

Shuffling in batting order to continue?

SPORTS REPORTER from Mumbai

While top teams, especially the ones who have been successful in this World Cup so far, seem to have proper clarity over their game plan, Bangladesh have looked drab and confused in formulating strategies in the mega event in India.

Struggles in the batting department have been a constant for Bangladesh in recent ODIs, mainly due to the failure of the top order which in turn has led to simultaneous shuffling in the batting order.

However, skipper Shakib Al Hasan, speaking to the media yesterday for the first time since being in India for the mega event, backed the constant shuffling in the batting order in all the first four matches of the World Cup.

“The reason to promote [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz up the order was mainly because he smashed a century against Afghanistan in the Asia Cup. So, we decided he would bat up the order against them,” Shakib clarified the reason behind sending Miraz up the order against Afghanistan.

That ploy from the team management worked as Miraz scored a fifty and Bangladesh got off to a winning start in the tournament. However, it only went downhill for the Tigers since then as they suffered three big-margin defeats against England, New Zealand, and hosts India.



Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who missed the last game against India due to a thigh injury, trained at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday and is expected to feature against South Africa today.

PHOTO: EKUSH TAPADER

The India defeat saw Bangladesh come under heavy scrutiny as they failed to utilise the Tigers' best-ever opening stand in the World Cup, set by Liton Das and Tanzid Hasan Tamim in their last game against India last week, mostly due to the team management's decision of sending Miraz up the order.

As Bangladesh had already gotten a solid start against India, questions were raised whether sending Mushfiqur Rahim, the team's leading scorer in the World Cup so far, would have made more sense considering his experience and well-known capability of rotating the strike.

“Some of our established batters are batting a bit lower down the order, but is there a guarantee that they will score higher up the order? These are difficult and tricky decisions that we have to make,” Shakib was skeptical of the notion that promoting Mushfiqur up the order might have worked in Bangladesh's favour.

“It has mixed results. I think we still had chances to score 280-290 runs in all three matches. Only [Mahmudullah] Riyad bhai batted well till the end. I don't think you can criticise that. Riyad bhai is doing well but if we bring him up and he can't perform out of his usual position, then we will all feel about it,” he added, hinting that the spontaneity in the batting order might continue even in the upcoming matches.



● South Africa hold a significant advantage against Bangladesh in ODIs as they have 18 wins to the Tigers' six in 24 meetings.

● In World Cups however, the two sides are at an even 2-2 tie, with Bangladesh handing out the latest blow with a 21-run win in the 2019 edition of the tournament.

● Bangladesh have lost the only match they've played at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, while South Africa have won two and lost three in five outings at the venue.

● Shakib Al Hasan has featured the most number of times in Bangladesh-South Africa encounters, having played in 17 of the 24 matches.

● Najmul Hossain Shanto is 18 runs away from reaching 1000 runs in ODIs.

● Mehedi Hasan Miraz is four wickets short of scalping 100 wickets in the format.



Mushfiqur Rahim, leading scorer for Bangladesh in the World Cup so far, has been in good touch and the Tigers will hope for him and the rest of the batting order to fire against the likes of South Africa's Lungi Ngidi and others when the two sides face off at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai today.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK/AFP

‘Pain-free’ Shakib urges for patience

MAZHAR UDDIN from Mumbai

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan said his side “still harbour the dream” of an ICC World Cup semi-final as they aim to face their fifth hurdle of the showpiece event in India.

After four matches in the ongoing ICC World Cup and three consecutive defeats, Shakib faced the media for the first time during the mega event.

The Bangladesh skipper appeared confident in the pre-match press meet ahead of his side's crucial game against an in-form South Africa at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium. The ace all-rounder in his fifth World Cup appearance had also cleared confusion over his injury status.

Having undergone a high-intensity running session yesterday, Shakib – who sustained a thigh injury against New Zealand on October 13 and went on to miss Thursday's India fixture – informed that he is expected to be fit for today's game.

“If there's no problem with running, I can play tomorrow (today). I wasn't 100 per cent before the India game. It was also important that I don't risk the rest of the World Cup. I am in good shape now. I am pain-free. I have to test myself,” said Shakib.

Although the Tigers will be under tremendous pressure to keep their hopes alive in order to progress beyond the group stage, Shakib reckons his side still have a chance at making it to the top-four.

“We still harbour the dream (reaching semi-final). Other teams are helping us also, so if we can help ourselves, it can happen. We still have the chance on paper. Let's finish this campaign first and then you can whole-heartedly feel

disappointed,” said Shakib.

Shakib gave the impression that the Tigers are not intimidated by South Africa's current form, especially on the batting front, given the way they humbled defending champions England in their previous game at the same venue. He feels that every game brings a new challenge for the teams in a stage like the World Cup.

“If we can all bowl, bat and field together, we can do something good. We believe that if we play our best cricket in ODIs, we can win against any team,” he added.

Bangladesh's pace-bowling unit has not been able to live up to their expectations in the tournament so far.

Moreover, pace spearhead Taskin Ahmed has already been ruled out of the South Africa clash as he continues to nurse a shoulder injury.

Shakib feels that the seamers have a huge role to play since he feels the spinners will have a tough time, considering the dimensions of the Wankhede Stadium.

“They (pacers) probably haven't done well in all four games, in terms of partnerships or their bowling figures. I am not

too disappointed as I felt they did well but they were slightly unlucky. I think the whole team has to take a step up.

“It (Wankhede Stadium) is a high-scoring ground. Still, we are planning to restrict them for a lower total. We are taking inspiration from how the Netherlands restricted them. We have been looking at their weaknesses from the last one or two years,” said Shakib, adding that winning the toss will be crucial for both teams since Mumbai's extreme heat and humidity are expected to play a big role in deciding that game's outcome.

Wary Proteas taking inspiration from Springboks

AFP, Mumbai

Aiden Markram says South Africa's cricketers are taking “inspiration” from the Springboks' run to the Rugby World Cup final as they continue their own quest for global glory in India.

Just hours after South Africa thrashed England in Mumbai on Saturday, their reigning rugby union world champion compatriots edged England 16-15 in a tense semifinal in Paris.

“We're following the rugby as much as everyone else, to be honest,” said top-order batter Markram on Monday ahead of the Proteas' game against Bangladesh in Mumbai. Markram was the stand-in captain against England after regular skipper Temba Bavuma was ruled out through illness.

“I suppose a lot of the hype is around them right now and rightly so. They're doing some special things once again as a team. It inspires us.” Meanwhile, Markram said he expected Heinrich Klaasen to be fit to face Bangladesh despite a 109 against England that “took quite a lot out of him” due to the oppressive Mumbai weather.

As for Bavuma, the 29-year-old Markram said he was “definitely improving” but no “final call” had been made regarding him for today's clash.

The Tigers have proved tricky opponents in recent encounters for South Africa. And even though Bangladesh have lost three of their four games at the World Cup, wary batter Markram said: “If your skills let you down against a team like Bangladesh, you will be put under a lot of pressure. They bring a great attack that is well rounded now. You can't just say they're going to bring fantastic spinners because their seamers have done a great job in the recent past.”



Afghanistan's ploy of entrapping Pakistan in their spin web worked very well in their World Cup encounter on a spin-friendly surface at Chepauk in Chennai yesterday. Playing only his fourth ODI and his first game in the World Cup, left-arm wrist spinner Noor Ahmad did the most damage. The 18-year-old started by trapping in front in-form Abdullah Shafique and went on to claim the crucial wickets of Pakistan skipper Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan. Noor ended with figures of three for 49 in 10 overs.

PHOTO: REUTERS

‘Ferrari’ Shami revs like no one else

AFP, New Delhi

India's Mohammed Shami was on Monday described as being “like a Ferrari” following his performance in the World Cup victory over New Zealand as a career that has witnessed a series of professional and private highs and lows took another twist.

Shami claimed 5-54 as India made it five wins in five with a four-wicket victory over the Kiwis in Dharamshala to move closer to the semi-finals. The 33-year-old sat out the first four games of the tournament but seized his opportunity when all-rounder Hardik Pandya missed Sunday's match through injury.

Shami remains India's most experienced quick in a fast bowling pack which includes Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj.

“Mohammed Shami is like Ferrari. Whenever you take it out of the garage it will give you the same speed thrill and joy to ride every time,” former India seamer Irfan Pathan wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

On Sunday, Shami's first ball rattled the stumps of New Zealand opener Will Young who inside-edged the delivery onto his stumps.



However, it was his bowling at the death that allowed India to restrict New Zealand to 273 all out after a strong start by Daryl Mitchell.

Shami was so relentless that he was even on a hat-trick in the 48th over. Lockie Ferguson denied him that particular moment.

Former India batter Mohammad Kaif joined in the Shami salutes.

“The legend of Mohammed Shami grows with every ball, every innings

and every game. Shami you inspire. Congrats on flier,” wrote Kaif on social media.

Shami now has 19 wickets in his last five World Cup games and said “everyone should enjoy each other's success” when asked about his feelings on sitting out of the first four matches.

Shami's performance on Sunday came almost two years after the Indian hero faced vicious social media attacks.

As a Muslim in Hindu-majority India, he was the prime target for blame when the team was defeated by arch-rivals Pakistan at the 2021 Twenty20 World Cup.

Thousands of hate messages described Shami as a “traitor” and trolls made wild accusations of match-fixing.

Superstar teammate Virat Kohli, who was captain at the time, came out in support of Shami and launched a blistering attack on his team's critics, terming them as “spineless” and “pathetic”.

Shami later admitted to battling depression and overcoming suicidal thoughts due to weight gain during an injury layoff.