have to wear neck protectors on their helmets when facing fast or medium-pace bowlers for the 2023/24 season, Cricket Australia announced Thursday.

The governing body has recommended neck guards be used since Australian batsman Phillip Hughes was killed after a bouncer hit him in the neck during a game in Sydney in 2014.

Stars such as Usman Khawaja, Steve Smith and David Warner had resisted wearing them but neck protectors will be mandatory in men's and women's matches when the new season starts in early October, Cricket Australia said.

"Protecting the head and neck is extremely important in our sport," Cricket Australia's head of operations Peter Roach said in a statement.

He said the decision was based on "a lot of advice and consultation with a wide range of experts and stakeholders".

The decision comes a week after Australian all-rounder Cameron Green had to leave the field with concussion after a bouncer hit the side of his helmet during his team's win over South Africa in a one-day international match.

Women referees to break another barrier

AFP, Kuala Lumpur



Women including Japanese trailblazer Yoshimi Yamashita will referee at the men's Asian Cup for the first time next year in Qatar, officials said Thursday. Yamashita, who was also selected for the 2022 men's World Cup in Qatar, has been chosen alongside four other women for the regional championship in January-February.

"For the first time ever, women match officials are poised to make their debut at Asia's most prestigious men's national team competition," the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said in a statement.

The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system will also make its "full debut" at the tournament, the AFC said.

The Asian Cup will have 24 teams for the first time and hosts Qatar are the reigning champions.

Pay deal ends Spanish players' strike

AFP, Barcelona

Footballers from Spain's women's top flight, Liga F, have called off a strike which postponed the first week of fixtures after an agreement over wages was reached, unions and the league said on Thursday.

"Liga F and the unions have reached an agreement regarding the minimum wage that allows the strike to be called off," said Liga F in a statement.

Five unions, including AFE and Futpro, called a strike covering the first two rounds of fixtures last week. "The deal is in regard to the minimum wage, the main cause of the strike -- accepted by the players as an act of responsibility to the fans of the sport," said the unions in a statement.