



And then there were two...

SPORTS REPORTER

When Mushfiqur Rahim hit the winning boundary to upset India in the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean, people had already gotten a glimpse of the talents who would lead Bangladesh cricket in the coming years.

It was the maiden World Cup campaign for three future Bangladesh stalwarts -- Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur, and Tamim Iqbal. Chaos and off-the-field issues, as it so often happens in Bangladesh cricket prior to major events, have ended Tamim's World Cup before it even began. But the 2023 edition in India is set to be a major

THE TAMIM-SHAKIB FIASCO and Bangladesh's prospects at the World Cup

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ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

On Friday, after Mehedi Hasan Miraz came out for the toss for Bangladesh's warm-up match against Sri Lanka in Guwahati, naturally the viewers started to wonder where Shakib Al Hasan was.

The broadcasters said that Shakib had apparently hurt his ankle the previous day while training and wouldn't be taking part in the warm-up game.

The seriousness of his injury wasn't clarified initially, which allowed the rumour mill to start churning out speculations.

The news of Shakib being ruled out for Bangladesh's World Cup opener against Afghanistan on October 7 spread on social media like wildfire.

This news should have hit the Bangladesh fans like a thunderbolt. But the reaction to the news was mixed to say the least.

Many fans reacted to the news as if divine justice had struck to correct the wrong that had occurred a few days earlier.

A little while later, when it was revealed that Shakib had only suffered a minor niggle, it was now the turn of Shakib fanatics to rejoice and they did so by mocking the 'rival fans' for their premature celebration.

This divide among the fans has been the byproduct of the mudslinging between two of the country's biggest sporting icons - Shakib and Tamim Iqbal.

The seeds of the clash were sown long ago. Their frosty relationship was an open secret for many years and became public knowledge after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon declared it to the world in an interview.

The retirement-unretirement saga of Tamim, him stepping down as captain and Shakib returning as the ODI skipper - they were all small tremors leading up to the earthquake that shook Bangladesh cricket just days before the World Cup.

Tamim, the country's leading run-scorer in all formats, had been left out of the World Cup squad.

The opener, however, claimed that he wasn't snubbed but had actually told a highly influential member of the board to leave him out of the squad as he didn't want to be part of the 'nasty games' being played against him in a



heated conversation over the phone.

Whether Tamim was left out or he took himself out, the end result remains the same: Tamim is not going to play in the World Cup for Bangladesh.

With that in mind, the most important question going forward is where does it leave the Bangladesh team ahead of the World Cup?

Well, the brief answer is, not in a great spot.

A quick look at the 15-man squad shows that Bangladesh have gone in with a bowling-heavy squad.

For the first time ever, the Tigers have selected five specialist pacers in the World Cup - Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud and Tanzim Hasan Sakib.

There are also four spin bowling options, a couple of left-armers in Shakib and Nasum Ahmed and the duo of right-arm off-spinners in Mehedi and Mahedi Hasan.

Liton Das and the young Tanzid Hasan Tamim are the two frontline opening batters in the squad.

The selectors took the gutsy call of not

taking a back-up opener as they are depending on Mehedi to come good as the makeshift opener when called upon.

Najmul Hossain Shanto is Bangladesh's most in-form batter heading into the World Cup. The southpaw averages a shade below 50 in ODIs in 2023 at a strike rate of 86.92 and his performances at No.3 will be pivotal for Bangladesh.

The middle-order of Shakib, Towhid Hridoy and Mushfiqur Rahim is Bangladesh's strongest point in the batting order.

When these three are not busy repairing the innings after an all too familiar top order collapse, they have the ability to make up for Bangladesh's glaring lack of firepower at No.7.

The veteran Mahmudullah has also made his comeback months after many had written the epitaph of his ODI career and could occupy the vacant No.7 spot.

But from what Shakib and coach Chandika Hathurusingha have said in the build-up to the tournament, it can be assumed that Bangladesh are likely to adopt the horses for courses approach, making changes in personnel and batting positions based on opposition and condition.

An honest comparison between Bangladesh and the other competing teams in the tournament also doesn't present a rosy picture for the Tigers.

The fact that the tournament is being played in a round robin format is also not helpful for a team like Bangladesh as it means that one or two big wins won't be enough to progress to the next stage. At the very least, they need more victories than defeats.

There is no reason to think that Bangladesh's fortunes would have looked radically better had Tamim been picked. But the drama leading up to his exclusion and the ugly spat that followed has divided the country's cricket fans.

Shakib will have the team of his desire at his disposal in the World Cup. The process of achieving that squad, however, was questionable to say the least. Now it's up to the skipper to deliver on his promise and make this Bangladesh's best ever World Cup.

Given the chaos leading up to the World Cup and the terrible precedent set by Shakib and Tamim, anything short of that will be unacceptable.



occasion for the two other stalwarts Shakib and Mushfiqur.

In a testament to their quality and longevity in international cricket, both Shakib and Mushfiqur are set to achieve a unique feat when Bangladesh take the field in their 2023 World Cup opener against Afghanistan on October 7 in Dharamsala - the duo are the only remnants from that 2007 World Cup to still be representing their country in this mega event.

16 years on, the game itself has evolved, and it is only obvious that many of its stalwarts would be part of that undertaking.

For instance, Rahul Dravid, the Indian skipper who had received a reality check from Shakib and Co more than a decade ago, will still be a part of the Indian contingent this time around but only in the dugout as their head coach.

Sourav Ganguly, India's opener back then, has already opened and closed his chapter as the president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. He served as the BCCI chief from 2019 to 2022.

Two other cricketers who were stunned by the Tigers in that tournament were South Africa's Ashwell Prince and Charl Langeveldt. Not only



have they already bid adieu to their careers as cricketers but have also proceeded in the most common post-cricket trajectory among cricketers and taken up coaching. Both had been part of the Bangladesh contingent for a while - Prince served as the Tigers' batting coach from 2021 to 2022 while Langeveldt was the overseer of the pace bowling unit for about five months in 2019.

Pakistan skipper back then, Inzamam-ul-Haq, played his final ODI in that very tournament and is now in his second term as the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) chief selector. However, Inzamam's bloodline - his nephew Imam-ul-Haq - will be wielding the willow in India as Pakistan's first-choice opener.

Meanwhile, over at the Netherlands team, a rare father-son connection is set to take place in the World Cup in India.

When Tim de Leede donned the all-orange in 2007, his son and now a mainstay of the Dutch team, Bas de Leede was just a seven-year-old. The World Cup in India is set to be Bas' first chance to follow in his father's footsteps and make him proud.

From exciting teens to the country's ambassadors, both Shakib and Mushfiqur have also gone through major transformations over the past 16 years. Having forayed into the World Cup by punching above their weight, Shakib and Mushfiqur will hope to end on a high as well.



ROLL OF HONOUR

YEAR	CHAMPIONS	RUNNERS-UP
1975	West Indies	Australia
1979	West Indies (2)	England
1983	India	West Indies
1987	Australia	England
1992	Pakistan	England
1996	Sri Lanka	Australia
1999	Australia (2)	Pakistan
2003	Australia (3)	India
2007	Australia (4)	Sri Lanka
2011	India (2)	Sri Lanka
2015	Australia (5)	New Zealand
2019	England	New Zealand
2023	?	?