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South Africa's Kagiso Rabada has made life difficult for batters in the World Cup. The in-form Proteas meet the Netherlands in Dharamshala today and the dutch will be hoping for something extraordinary from Bas de Leede, their best performer in the tournament so far.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

## Victim of intended success: Out pops a strange narrative

MAZHAR UDDIN from Pune

Teams tinkering with tactics or playing eleven while building up to a tournament of ICC World Cup's magnitude is quite common. Experiments, by definition, can go either way, but it is rarely seen that a successful move can even end up backfiring. Bangladesh, of late, have been on the receiving end of such an outcome, if team director Khaled Mahmud Sujon's opinion is taken into account.

No matter how unusual it may seem, Mehedi Hasan Miraz's impressive show as a make-shift opener in the Asia Cup -- where he came up with a century against Afghanistan -- has somehow introduced more problems that it solved.

Based on Bangladesh's three outings in the flagship event so far, top-order failure has remained a standout feature of the Shakib Al Hasan-led side, leading to the constant shuffling in the batting order deemed as the primary reason of downfall.

"I'm not saying Miraz is our main batter but he has come a long way. But since we promoted Miraz at the top to preserve our wickets, I think that backfired for us," Mahmud said yesterday, referring to the fact that Miraz was demoted to bat down the order before returning to number three, where he produced a fifty against Afghanistan in Bangladesh's tournament opener.

According to the former Bangladesh captain, players like Najmul Hossain Shanto -- who scored heavily at number three in the past year -- have not voiced their discomfort over the batting order shuffle.

"I think there wouldn't have been any problem if Miraz batted in his usual batting position, then Shanto, Shakib, [Towhid] Hridoy and Mushfiqur [Rahim] would follow the openers in the batting order. Maybe then Miraz or Mahmudullah batted at number seven and eight. As I said Miraz scored a hundred in the Asia Cup at the top-order and he also scored runs in a few matches and he was in form," Mahmud added.

Although Mahmud opined that it is ideal to have a specialist batter for a specific position, he also said that it is the coach and captain's call eventually. "As we know in ODIs, there are situations which demand that we shuffle the batting order. If I talk about Miraz and Shanto, basically the coach and captain felt that they took the left-and-right-hand combination in mind. Maybe it's unnecessary at times."

In similar circumstances, Towhid Hridoy is another batter who suffered a dip in form, after having shown promise at number five. He had to sacrifice his usual batting position to bat at number seven in three matches so far.

Mahmud continued, "If I talk about Hridoy's batting, since Shakib is batting at number five and Mushy at six, so Hridoy or Mahmudullah will ultimately come at number seven or eight which is normal.

"We are playing with an extra batter and five bowlers, and this explains the batting order. Again, it would be good if the batters can bat in their usual positions. But again, as Shanto scored a hundred in the Asia Cup while batting at number four, this is not a big reason," he said.

Mahmud's observations about their batting failure revealed a lack of clarity in the planning department. Now we have to wait and watch if the team management solves their unique challenge with another unique approach or sticks to the basics.



## South Africa won't be 'arrogant' against Dutch

AFP, Dharamshala

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma insists his team cannot afford to be "arrogant or loud" when they face the Netherlands in the Cricket World Cup on Tuesday, wary of the shock defeat they suffered against the Dutch at the World T20 last year.

South Africa are on a high at this tournament, piling up runs and coasting to comfortable wins over Sri Lanka and five-time champions Australia.

However, memories of the 13-run loss to the Dutch in Adelaide at the T20 showpiece in November 2022, when the Proteas failed to chase down a modest 158, are still raw.

Eight of the South African team who played in that game are likely to feature Tuesday at the picturesque Himalayan venue of Dharamshala as the third round of group games wraps up.

Bavuma was determined on Monday to stress that his team should be stronger in the longer 50-over format.

"We definitely won't be taking them lightly. There was a T20 World Cup last year, a 50-over World Cup now," said the captain.

"Different format, different ask in terms of your skills, being able to do your skills for a longer period of time. So, I think that's something that I think we all need to appreciate."

In one-day clashes, South Africa enjoy a convincing 6-0 winning record.

Two of those wins -- by eight wickets in Benoni and 146 runs at Johannesburg -- earlier this year assured South Africa of a spot at the World Cup.

Those results took the Dutch into the qualifying tournament instead.

"We played them in South Africa and our victories there were emphatic," added Bavuma.

"I think in terms of the confidence

semifinals on four occasions.

However, they have looked impressive so far India.

Quinton de Kock, Rassie van der Dussen and Aiden Markram all cracked centuries in a tournament record 428 against Sri Lanka in a 102-run win.

De Kock made another century in the 134-run mauling of a misfiring Australian team.

South Africa's biggest challenge on Tuesday could come from the weather.

A chance of rain is forecast alongside temperatures around the 18 degree (64 Fahrenheit) mark.

When South Africa beat Australia in Lucknow last Thursday, it was a steamy 35 degrees.

Also of concern in Dharamshala is the outfield which was described as "poor" by England skipper Jos Buttler and deemed only as "average" by the International Cricket Council.

"I think the field is a bit patchy," said Bavuma.

"We did have a fielding practice last night and to be honest it didn't play as bad as it really looked - but I guess we'll see how it goes within the game.

"We have spoken about trying to be a bit more cautious. Maybe changing your diving technique, I don't know how easy that is to do when you are in the heat of the moment."

and belief within the team without us being arrogant or loud about it I think it's still up there.

"We still respect opposition, not just the Netherlands, but any opposition. We'll be coming into the game with the same mindset that we had against Sri Lanka and that we had against Australia."

South Africa have never made a Cricket World Cup final, falling at the



- The Netherlands are yet to win an ODI against South Africa. The Proteas registered convincing wins in six of the seven games played against the Dutch with one match yielding no result.
- The Netherlands have worse memories of facing South Africa in the ODI World Cup. The two teams have come across each other three times in the mega event with a 160-run defeat against the Proteas in 1996 in Rawalpindi being the best result for the Dutch in the tournament.
- The last time the two sides met in the World Cup in the 2011 edition, South Africa recorded a 231-run win against the Netherlands in Mohali -- the sixth-largest margin of victory (by runs) in the World Cup.
- The one other time South Africa played the Netherlands in the World Cup, Herschelle Gibbs became the first player to hit six sixes in an over in ODIs. Gibbs hit leggie Daan van Bunge for six maximums in an over during a group game in the 2007 edition in Basseterre.
- South Africa's Aiden Markram and Heinrich Klaasen are the only batters with strike rates over 120 against both pace and spin this year (minimum 200 runs against each).

## 'Satisfied it will be an outstanding World Cup'

AFP, Mumbai

International Cricket Council (ICC) chairman Greg Barclay still expects India to stage an "outstanding" World Cup despite concerns over the size and composition of crowds in the early stages of the event.

Pakistan team director Mickey Arthur took aim at the ICC for a lack of support for his side in their showpiece match against arch-rivals India in Ahmedabad's 132,000-capacity stadium on Saturday. The South African said the game had looked more like a "BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) event" than a major international cricket fixture.

"Every event we have, there are always criticisms from various quarters, things that we will take away and try to work on, try to do better," Barclay said in answer to a question from AFP in Mumbai on Monday.

The BCCI -- the global game's financial powerhouse -- had already been criticised for a delay in announcing the World Cup fixture list until three months before the tournament began. The schedule was suddenly overhauled a few weeks after it was first published with the dates of some of the biggest matches changed.

Fans have meanwhile complained about online ticketing crashes, and matches not featuring the hosts have been sparsely attended. Pakistan fans were effectively banned from the Ahmedabad ground after

failing to secure visas to cross the border, leaving the arena awash with the blue shirts of India supporters as the hosts coasted to a seven-wicket victory.

But Barclay, speaking in Mumbai after the International Olympic Committee voted to include Twenty20 cricket in the programme for the 2028 Los Angeles Games, defended the organisation of the World Cup.

"This event has only just started, let's just see how the whole thing plays out. Then we will review what

we could change, how we can improve World Cups and the general offering around cricket," he said. "I'm satisfied that it will be an outstanding World Cup." In Ahmedabad, Pakistan were backed only by a handful of expatriate fans who had made the trip from the United States and United Kingdom.

"It didn't seem like an ICC event to be brutally honest," Arthur said afterwards.

"It seemed like a bilateral series; it seemed like a BCCI event," he said.

event." Arthur also accused the public address system organisers of favouring India by refusing to play "Dil Dil Pakistan", the nation's unofficial anthem.

"So yes, that does play a role, but I'm not going to use that as an excuse," Arthur added. Since the 2008 attacks on Mumbai, India and Pakistan have not played a full bilateral series, with New Delhi and Islamabad still involved in a bitter diplomatic dispute.





Australia's Adam Zampa produced figures of four for 47 in his eight overs against Sri Lanka in Lucknow yesterday. After the Lankans got off to a blistering start, Zampa got wickets in consecutive deliveries to see Sri Lanka lose way in the middle. Zampa once again took two wickets in quick succession at the latter stage as Australia bundled out the Lankans for 209 in 43.3 overs and chased it down with five wickets and 88 balls remaining.

PHOTO: AFP

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