

Aussie losses 'warning sign ahead of WC'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty was left a frustrated figure after her side succumbed to an eight-wicket defeat in the third and final ODI against Australia in Mirpur yesterday, leading to the world champions attaining a clean sweep of the series in their maiden Bangladesh tour.

The visitors cut through Bangladesh's home advantage factor to reveal many deficiencies.

"I am totally surprised because we have not played this kind of cricket in the last six months," Joty said at the post-match press.

"You can accept mistakes in one or two areas, but the whole team played differently; and that put us on the back foot. We could not perform 10 percent close to our ability," Joty added.

Opting to bowl, the Alyssa Healy-led side were on point from the onset. Standout bowler Kim Garth claimed three wickets, conceding 11 runs from seven overs, as Bangladesh were skittled out for 89 — producing a worse display than the first two ODIs — before the seven-time world champions chased down the target inside 19 overs.

Joty believes that they were behind mentally after the first loss. "When we got out below 100 runs in the opening game, from that point, everyone was thinking that it would be tough for us; and it got into our heads," she said.

The Tigresses bagged important wins recently, against India and Pakistan at home, while also recording first away T20I and ODI wins in South Africa. Australia, however, proved to be a different beast.

"We need to do better in certain areas — and that is good for us — because this is a warning sign ahead of the [T20] World Cup and we cannot proceed this way... otherwise we will have the same result against a big team," Joty concluded.

SHAKIB'S EXPERIENCE 'will benefit' wounded Tigers

EKUSH TAPADER

Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan had a decent tune-up before joining the Bangladesh Test squad in Chattogram, where the bruised Tigers will play their second and final Test against Sri Lanka on March 30.

The ace all-rounder performed quite admirably with the ball in his first two outings in the ongoing Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League for Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club, but his batting left a lot to be desired, having scored 19 and 34 runs, respectively.

Shakib, however, returned to his elements just when it was most needed ahead of the series finale — the seasoned campaigner striking 53 off 65 balls and scalping two wickets for only 14 runs in nine overs in a decisive show against Gazi Group Cricketers on Wednesday — as the hosts will be hoping for much-improved batting after their dismal performance in the preceding Sylhet Test.

Amid a sporting wicket at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side suffered a heavy 328-run defeat, with the top-order batters becoming the main culprits



- Shakib boasts 4454 runs and 233 wickets in 66 Tests, with a batting average of 39.07 and bowling strike-rate of 63.41.
- He took only nine wickets in his last five Tests, going wicketless in four innings, while he hit four half-centuries to amass 351 runs at an average of 37.89.
- He is now ranked third in the list of Test all-rounders.
- Shakib holds the record for most wickets taken at Chattogram's Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, with 64 in 19 Tests.

behind the below-par showing.

Shakib, who last played a Test against Ireland in April last year and did not take part in any longer version domestic cricket ever since, had initially opted to skip the Sri Lanka series. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) did not hesitate to give him a break as he had been suffering with an eye problem — evident during the

recently concluded Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

However, once the 37-year-old cricketer expressed his desire to get back in red-ball format after a gap, the selectors promptly included him in the second Test squad.

Former national captain Mohammad Ashraful reckons that Shakib's inclusion

will bolster the Tigers' squad, irrespective of the length of time he was absent from the red ball cricket, especially when Bangladesh is missing the service of fellow veteran Mushfiqur Rahim.

"He [Shakib Al Hasan] is not completely out of touch. He batted well in BPL and DPL [Dhaka Premier League]. He scored fifty today. He has vast experience, and so the team will benefit from his inclusion," Ashraful told The Daily Star yesterday.

In his last Test, Shakib scored 87 runs and took two wickets against Ireland, and before that he played a two-match series against India, where he scored 116 runs and claimed six wickets.

Ashraful, however, emphasized more importance on Shakib's experience rather than the numbers, reminding that Shakib's inclusion gives Bangladesh the cushion to play an extra batter at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

"Bangladesh batsmen failed to handle the initial movement of the Kookaburra ball. It becomes easy when the ball gets older, but unfortunately Bangladesh failed to reach that position. I think, in this regard, Shakib's experience can be handy for the entire batting unit," explained Ashraful.

Cabrera losing Salahuddin's trust?

ATIQU ANAM

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin blamed the head coach and his support staff following the men's team's back-to-back defeats against Palestine, which all but ended Bangladesh's journey in the World Cup Qualifiers.

The BFF boss watched from the VIP Box of the Bashundhara Kings Arena on Tuesday as Bangladesh conceded a stoppage time goal in a 1-0 home loss against the Middle Eastern nation, five days after being thrashed 5-0 by the same side in Kuwait.

The defeat left Javier Cabrera's charges bottom of Group I with a single point from four matches. Australia clinched one of the two spots for qualification with 12 points. Palestine are in pole position to secure the other spot with seven points while Lebanon sit third with two points.

While Tuesday's was a much-improved performance from the Men in Red and Green compared to the drubbing in Kuwait, the BFF boss was visibly frustrated with the result as the hosts relinquished an opportunity to earn a valuable point.

"I think there were a lot of technical mistakes from the team management," Salahuddin told reporters after the game, adding that he was pleased with the players' effort.

"The results in these two matches are due to technical mistakes by the management. I cannot answer this, the coach has to answer," Salahuddin said, in reply to a question regarding the coach's



game plan and team selection.

The team selection and substitutions in both games have been questioned by the local media and fans.

Bangladesh played the first game against Palestine with a high-line defence and used right back Bishwanath Ghosh at the left centre-back position and Isa Faisal as a left-back. The left side of the defence was exposed time and again by the opposition team and the organisation broke down completely once the first goal was conceded after 43 minutes. Both Bishwanath and Isa were taken off during the second half, but by then the game had gone beyond Bangladesh's reach.

A respected local coach said that he felt there was no use in having a contingency plan for the team, especially in the away match, once their initial plan had failed.

In Tuesday's game, there was no place in the starting eleven for Isa while Bishwanath went back to his usual right-back position, and Bangladesh fared much better in defence as well as in creating opportunities.

However, the decision to bring on Mehedi Hasan Srabon in place of injured Mitul Marma under the bar shortly before the goal, with experienced Anisur Rahman Zico sitting in the dugout, raised a few eyebrows.

"The performance was much better today but maybe a bit of lapse in concentration in the end cost us the game. However, I thought Zico could have played ahead of Mitul and Srabon given his physical stature and maturity of playing big international and domestic matches," the local coach, on condition of anonymity, said in his assessment.

Cabrera, though, defended his tactical decisions. "The result won't reflect the performance of the team, and how we have progressed. We shouldn't start making decisions based only on results against strong teams like Palestine, Lebanon, and Australia," the Spaniard said when asked about his reaction to what Salahuddin had said.

It is not the first time that Cabrera's team selection has caused surprise and it is not the first time that Salahuddin openly questioned the coach's decision-making, even as the Spaniard was handed a one-year extension, for the second time last December.

When contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, Salahuddin declined to comment on his remarks from Tuesday, saying: "I don't want to drag this further. I will sit with the coach in a week."

It is believed that Cabrera's rigidity in sticking to his decisions and not being swayed by outside opinion is a major sticking point towards him completing his tenure. However, whether BFF will go for any extreme measures, especially following the bitter ramifications of sacking Jamie Day two years ago, remains to be seen.

Hridoy ton keeps Abahani on top

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club went third on the Dhaka Premier League table with a one-run win via DLS method over Prime Bank yesterday at BKSP Ground 4.

Prime Bank's Tamim Iqbal struck an 83-ball 65 while in-form opener Parvez Hossain struck his third DPL ton this season, notching a 111-ball 110. Shabbir Rahman struck 39 as well but after the 122-run opening stand and the 96-run third-wicket stand, wickets fell regularly as Prime Bank managed 279 all out.

Despite a poor start to the chase, Mahidul Ankon's 78 along with Ariful Islam's 45 stabilised the innings. With the DLS coming into play in the 33rd over, the match was reduced to 47 overs as Mahmudullah Riyad's 33-ball 42 and Abu Hider's 36-ball 54 saw Mohammedan win with a last-ball boundary.

Sheikh Jamal won by 39 runs as per DLS method against Gazi Group Cricketers in another rain-interrupted game at BKSP Ground 3.

Shakib Al Hasan's 65-ball 53 and Ziaur Rahman's 44-ball 55 helped Sheikh Jamal post 233 all out. The revised target of 232 from 45 overs came into effect during the 30th over of Gazi's chase but they only managed 192 all out as Mrittunjoy Chowdhury bagged three and Shakib picked two wickets for 14 runs.

Table-toppers Abahani romped to a 140-run win over Rugganj Tigers at Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah. Towhid Hridoy blazed an 84-ball 125 while Jaker Ali struck 78 as Abahani posted 320 for four. In reply, Rugganj were bowled out for 180 with Mohammad Saifuddin scalping two while spinners Nahidul Islam and Mosaddek Hossain bagged three each.



It was a special occasion for Real Madrid-bound Endrick, who marked his first appearance at Santiago Bernabeu — home of Real Madrid — with his second goal for Brazil in as many appearances as the Selecao bounced back twice to snatch a 3-3 draw in a heated and entertaining friendly against Spain on Tuesday. [Top inset] Meanwhile, Jude Bellingham struck in stoppage time to earn an impressive England 2-2 draw in a friendly with Belgium at Wembley. [Bottom inset] Angel Di Maria also scored, from a freekick, as reigning world champions Argentina, missing injured captain Lionel Messi, wrapped up their two-match tour of the United States with a deserved 3-1 victory over Costa Rica in a friendly at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

PHOTO: REUTERS

PATIENCE & HOPE key as Georgia make history

AGENCIES

Georgia qualified for Euro 2024 on Tuesday, winning their play-off against Greece 4-2 on penalties after a 0-0 draw at the end of extra time to advance to their first-ever major tournament finals.

Nika Kvekveskiri stroked in the decisive penalty in the shootout to spark a pitch invasion from fans at the Boris Paichadze Stadium in Tbilisi after Tasos Bakasetas and Giorgos Giakoumakis both failed to score from the spot for Greece, who won the 2004 Euro.

Georgia coach, former France international Willy Sagnol pointed out how basic qualities like patience helped them to cement a spot in the 2024 Euro.

"It is gratifying when you get results, but you need a lot of patience and hope. We practised a lot on penalties. Sometimes things work out, sometimes they don't, that's why patience is necessary," Sagnol said after the match.

Ranked 77th in the world, Georgia will join Turkey, Portugal and the Czech Republic in Group F at the European Championship in Germany in June.

It will be their first appearance at a major tournament since the country in the Caucasus of 3.7 million people gained independence from the

Soviet Union in 1991.

Meanwhile, war-torn Ukraine guaranteed qualification by beating Iceland 2-1, delivering an emotional boost to the country ravaged by the Russian invasion of February 2022.

Second-half strikes from Viktor Tsygankov and Mykhailo Mudryk turned around the game for Serhiy Rebrov's side, who trailed at the break following Albert Gudmundsson's sublime opener.

The 26-year-old slalom away from two Ukrainian defenders before feeding a perfectly placed curling effort with his left foot beyond the reach of Ukraine's Andriy Lunin from 25 yards in the 30th minute.

Iceland were on top in the final quarter until Mudryk found space 18 yards out and swept

Heorhiy Sudakov's lay-off into the far corner of the goal with just six minutes remaining on the clock. In Cardiff, Poland beat Wales on penalties to qualify for the Euros. The match ended 0-0 at full-time and there were no goals either in extra time, which ended with Wales having Chris Mepham sent off for a second booking.

A high-quality shoot-out, which began with Robert Lewandowski converting Poland's first kick, saw nine successful penalties before Daniel James had his effort saved and Wales lost 5-4.

