

SPORT



Shakib Al Hasan walks back to the pavilion after a disappointing show as Mahmudullah Riyad's late century only delayed the inevitable in Bangladesh's 149-run defeat against South Africa at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Aussies look to crank up a notch

AGENCIES

After a wobbling start that made everyone question their World Cup pedigree, the five-time champions are now back where they had hoped to be with the tricky Netherlands the Aussies' next opponent in India.

Australia began the tournament with a loss to India and then went down to South Africa before they bounced back to be placed fourth in the 10-team table led by the hosts India.

The first four teams will qualify for the semifinals following the end of the round-robin league stage, and Australia will only hope to strengthen their stay at the top with a win against the Netherlands at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi today.

"We're not in unfamiliar territory. We had a slow start and we were put under pressure at times, but the vibe is great," said Marsh on the eve of the clash with the giant-killing Dutch.

"We've played really good cricket the last two games and hopefully that's the case tomorrow [on Wednesday against the Netherlands]. So, there's a big carrot dangling for us in a couple of weeks'

Australia and the Netherlands have come across in ODIs only in World Cups -- once in 2003 and then in 2007. Australia won convincingly on both occasions.

Australia's Mitchell Starc, with 55 wickets in 22 matches, needs just two more wickets to go third in the all-time wicket takers' list in World Cups. Glenn McGrath leads the chart with 71 scalps in 39 matches.



time."

The Netherlands stunned high-flying South Africa last week but lost to Sri Lanka in their next outing. Afghanistan's shock win over Pakistan in Chennai on Monday came after they had stunned defending champions England in New Delhi.

Marsh said the level of competitiveness has brought the tournament alive.

"Teams have got better. I think that's great for world cricket, certainly in tournaments like this that can sometimes be pretty long," said Marsh.

"We respect the Netherlands; they're playing some good cricket and that will be a tough challenge." Marsh, however, might see himself drop down to number three in the batting order if opener Travis Head returns to the team for their clash against the Netherlands.

Marsh comes into today's contest fresh from his 121 in a 259-run opening partnership with David Warner against Pakistan last week. Head, who broke his hand at Centurion in South Africa last month, has rejoined the team after rehabilitation in Adelaide and had a hit at the nets in Delhi.

"I think that decision (of having Head in the XI) will be made this afternoon/tonight," Marsh added. "He looked good, a bit of range hitting last night. He says the hand feels good. So, I'm sure if he's fit, he'll be available for selection in the team."

On slipping down the batting order, Marsh said he had no problem with it.

Reality still a far cry

MAZHAR UDDIN from Mumbai

Shakib Al Hasan had smartly faced the media on Monday, on the eve of his side's fifth World Cup game. However, the Bangladesh captain's confident demeanour did not rub off onto his troops against South Africa as Bangladesh bowling unit was made to look toothless.

South Africa's brand of cricket in the ongoing showpiece event has been exemplary. Apart from the shock defeat to Netherlands, they bullied oppositions with a voracious appetite for runs, resulting in three 350-plus totals -- including a record 428 for five against Sri Lanka.

It was pretty much on the cards that the Proteas would come hard at the Tigers with their attacking mindset. Courtesy of opener Quinton de Kock's third hundred in the ongoing World Cup, complemented by a blistering ninety from Heinrich Klaasen, the four-time semifinalists clobbered their way to a mammoth 382 for five, with the Tigers leaking 144 runs in the last ten overs.

Even a team like Australia fell victim to South Africa's onslaught but what separates Bangladesh from the rest in the ongoing event is their inability to raise the standard of their game.

Afghanistan may have lost

to Bangladesh to kickstart their World Cup campaign on the wrong note, but their strong body language and mental strength was paramount in helping them to make a dramatic turnaround.

Afghanistan, all of a sudden, now find themselves in contention for the top four spot after stunning two powerhouses: England and Pakistan.

Sent in to bowl, Bangladesh did inflict early damage to leave

But once again, the seamers continued their dismal show and failed to deliver when it mattered in the past 17 days.

None of the Bangladeshi quicks -- Mustafizur Rahman, Hasan Mahmud and Shoriful Islam -- were able to complete their full quota of ten overs. It came as little surprise that all the pacers remained on the expensive side as they rarely had the South Africa batters under any spot of bother.

Mustafizur, being the most experienced pacer in the side, was expected to take the leading role but his game awareness was lacking. Mustafizur remained wicketless after nine overs, conceding 76 runs at an economy-rate of 8.44.

Hasan Mahmud was the most expensive of the lot. Although he removed two dangers -- de Kock and Klaasen -- his six overs amounted to 67 runs. Shoriful, who gave the early breakthrough by removing Reeza Hendricks, gave away 76 runs from his nine.

Bangladesh fans may have had high expectations this time around but, given the results and the manner in which they arrived in India, it appears that the wait for something special from the Tigers will extend beyond the current edition of the prestigious event.



South Africa at 36 for two inside eight overs but the bowlers were unable to build pressure following a decent start.

Bangladesh pace unit had garnered high hopes prior to the World Cup since their impressive run around the past year. According to Shakib, the onus fell on the pace-bowling unit to take the leading role against South Africa, considering the smaller dimensions of Wankhede Stadium.

I thought we bowled well for 35 overs, took a few wickets and were going for five-an-over. From there on they kicked, especially Quinton, he batted really well and Klaasen finished it off. On a ground like this, it can happen.

There has been some talk about Mushfiquir and Mahmudullah batting up the order. The top five, who are not scoring, need to score more and then we can get more out of them. At the moment India, New Zealand, and South Africa are the three teams that look like they can win the title. But anything can happen, a long way to go. Lot to learn and a lot to play for. We want to finish, if not as semi-finalists then at five or six. We can still do it, I'm hopeful we can come back stronger.

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan

SCORES IN BRIEF

South Africa: 382 for 5 in 50 overs (De Kock 174, Klaasen 90, Markram 60; Mahmud 2-67, Miraz 1-44)

Bangladesh: 233 all out in 46.3 overs (Mahmudullah 111, Liton 22; Coetzee 3-62, Jansen 2-39, Rabada 2-42)

Result: South Africa won by 149 runs

Player-of-the-match: Quinton de Kock

What went wrong with PAKISTAN?

AFP, Chennai

Pakistan's chances of making the semifinals of the Cricket World Cup are on a knife-edge after their eight-wicket defeat to Afghanistan on Monday in Chennai.

It was the team's third successive loss at the tournament after two opening wins.

Here is a list of problem areas for Babar Azam's faltering team: **'World-class' bowling looks ordinary**

Pakistan's bowling was touted as 'world-class' before the Asia Cup and when they restricted a strong India side to 266 all out in a washed out game at Pallekele, commentators saw it as a major warning to World Cup rivals.

But two weeks before the showpiece event, key fast bowler Naseem Shah was ruled out with a shoulder injury.

Spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi has 10 wickets in five games in India

but has failed to make an early impact -- his 2-36 against India and 5-54 facing Australia came in losing causes.

Haris Rauf has leaked runs, conceding 286 in five games for eight wickets while the spinners have lacked bite on the slow and turning pitches of India.

Captaincy in question

Babar is one of the top batters in white ball cricket but has not been able to live up to this reputation as he managed just two fifties in the showpiece event -- both in losing causes against India and Afghanistan. However, more than that, it is his captaincy that has come under scrutiny.

Pakistan media have consistently accused him of favouring his friends in selection.

"As far as captaincy is concerned, I don't have much pressure on me or on my batting. I try to give my best in batting," Babar said after Monday's

loss to Afghanistan.

"During fielding, I think about captaincy and during batting I just think about the batting."

Babar has won some sympathy in India for his team having to play in front of crowds where Pakistan fans have been effectively banned.

Lack of planning

There have been frequent, unsettling changes in the Pakistan Cricket Board set-up -- three chairmen in the past year -- which hurt planning for the World Cup.

Former chairman Najam Sethi brought in Mickey Arthur as team director but he also kept his Derbyshire county job in England.

Directing the team from the UK, he was criticised in some media as a "Zoom coach."

Pakistan officials have also been accused of failing to manage the workload of their fast bowlers with Naseem and Shaheen playing all three formats.

"You were not able to find a coach and since you liked foreign ones you hired an online coach. We change our system frequently and that is showing in our performance in the World Cup," said former Pakistan great Wasim Akram.



South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen put on a show yesterday, turning pacer Shoriful Islam and other Bangladesh players into helpless spectators for almost as long as he batted in the World Cup game at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. The Proteas batter dealt in boundaries, mostly in sixes as he hit a total of eight maximums and two boundaries during a whirlwind 49-ball 90. It seemed like he was about to notch his fifth ODI ton till he holed one out to deep cover off the bowling of Hasan Mahmud in the final over.

PHOTO: REUTERS