



‘Greatest ever innings’

AFP, MUMBAI

Australia skipper Pat Cummins hailed Glenn Maxwell's epic World Cup double century as the "greatest innings" on Tuesday as the swashbuckling batsman defied injury to spark a three-wicket win over Afghanistan.

Maxwell made 201 not out off 128 balls with 21 fours and 10 sixes as five-time champions Australia recovered from 91-7 to chase down their 292-run target.

"Just ridiculous. I don't know how you describe that," said Cummins. "A great win but Maxi was just out of this world. It's got to be the greatest ODI innings that has ever happened."

Cummins played a supporting role with an undefeated 12 off 68 balls as Australia made the semi-finals.

"It's one of those days where you can just think, 'yep, when that happened I was there in the stadium' and feel very lucky," added Cummins.

Maxwell rode his luck, he was dropped on 33 and overcame cramps to see his team home. He also used a review to overturn an lbw decision against him early in his innings.

He came into the game having missed the last match against England having suffered a concussion after falling off the back of a golf buggy.

"Horrific, I feel shocking. It was quite hot when we were fielding, I haven't done a whole lot of high intensity exercise in the heat," said Maxwell.

"It got a hold of me today, I was lucky to stick it out until the end."

Maxwell, nicknamed the 'Big Show', has been in fine form at the tournament, hitting a record 40-ball century earlier in the World Cup.

"It would've been nice if it was chanceless, I've lived a very charmed life out there," he added.

"To make the most of it, be not out with Patty out there at the end I'm proud of."

Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi was stunned by the turn of events.

"Really disappointed. Cricket is a funny game, it was unbelievable," he said.

Meanwhile, former England captain Michael Vaughan told the BBC that this could be the greatest innings ever in cricket. "This is the greatest ODI innings ever. It might be the greatest innings of any kind ever," Vaughan said.

Former Pakistan batter Kamran Akmal, meanwhile, expressed his admiration through a post on X, which read:

"One of the greatest innings of world cup so far....Incredible batting @Gmaxi 32 you beauty what a way to finish a game with a win & a double. Perfect display of batting."



PHOTO: AFP

Australia batter Glenn Maxwell had limited mobility as he battled through severe cramps to single-handedly take his side over the finish line with a budgeoning 128-ball 201-run knock against Afghanistan in their ICC World Cup fixture in Mumbai yesterday.

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Daredevil Shakib leaves grey areas in WC 'farewell'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

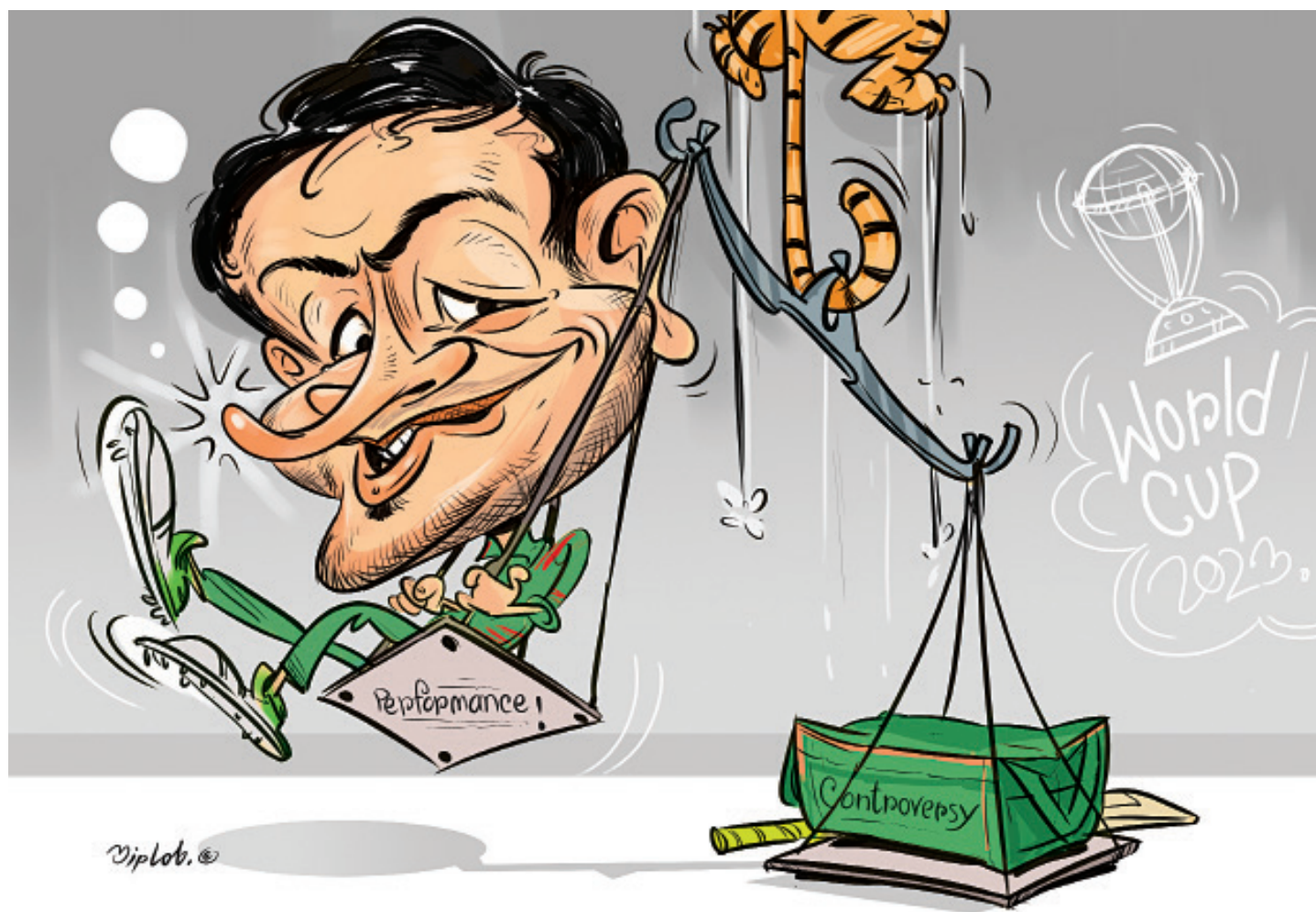
Bangladesh's most decorated cricketer Shakib Al Hasan may have just played his last-ever World Cup game in cricket's most-celebrated format. Shakib's possible end to competing in cricket's biggest event and how it ended, will however portray him as both a villain and a hero, much like throughout his career where he often courted controversy. He had played through pain in his final outing this World Cup and even as it ended with a flourish, there will also be disappointment.

The Bangladesh skipper fell prey to injury while batting against Sri Lanka on Monday and has been ruled out of the game against Australia, Bangladesh's final assignment in this World Cup.

Just as the 36-year-old had competed throughout his career, the end was certainly a bit crazy. Everything was a bit silly when he came out to bat in the seventh over with retribution in Sri Lanka players' minds effected by Angelo Matthews' Timed Out dismissal. Soon, having gotten a few runs under his belt, he heard something crack in his hand. Knowing that it was a finger injury that would eventually rule him out of the next game, he decided to tell his batting partner and the physio that he would keep going. His 65-ball 82 significantly improved Bangladesh's chances of making the ICC Champions Trophy as the Tigers leapfrogged Sri Lanka to seventh position with a better run-rate.

The fire in his belly was once more in view too as Shakib said in post-match presentation that a riled-up Matthews and Sri Lanka helped to fire him up as well. The Matthews conundrum and how it played out in essence is what Shakib brings to the wider cricketing world. A daredevil act, for no one in 146 years of international had triggered such a dismissal.

It required brevity but Shakib is not one to dwell on repercussions. He felt there was an advantage to be taken and he took it, no questions asked. While the cricket world will be debating the Matthews dismissal



for some time, Shakib will not be paying heed. An introvert who makes extravagant remarks when he feels the need to, Shakib's desperation to win was there for all to see.

Shakib was criticised when Tamim Iqbal did not want to be part of the World Cup squad; criticised when amidst high expectations back home, Bangladesh's performance remained pretty dismal with batting order going through frequent changes. Yet, he courted further controversy by leaving the team to work on his batting with his childhood mentor, Nazmul Abedeen Fahim.

Possibly well aware that it was his last ODI World Cup, Shakib had been desperate. The way he batted on Monday was mesmerising, overcoming many deficiencies he faced during the tournament.

The wider cricketing world also knows about Bangladesh somewhat through Shakib's

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terrific achievements. In fact, he made his career through the ODI format, scoring 7570 runs and taking 317 wickets. But, as Bangladesh's most significant cricketing talent, the end also appears not quite fitting, both individually and around team's successes.

Bangladesh had a lot of expectations ahead of the World Cup but under Shakib's leadership, those did not materialise even though results had not gone preceding the marquee event either.

His frequent trips abroad to inaugurate show-rooms or attend events also bring into question his preparation for the World Cup.

Despite his struggles, Shakib is still the Tigers' third-highest run-getter and second-highest wicket-taker in this World Cup, ahead of the last game. Yet, not playing the Australia game would hurt him as will not being able to reach the stratospheric feats he achieved in 2019 edition of the World Cup. Having possibly played his last World Cup game

in ODI format, Shakib's end on a personal level maybe satisfactory but for Bangladesh as a team, nothing materialised. He had suggested in an interview before the World Cup that he would not captain the side even for a day after the World Cup. He captained reluctantly, gave what he could but from Bangladesh's context, a lot more was desired.

"Not a harmless figure, he likes to compete and will always be there to do that," Shakib's mentor Fahim said. "Bangladesh's performances were not easy to recover from and Shakib had said that but he will get the credit for his final outing."

The smirk on Shakib's face during the Matthews incident would remind the wider cricketing world of his essence, of not giving any quarters. But daredevil acts such as those also bear aloft Shakib wherever one wants to see him on a moral compass.

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Crestfallen England aim to 'win and win well'

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England's title defence has not gone as planned but the reigning champions still have plenty to play for during their final two matches of the ongoing ICC World Cup. The defending champions will take on the Netherlands in their penultimate match of the tournament at the MCA International Stadium in Pune today.

With just one win from their opening seven matches, England are already out of contention for the semi-finals but they are now fighting for a top-eight finish to qualify for the 2025 Champions Trophy in Pakistan.

The Netherlands, however, do still have an outside chance of finishing in the top four and will need to win their last two and have other results go their way to have any chance of sneaking into the semi-finals.

But a spot in the ICC Champions Trophy is surely also a prime motivation for the Dutch and a win over England here will put them one step closer to achieving this.

England sit at the bottom of the table, two points behind ninth-placed Netherlands.

England fielding coach Carl Hopkinson said on Tuesday that England have not been able to execute their plans under pressure in India.

Their star-studded batting lineup, which includes the likes of captain Jos Buttler, Ben Stokes and Joe Root, has managed just a single 200 plus total in the last four outings.

"I think cricket can be a game of - It's about executing under pressure, isn't it? Everybody knows that, and I think this team has been well known for doing that really, really well," Hopkinson said.

"It's an incredibly skillful team, a very talented team, but at key moments in certain situations, we haven't executed under pressure like we normally do."

