

Tigresses back to drawing board after heavy defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

The possibility of Bangladesh suffering a big margin defeat against the reigning world champions Australia, despite playing on home conditions, was in the offing. Yet, when the visitors were pegged back to four down for 48 in the morning, it might have ignited hopes in the Bangladesh dressing room that something historic may happen in the first of three ODIs at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

However, while the lower-order helped the Aussies get to a really challenging score, of 213 for seven, the Tigresses lost their last eight wickets for just 25 runs to get bundled out for 95, suffering a 118-run loss.

Earlier, Sultana Khatun, Marufa Akter and Nahida Akter gave the hosts a bright start with the ball. Once Fahima Khatun bagged Beth Mooney after a resilient 64-ball 25, leaving Australia at 78 for five, the tail-up Tigresses looked under control.

Eventually, an unbeaten 67-run eighth-wicket stand off 56 deliveries by Annabel Sutherland's 58 and Alana King's stormy 46 – who hit Fahima for four sixes and a four as the innings' final over yielded 29 runs, becoming the most expensive one in women's ODI – took the game out of Bangladesh's control. But the 30-odd partnerships in the middle of the innings was where Bangladesh lost their stronghold and momentum as a consequence.

"I felt, the bowling was a bit bad if you are asking about the difference between the two sides. I feel our bowlers are



capable of better showing," Bangladesh spinner Nahida Akter said at the post-match press conference.

Nahida, however, was not willing to concede that the 29-run over sent them on the backfoot.

"No, it's part of cricket. Some days it goes well, some days not so much. Overall, during our bowling innings, they got set in the middle of the innings and built a good partnership. If we could break that partnership, the scenario would have changed.

"Of course, they [Australia] have the experience, but we were bowling here and there, which is why they were playing easily," she said, adding that the three run outs had derailed their chase.

Nahida's two wickets for a miserly 27 runs in 10 overs enabled her in surpassing Salma Khatun's 52 dismissals to become the highest wicket-taker for Bangladesh in women's ODIs, but she was not focusing on records.

"Of course, we will work on our shortcomings and discuss them, in order to come back in the next match," she added.

On the winning camp, Alana King said that the seven-time world champions got the drift early on how to bat in these kinds of tracks.

"I think the top order did a really good job, assessing the conditions really early and communicated that back to the dressing room," King said.

Bangladesh will now be eager to come back in the series, just like they did against India last year, knowing full well that the basics such as fielding and picking the right time to attack, with either bat or ball, would be key against the all-conquering Australia in their first tour in the country.

Bangladesh are yet to win a Test against Sri Lanka at home.

In 24 Tests against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh lost 18, and drew 5, with their only win against the opponents coming back in 2017 in Colombo.

Bangladesh's two-match Test series, beginning with the first match in Sylhet today, will be part of the latest cycle of the World Test Championship. The Tigers are currently fourth in the standings with one win and one loss from two matches.

This will only be the third Test to be played at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. In the first Test at this venue, Bangladesh suffered a 151-run loss against Zimbabwe in 2018. However, the Tigers recorded a memorable 150-run win over New Zealand in the other game here last year in November.



Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha backed Liton Das to get amongst the runs in red-ball cricket as the star opener has been going through a lean patch in the shorter formats for a while now. Liton will definitely hope to repay the coach's faith in the first of the two-Test series against Sri Lanka in Sylhet today. [Inset] Meanwhile, Sri Lanka coach Chris Silverwood and skipper Dhananjaya de Silva were seen inspecting the surface of the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

PITCH IMPRESSION



"The pitch is a little bit different. The last one [against New Zealand last year] was bare without much grass. This one has a tinge of green grass. Weather will be a factor in this game."

BANGLADESH COACH CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA

"It looks green, I think; we will have a look at it tomorrow. But for now, it looks green."

SRI LANKA CAPTAIN DHANANJAYA DE SILVA

A battle between youth and experience

EKUSH TAPADER from Sylhet

The first thing Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha and captain Najmul Hossain Shanto did after arriving at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday morning was to rush to the middle and take a closer look at the pitch.

Later, pace bowling coach Andre Adams also joined them and together they picked the brains of the pitch curator Tony Hemming about how the greenish surface would play.

As they walked back, Adams was showing the coach and captain how much the ball could bounce on the pitch with his hand gestures and Hathurusingha later told the media that he expects the pitch to be starkly different to the one that was used against New Zealand last year, a match the Tigers won.

The weather was overcast in Sylhet yesterday with some rain at noon. The condition is likely to remain the same today and this probability will be a factor in selecting playing elevens.

Given the conditions, there is a strong possibility that Bangladesh will play three pacers. Shoriful Islam, who played all six matches in the white-ball series, reached Sylhet yesterday and didn't train.

Even though Shoriful is not

injured, his absence from training could mean the management is thinking about resting him for the first Test to manage his workload.

If he doesn't play, Bangladesh could end up debuting two pacers in the match - Mushfik Hasan and Nahid Rana - hinted Hathurusingha.

"They are both exciting prospects for Bangladesh. They can both bowl 140km/h plus. They are very young. They are strong boys. They made good starts to their first-class careers. They bowled lots of overs. I am looking forward to seeing one of them playing in this game, if not both," the coach said at the pre-match press conference.

Khaled Ahmed, the most experienced pacer in the Bangladesh squad with 12 matches, is almost certain to play.

Pacer Nahid is being hyped up as Bangladesh's surprise package and yesterday, the 21-year-old gave another proof of his express pace when his delivery stung Zakir Hasan's left index finger and caused it to bleed, forcing the left-hander to leave the nets and ice his wound.

Coach Hathurusingha, who spent most of the day inside the dressing room doing last minute homework for the series, was caught unaware of Zakir's incident.

If Zakir's wound keeps him from

playing the match, Shadman Islam is likely to replace him.

There is a gulf of difference between the two teams in terms of experience, which became even more pronounced due to Mushfikur Rahim's absence from the series owing to injury.

The entire Bangladesh squad have played 270 Tests, while the Sri Lanka squad has the combined experience of 491 Tests. Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews alone has played 107 Tests.

Hathurusingha also acknowledged the gap in experience, saying, "We understand that SL has an experienced batting line-up. Couple of the guys maybe have over 100 Tests. We are up to the challenge.

Mominul Haque (59), Liton Das (39) and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (25) are the three most experienced players in the Bangladesh camp and will have to shoulder a lot of the responsibility.

Mushfikur's replacement Towhid Hridoy joined the team yesterday evening but is unlikely to get a start with Shahadat Hossain Dipu, who has played just two Tests, the front-runner to take the veteran's place in the batting order. Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam are likely to be Bangladesh's two spinners in the match, with Nayeem Islam having to sit out.

Mashrafe gets fifer on return to action

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza picked up a five-wicket haul for Legends of Rugganj against Gazi Tyres Cricketers in his return to action in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) in BKSP yesterday.

Sent in to bat, Gazi were skittled out for just 136, courtesy of Mashrafe's 5 for 19 in eight overs. Rugganj chased down the target in 28 overs with six wickets in hand.

Mashrafe could play just five matches in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) before he had to leave the tournament due to political engagements.

Although he was still bowling with a shortened run-up, he still troubled the batters with his accurate line and length along with some movement.

It was Mashrafe's eighth List A five-wicket haul with only Abdur Razzak ahead of him amongst Bangladesh bowlers with nine five-wicket hauls.

At the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Robiul Haque picked up two wickets for 12 runs after making 11-ball 21 as Shinepukur Cricket Club (224) defeated Gazi Tyres Cricket Academy (151) by 73 runs.

Shinepukur's Rishad Hossain, the new sensation in Bangladesh cricket after his blazing knocks against Sri Lanka, contributed eight runs and picked up three wickets for 27 runs. Mohammedan Sporting Club (188-6) beat Partex Sporting Club (187 all out) in BKSP, courtesy of Mahidul Islam Ankon's unbeaten 96-ball 70.



Can Mustafizur bring the fizz back in CSK colours?

STAR SPORTS DESK

Chennai Super Kings will begin their Indian Premier League (IPL) title defence against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in what could be MS Dhoni's final year in the lucrative Twenty20 competition after he stepped down as captain on Thursday.

India's World Cup-winning skipper Dhoni, who had knee surgery last year, handed over the captaincy to batter Ruturaj Gaikwad ahead of Friday's opener.

While India and Chennai fans might find it a bit odd to see Dhoni without the captain's armband, Bangladesh fans will be excited at the prospect of seeing the Tigers' ace pacer Mustafizur Rahman in new colours in IPL.

This will be the seventh season in the IPL for Mustafizur, who played for the Sunrisers Hyderabad, Mumbai Indians, Rajasthan Royals, and the Delhi Capitals in the previous season. He was roped in by CSK for his base price of Rs 2 crore in the auction last year.

Mustafizur suffered cramps and was unable to bowl his full quota of 10 overs in Bangladesh's final ODI against Sri Lanka in Chattogram last Monday. Thankfully, it was not anything serious as the pacer joined his CSK side on March 20, as per schedule, and also practised at the nets ahead of the opener.

With CSK's only other overseas pacer, Sri Lanka's Matheesha Pathirana, out

with a hamstring injury for at least the first few matches, Mustafizur could as well make his debut for Chennai today.

Mustafizur had a torrid time in the shortest format recently as he was dropped from the first two Sri Lanka ODIs after underperforming in the prior three match T20I series in Sylhet. He had conceded runs north of 10 an over in each of the matches and could scalp just a solitary wicket in the series.

However, Mustafizur bowled well when he was recalled to the eleven in the final ODI against Sri Lanka. He scalped two crucial wickets and was tight with his line and length, returning economical figures of two for 39 in nine overs that also included a maiden.

Mustafizur played only twice for Delhi Capitals in 2023, a stark contrast considering his debut season in 2016 with Sunrisers Hyderabad and his 2021 season with Rajasthan Royals.

The left-arm pacer helped Sunrisers win their only title in 2016 and became the first overseas player to have won the 'Emerging Player of Tournament' award following a stellar campaign in which he scalped 17 wickets in 16 games.

He was also a constant feature for Rajasthan in the 2021 season, playing 14 matches and taking as many wickets in that season for the side.

IPL remains a platform where Mustafizur has already shown his calibre.



But the fluctuating nature of his form in recent times means that the 28-year-old will have to capitalise on every opportunity that comes his way.

If given a nod, Mustafizur will hope to help his new IPL outfit to a positive start all the while cementing his place in the squad before Pathirana returns from injury as that would go a long way in determining what sort of role the pacer will play in this season's IPL and how much of him could be seen in the lucrative T20 league.

India and Royal Challengers Bengaluru's star batter Virat Kohli is the highest run-getter in IPL history, scoring 7263 runs in 229 innings. Shikhar Dhawan, David Warner, Rohit Sharma, and Suresh Raina chronologically follow Kohli on the list. However, among the top five run-getters, Kohli is the only one yet to win an IPL trophy.

Mumbai Indians opener Rohit Sharma's 257 sixes in 237 innings is the highest by any current IPL player in the tournament. Sharma, however, is second in the list of most sixes in IPL, behind Chris Gayle who has hit 357 sixes in 141 innings.

The 17th edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) will see a few significant changes in rules:

The bowlers would enjoy the luxury of bowling two bouncers every over as opposed to only one allowed in earlier seasons.

IPL 2024 will also unveil the Smart Replay System which bypasses the need for a TV broadcast director as an intermediary and helps umpire direct access to a wider array of visuals, including split-screen images.

However, there will be no stop clock rule in the IPL, a recent change in the ICC playing conditions which has been made permanent in white-ball international games.

SHORT CORNER

Hosts France get kind Olympic draw

Thierry Henry's France side are firm favourites to progress following a kind group draw for men's football at the 2024 Olympic Games on Wednesday, as the hosts wait to see if Kylian Mbappe will be made available. Les Bleus are in Group A of the 16-team tournament with New Zealand, USA and the winners of the AFC-CAF play-off, as they seek to win a second Olympic gold after success in 1984.

Robinho must serve rape sentence in Brazil, court says

Brazilian judges ruled on Wednesday to uphold former AC Milan and Brazil striker Robinho's rape conviction, adding that he must serve his nine-year prison sentence in Brazil. The trial in Brazil's Superior Court of Justice (STJ), the country's top court for non-constitutional matters, had a majority rule that Italy's decision was valid in Brazil.

Palestine FA urges FIFA sanctions against Israel

The Palestine Football Association has called on football's international governing body, FIFA, to sanction Israeli teams over the war in Gaza. The PFA asked for its proposal, which it said six other member nations had endorsed, to be on the agenda at FIFA's upcoming congress in May. Israel's football association on Wednesday responded to the petition by saying it had "always followed FIFA regulations and always will."