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Similar results on field, but different approach off it

MAZHAR UDDIN from Mumbai

Even though not much has changed results-wise for Bangladesh in the World Cup, the one thing that certainly has been different in this edition of the mega event in India is the Bangladesh team management's way of interacting with the media.

Bangladesh managed only one win in four matches so far, that too against a lower-ranked Afghanistan in their World Cup opener. Since then, it has been a familiar sombre ride for the Tigers in the mega event as they suffered three convincing defeats on the trot.

While the players have not been able to produce something new and different on the field, the team management, interestingly, took up the mantle as it has been maintaining some sort of secrecy when it comes to providing injury updates of the players to the media officially.

None of the members of the team faced the media yesterday in Mumbai, where the Tigers will play an in-form South Africa next.

It was learned that this move of avoiding the media is the team management's way of protecting the players from outside noise, helping them to focus solely on their game as the management believes that there is a chance of spreading misinformation if the players or the coaching staff address the media every now and then.

After a couple of days' rest, the Bangladesh team started training at the Wankhede Stadium yesterday, and once again, all eyes were on skipper Shakib Al Hasan who is recovering from a thigh injury. It was learned that Shakib has a Grade-1 tear, however, the team management is yet to reveal his actual injury status.

Although the Bangladesh team were scheduled to start training from 2:00pm, the Tigers arrived at the iconic venue an hour early without their head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, who, according to sources, has food poisoning.

Shakib, who sat out the previous game against India, was seen in a jolly mood yesterday. He took part in a footvolley session before he went to bat in the nets for around 35 minutes, facing both spinners and pacers without much discomfort.

After completing the net session, Shakib went for a break before returning again to knock some throwdowns for another 15 minutes.

Unlike the team management's vagueness regarding his injury status, Shakib's pattern of training was pretty similar to what he had done before the game against India as he did not bowl and also avoided high-intensity running session.

"We are not willing to rush regarding Shakib. We are going with the conventional approach and observing his progress gradually. You can't say when the pain will resurface if the recovery process is not done properly. We are hoping he would be able to start high-intensity training soon," said a member of the Bangladesh team management.

Meanwhile, another injured pacer Taskin Ahmed was also seen undergoing his recovery process after having missed out the previous game against India due to shoulder pain.

Much like Shakib's case, no official statement has been made regarding Taskin's injury. However, it was learned that he has played first three games of the World Cup by managing his shoulder pain.

Taskin did not bowl in the training session yesterday and was constantly monitored by the team physio during the drill sessions. It is still not confirmed whether the pacer will be able to recover and feature against South Africa on Tuesday.

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Pakistan will hope for their skipper Babar Azam, who has only hit one fifty in this World Cup so far, to come up with an inspiring performance and lead his troops in neutralising the threat of Afghanistan's spin attack, led by star leggie Rashid Khan, in a presumably spin-friendly surface at Chepauk in Chennai today.

PHOTO: AFP

Chennai up for renewal of 'passionate' rivalry

AFP, Chennai

Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott said Sunday that his team are looking forward to renewing a "passionate" rivalry with Pakistan which has often reflected the stormy political relationship between the two neighbours.

Both sides are in desperate need of a win at the World Cup.

Pakistan have lost their last two games after a pair of opening wins. Afghanistan pulled off a shock victory over defending champions England but have also slumped to three defeats.

Adding spice to Monday's crucial clash is the current cross-border friction between the two nations.

Pakistan has seen a sharp rise in militant attacks since the Afghan Taliban surged back to power in Afghanistan in 2021.

The militant assaults have been focused in regions abutting Afghanistan, and Islamabad alleges some are being planned on Afghan soil — a charge Kabul denies.

Islamabad has also recently announced a plan to evict hundreds of thousands of Afghan migrants living in Pakistan.

There have been intense cricket clashes as well.

At the 2019 World Cup match in Leeds, which Pakistan won by three wickets, riots between the two sets of

fans erupted outside the stadium.

Afghanistan fast bowler Fareed Malik and Pakistan batsman Asif Ali almost came to blows in a Twenty20 game at Sharjah last year.

"I think for them (Afghanistan players) it's a rivalry that excites them," said Trott on Sunday.

"I think it's a rivalry that sometimes in the past has been very passionate.

"We've had very close games as well. Hopefully tomorrow isn't very exciting

Afghanistan's world-class spin attack.

"I didn't know about them wanting to (change the venue), but I think Pakistan have got good spinners themselves and the thing with spinners, there are only two or three of them playing a game," said Trott.

Afghanistan's spin trio of Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi will pose a threat for Pakistan as they did against England, sharing eight wickets in an upset 69-run win.

That game, however, took place in New Delhi.

"It's everybody's job, not just the spinners, to win games. There's batsmen who've got to put runs on the board or batsmen who've got to chase down a total," added former England batsman Trott.

"Chennai is normally a good wicket. So, with regards to the mindset, it's important, as I said, the mindset we have there is that it's a team game. It's not just a spinners game."

Afghanistan have lost all seven ODIs against Pakistan but can take a degree of satisfaction from knowing that they clinched three of the teams' last four Twenty20 meetings.

"We always look to put the opposition under pressure straight away so we'll be looking to do that tomorrow obviously, and I don't think there's any thoughts with regards to previous matches," said Trott.

Afghanistan are yet to go one up on Pakistan as they've lost in all seven meetings against the 1992 world champions in ODIs.

Pakistan have won both of their previous ODIs in Chennai. The 35-run win over India at the venue in 1997 featured Saeed Anwar's 194-run knock off 146 balls which was then the highest individual score in the format.

The 2019 encounter between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the only time the two sides have met in the competition, produced a thriller in which Pakistan managed to edge by three wickets.

Pakistan pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali need five and two wickets respectively to reach a century of ODI scalps.

Afghanistan opener Ibrahim Zadran requires three more runs to complete 1000 runs in ODIs. If he can do it today, his 24th innings in the format, it would make him the quickest Afghan batter to get to the landmark as he would surpass his opening partner Rahmanullah Gurbaz who took 27 innings.

Pakistan batter Mohammad Rizwan needs 78 runs to take his tally to 1000 runs in 2023.

Pakistan opener Imam-ul-Haq has scored the most runs against Afghanistan as he has amassed 281 runs in five innings while averaging 56.20, while Shaheen leads the charts in the bowling scheme of things as he has taken 12 Afghan wickets in five matches so far.

Imam hopes to carry Anwar 'motivation'

AFP, Chennai

Pakistan opener Imam-ul-Haq will channel the spirit of record-setting compatriot Saeed Anwar and his country's winning relationship with Chennai on Monday in an effort to revive the team's World Cup campaign.

Pakistan face Afghanistan at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium where in 1997, flamboyant left-handed opener Anwar hit a monumental 194 against India.

At the time it was the highest individual ODI score while Anwar's heroics also gave Pakistan a 35-run win over their arch-rivals.

"We have a great record at this venue, so I am sure that will be a motivation," said Haq, who was only two when Anwar blitzed the India team which featured the likes of Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid in 1997.

"Although I don't have any memory of Saeed Anwar's record, that too will be a motivation."

Pakistan lost two of their previous World Cup games against arch-rivals India and Australia and will be desperate for a comeback. "We have to



always lowers morale. We dropped crucial catches [against Australia] and that hurt," said Haq.

David Warner was on 10 when he was dropped by Usama Mir off Shaheen Shah Afridi — he went on to make 163 and share a record Australian World Cup opening stand of 259 with Mitchell Marsh who compiled 121.

"You will see a new thing tomorrow. We want to go to Kolkata with four wins in six games," said Haq, whose team will also face South Africa in Chennai on Friday.

Haq also played down the threat posed by Afghanistan's spin trio of Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi at a venue renowned as a slow bowlers paradise.

"We know this ground favours spinners and they have quality spin bowlers but we have beaten them 3-0 recently in a one-day series in Sri Lanka under the same conditions," said Haq.

"We all know Afghanistan is a good team and in these conditions they will be tough but we are ready for that and will execute our plans."

admit we did not play well in those games," said Haq on Sunday.

"We were not up to the mark, did not get the execution right and defeat



Pacer Mohammad Shami, who had to sit and watch India win from the bench in the first four matches of the World Cup, made his mark in the tournament with a fiver in his first appearance in Dharamshala yesterday. Having taken five wickets for 54 runs against New Zealand, Shami made his way into the record books as he became the only India bowler to have picked up two five-wicket hauls in World Cups.

PHOTO: AFP

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