

Haris, Naseem expected to be fit for WC: Babar

AFP, Colombo

Pakistan captain Babar Azam said Friday that injured quicks Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah remained central to his team's World Cup plans, after their absence saw the team crash out of the Asia Cup.

Azam's men went down to fellow co-hosts Sri Lanka by two wickets Thursday in a last-ball thriller of a rain-shortened Super Four knockout game in Colombo.

Both Naseem and Rauf were injured in the Super Four loss to India in the 50-over tournament, a tune-up for the ODI World Cup in India starting next month.

"Haris Rauf is not bad, he has a little bit side strain but will recover before the World Cup," said Azam.

"Naseem Shah has missed a couple of matches but I don't know about his recovery. But in my opinion, he will be in the World Cup."

The pace duo's absence was felt when Pakistan failed to defend 252 in their 42-over-a-side match against Sri Lanka.

Charith Asalanka steered his side home in that game, hitting a four and a double off the last two balls, bowled by debutant Zaman Khan.

"Definitely when you lose your best bowlers, that costs you and your team," Azam said after the match.

"We were not short of effort but didn't finish well."

Azam said the team would learn from their mistakes to put on a better show in India next month, where they will meet the hosts in a hotly anticipated October 14 clash in Ahmedabad.

"In fielding, we lacked the kind of response that we should have got. In the bowling, there is an issue in the middle overs," said Azam.

"We will try to learn from them and will clear them before going into the World Cup."

Sciver-Brunt scripts 'a masterclass'

AGENCIES

England captain Nat Sciver-Brunt made her landmark 100th ODI appearance memorable in a remarkable way, smashing a record-breaking century to see her side thrash Sri Lanka by 161 runs on Thursday.



Deputising for ill captain Heather Knight, Sciver-Brunt hit England's fastest women's ODI century in just 66 balls.

"It was a masterclass, outstanding," is how England quick Lauren Filer, who made her ODI debut in the series and was also adjudged the player of the three-match series that England won 2-0, described the innings that she witnessed firsthand at Grace Road.

After eclipsing the previous best by Charlotte Edwards off 70 balls against New Zealand in 2012, Sciver-Brunt went on to reach 120 from 74 deliveries.

Her record would only have stood for a couple of minutes if Maia Bouchier had hit her 65th ball for six but she was lbw for 95, ending a boundary-laden 193-run stand in 121 deliveries with Sciver-Brunt.

Sciver-Brunt also mentioned that she was happy to have carried on with her form from the Ashes series against Australia last month.

"[100th ODI] Usually the commemorative cap games weren't so good for the player so very happy to bat how I did and carry it on from [the last Ashes series against] Australia," Sciver-Brunt said.

The efforts from Sciver-Brunt and Bouchier underpinned England's score of 273-8 in a contest reduced to 31 overs each because of a rain-delayed start.

Charlie Dean took five wickets as Sri Lanka were dismissed for 112.



Bangladesh pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib made a promising ODI debut, providing the Tigers two early breakthroughs in their final Asia Cup Super Four game against India in Colombo yesterday. With India already through to the final and Bangladesh out of the competition, the game was a dead rubber but Sakib's exuberant bowling display gave fans something to cheer for. [Bottom] Earlier, skipper Shakib Al Hasan scored an 85-ball 80 as Bangladesh posted a competitive total of 265 for eight. PHOTO: AFP

Shakib shows avenue for better batting plan

SPORTS REPORTER

When Shakib Al Hasan came to the crease yesterday in the fourth over, the top-order was once again struggling; this time at 15 for two. Shakib may not have found the hundred he would have been desperate to get, but during a crucial 101-run stand with Tawhid Hridoy, he batted to a plan to bring much-needed respite for Bangladesh in their Asia Cup Super Four fixture against India in Colombo.

After missing out on a single, the stump mic caught him telling Hridoy, "You know how much further we have to go?" It was a reminder of the task ahead. And as the only veteran in the playing eleven, it was much needed.

Judging from his remarks before the game, he was acutely asking his players to take up their end of the bargain. He demonstrated how he does his bit. "Here experience or inexperience or new and old doesn't come into the equation," he had said. It was the scenario the Tigers' veterans and youngsters have to play if the team are to find rhythm at the upcoming World Cup.

With Anamul Haque Bijoy once again failing to impress and Mehedi Miraz departing soon after, the Tigers' batting recovery hinged on Shakib and Hridoy's partnership.

Shakib, was comfortable in shot-making from the onset but impatience was showing as well. He had to gradually settle down with wickets falling around him. It had been 36 innings since his last ODI ton; in fact, he has not reached three figures in any format since his blistering 124 not out against the Windies at the 2019 World Cup.

But as he has shown many times, he often does not worry about the numbers as long as he is contributing. He has scored fifty 11 times, crossing 90 twice since that ton against Windies. The unbeaten 96 against Zimbabwe was the closest he got to a hundred since then.

When he came on, it felt like he needed some luck



on his side to play a bigger innings. He had got going against Pakistan in this Asia Cup too, but did not make enough to really make an impact. This time against India, despite it being a dead rubber, Shakib needed some confidence to carry to the World Cup. It is after all, his individual responsibility to shine with the bat at the World Cup.

That rub of the green came in the 19th over, when off-spinner Tilak Varma troubled him and got the outside edge but only for KL Rahul to drop a difficult chance behind the stumps.

Shakib would then get the wake-up call. With the spinners introduced, he found negotiating Varma difficult. But when India wanted to squeeze the run-rate, Shakib had finally found his preferred matchups in Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja.

While risks could not assure favourable results with a lot of rebuilding to do, Shakib and Hridoy were calculative. Thus, Hridoy went after Varma, the right-arm off-spinner, hitting two sixes in the 23rd over. Shakib picked the cue for acceleration and hit Patel for two through mid-wicket.

As spinners were trying to go through their overs fast, Shakib faced 20 deliveries from Patel, hitting 27 runs and picking 22 from the 17 deliveries he faced against Jadeja. Hridoy had taken Varma for 15 off the nine he faced against his favourite matchup.

When it looked assured that Shakib would convert the 80 to a ton, he fell to a careless shot, at a time the team needed a bigger contribution from him. Hridoy's fifty would ensure at least 200 on the board before Nasum Ahmed and Mahedi Hasan finished well.

Despite the lacklustre state of the batting department, some nuance shown by the skipper and others after yet another top-order struggle should set the Tigers on a better plan for their batting department.

Djokovic looking forward to Paris Olympics

REUTERS, Valencia



Chasing an elusive Olympic gold medal will be one of Novak Djokovic's main goals for next season even though the 24-times Grand Slam champion knows he will have to be physically and mentally ready to cope with a crammed schedule.

Djokovic won bronze in Beijing 2008 and fell short in London 2012, Rio 2016 and Tokyo two years ago, but the Serbian who will turn 37 before the next Games begin is still fighting to be fit after claiming three Grand Slam titles in 2023. The world number one also made the Wimbledon final earlier this year, where he was beaten in five sets by Carlos Alcaraz, and he is in no mood to slow down.

"My plan for now is to play the Olympic Games, so I'm hoping that I will be able to play, that I will be ready physically and mentally," Djokovic told reporters in Valencia, where he turned up to play in the Davis Cup just days after his U.S. Open triumph.

"It's going to be a very congested and challenging schedule next year, with Roland Garros on clay, Wimbledon on grass, the Olympics on clay and then the U.S. Open and the tournaments before that on hardcourts.

"It's going to be challenging for players, but my plan is to play the Olympics, because it's one of the most important events in the history of the sport. That's where you also represent the country and the feeling of being part of it is a huge honour."

Djokovic missed Serbia's 3-0 victory over South Korea in the Finals group stage this week as he was travelling, but is likely to feature against a Spain side missing Alcaraz on Friday.



South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen leaps into the air after reaching 100 off just 57 deliveries during their fourth ODI against Australia in Centurion yesterday. The wicketkeeper-batter did not stop there as he went on to smash an 83-ball 174 during a whirlwind of an innings that saw 13 fours and as many maximums and helped South Africa post 416 for five -- their third highest in ODIs. His 94-ball 222-run fifth-wicket stand with David Miller, who remained unbeaten on 82 off just 45 deliveries, is now the fastest double-century stand in the format. PHOTO: AFP

Zampa's day to forget

STAR SPORTS DESK

Adam Zampa became part of an unwelcome record yesterday as the Australia leg-spinner equalled the most expensive figures bowled in ODI cricket history.

At the SuperSport Park in Centurion, after being pummeled by South Africa's middle-order batters Heinrich Klaasen and David Miller, Zampa conceded 113 runs from his 10 overs -- equalling the figures of compatriot Michael Llewellyn Lewis, who was taken apart by the same opponents in 2006 during that epic game in which South Africa chased down a 435-run target set by Australia.

Zampa, who was struck for eight fours and nine sixes on the day, became one of 16 bowlers to concede more than 100 runs in an ODI. The Proteas amassed a mammoth 416 for five as they attempt to stay alive in the five-match series, which Australia lead 2-1.

Verstappen hits back at Mercedes boss

REUTERS, Singapore

Max Verstappen hit back at Mercedes Formula One team boss Toto Wolff on Thursday after the Austrian said the Red Bull driver's record run of 10 wins in a row was irrelevant and just for Wikipedia.

Wolff made his comments after this month's Italian Grand Prix, where Mercedes were beaten by both Ferraris as well as the two Red Bulls.

Asked at the Singapore Grand Prix for his reaction, Verstappen said he was not disappointed.

"They had a pretty shit race, so probably he was still pissed off with their performance," the 25-year-old Dutch driver told a news conference ahead of a race that could bring his team a 16th successive victory.

"He almost sounds like he's an employee of our team sometimes, but luckily not."

Verstappen, who is 145 points clear of team mate Sergio Perez in the championship and set for a third title well before the end of the season, suggested Wolff should focus on his own team.

"That's what we did in the past as well, when we were behind them and when they were dominating," he said.

"I think you should be able to appreciate when a team is doing really well. Which I think we've done in the past, because it worked also as a kind of inspiration. To see someone that dominant, it was very impressive at the time."