

The veiled concerns over Shanto's waning form

EKUSH TAPADER from Chattogram

The discussions over Liton Das's struggles with the bat has almost overshadowed the waning form of skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, whose lack of big scores and poor strike rate in Twenty20 Internationals should be a matter of concern for Bangladesh heading into next month's T20 World Cup.

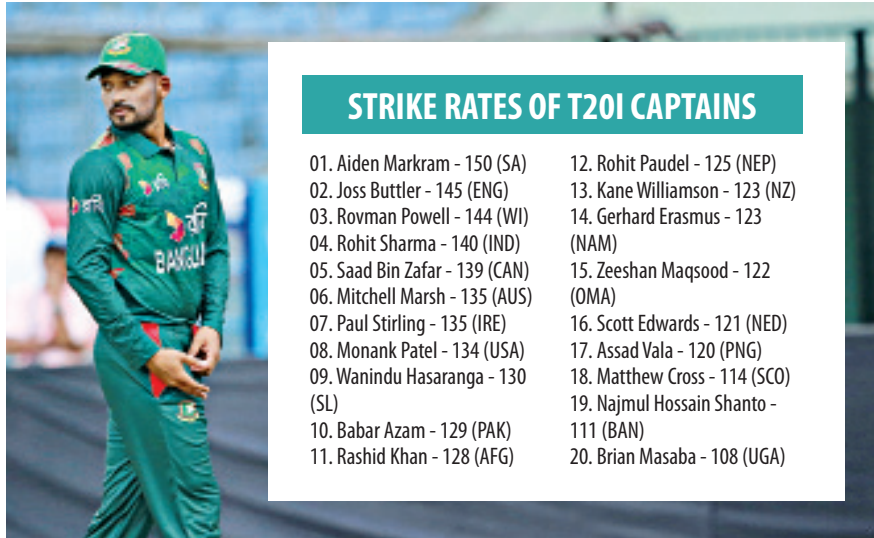
Batting at No.3, Shanto presumably plays the anchor role for the Tigers in T20Is. But even as an anchor, his strike rate of 111.05 is not in line with the demands of the modern game.

Shanto's strike rate is the second lowest among all captains of the 20-team T20 World Cup, barring the Uganda skipper Brian Masaba (108), who is a bowling all-rounder.

Moreover, to be considered a successful anchor, one has to score consistently with the bat, something Shanto has struggled to do in the shortest format in recent times.

In 33 T20Is, Shanto has accumulated 731 runs at an average of 26.40. However, in his last 12 innings, he has made just 185 runs at an average of 18.50 and strike rate of 106.32.

The Bangladesh captain has scored



just one half century in this period, an unbeaten 38-ball 53 against Sri Lanka in Sylhet.

Shanto could not get going in the first two T20Is against Zimbabwe as well, making 21 off 24 and 16 off 15 in the two matches respectively, leaving the team vulnerable while chasing on both occasions.

On Monday, team's assistant coach Nic Pothas spoke to the media before conducting a training session with fast bowling coach Andre Adams, batting coach David Hemp and spin bowling coach Mushtaq Ahmed where Soumya Sarkar and the squad members, who weren't picked for the first two matches, attended.

Pothas dismissed any concern with Shanto's batting while heaping praises on him for his captaincy.

"Absolutely not. He's playing fantastically well," Pothas told the media at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram.

"What's been the most impressive thing about him is how he has captained this group and how he has led this group... For a young captain, I think he has been very, very courageous, very brave in the way he has run this group, and you'll see the benefit of that in the future," he added.

Pothas also said that if Shanto bats for a long period, he has the ability to make up for his slow start.

"His strike rate is immaterial because if he goes through, that strike rate then goes through the roof. So, it's probably a case of when he gets to that point."

There are still three matches to go in the series where Shanto is likely to get opportunities to get some runs under his belt. With the team leading 2-0 in the five-match series, captain Shanto now needs to come good with the bat in hand, set an example for his teammates and head into the T20 World Cup, his first major test as skipper, with confidence.



Even though the winners of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) had already been decided, with Abahani clinching the title about a week ago, Prime Bank Cricket Club pacer Rejaur Rahman Raja yesterday made history as he claimed the best-ever figures by a Bangladeshi in List A cricket to help his side seal a clinical 199-run win over Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in Fatullah. Breaking the record of medium pacer Yeasin Arafat, who had claimed 8-40 for Gazi Group Cricketers against Abahani in 2018, Raja claimed 8-23 in 6.3 overs to bundle out Sheikh Jamal for a mere 71 in 21.3 overs after Prime Bank had posted 270. PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Tigresses rue lack of intent

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh women's cricket team once again displayed a meek batting performance, lacking intent in helpful conditions and suffered yet another heavy defeat to their Indian counterparts in the penultimate match of the five-match Twenty20 International series in Sylhet yesterday.

In a rain-interrupted match at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, India posted 122-6 in their 14 overs with skipper Harmanpreet Kaur top scoring with 39 off 26 balls.

The Tigresses could only reach 68-7, chasing a revised target of 125 in 14 overs, suffering a 56-run defeat in DLS.

Only three batters - Dilara Akter (21 off 13 balls), Rubya Haider (13 off 17) and Shorifa Khatun (11 not out off 11) - made it to double-figures for the hosts as the Tigresses suffered a fourth straight defeat in the series and eighth in a row overall in T20Is.

Bangladesh didn't show any intent at the top to chase down the target, scoring just 21 runs for the loss of one wicket in their four-over Powerplay.

India, on the other hand, had raced to 48-2 in the first 5.5 overs, before rain stopped play for over one-and-a-half hours.

Skipper Nigar Sultana Joty, who made just one, rued the lack of intent from the batting unit.

"In this kind of rain interrupted matches, you have to get runs in the Powerplay. We played way too many dots as a batting unit," Joty said in the post-match presentation ceremony yesterday. "We lack in intent. Obviously, we showed some intent in the last overs through Shorifa. We need to play bravely and with intent."

Papon laughs off Shakib's remarks on WC preparation

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan's remarks that playing Zimbabwe in a T20 series was not adequate preparation for upcoming the T20 World Cup had caused quite a bit of stir. Yesterday, BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon said that he felt Shakib was just joking since if he was focusing on those finer points, he would be playing the Zimbabwe series instead of the Dhaka Premier League.

"It will be wrong if we consider our performance against Zimbabwe and the USA while thinking about the World Cup," Shakib had said on Saturday.

After Abahani lifted their 23rd Dhaka Premier League title on Monday, the BCB president had to field questions regarding preparations.

"The series we are playing against Zimbabwe is in T20 format as well. Before that we played the BPL and that was competitive. We also played a full series against Sri Lanka. Still preparation is needed. I think what he said, he did so whimsically. If he [Shakib] did it [seriously], he could have played the T20s [against Zimbabwe] but he is playing one-day [in DPL]. I think he was joking," Papon told the media.

The BCB president also denied the notion that the series against Zimbabwe, which the Tigers currently lead 2-0, was being seen as preparation for the World Cup.

Shakib had argued that their preparations for the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia had been better and the team reaped the rewards in the tournament. Bangladesh had played New Zealand and Pakistan in a tri-nation series before that World Cup in Australia. Papon felt that the series against Zimbabwe was not

preparation for the World Cup.

"The series against Zimbabwe is not preparation for the World Cup. It's part of the FTP schedule and should I hand them [Zimbabwe] points in a series which is in FTP? There is no relation. Regarding the games against USA, we want to play in those conditions to adjust to the wicket and everything," the BCB president said.

There had been an idea brewing during the latter stages of the DPL Super League that the rest of the matches be held in T20 format. Shakib had also said on Saturday that the Super League phase could have been played in T20 format.

The need for a separate T20 format had been felt due to the national team's performances in the format. Papon renounced the idea that a List A tournament can suddenly change format and also identified what problems the board would face in arranging a separate T20 tournament alongside BPL.

"It will have to be done by BCB and I don't think the clubs will be interested. I don't think franchises would be interested either. Stating simply, in our country, when national team players are not involved, the clubs or franchises are not interested. There could be separate tournament for them and that would be a good thing but there is no opportunity for national team players because of the schedule. Already I feel that they are facing a lot of pressure.

"In other countries, when national team players don't play, nothing happens," Papon concluded.

However, given how Bangladesh are faring at the moment, questions will be asked about the preparations going forward.



Mbappe and PSG aim to seize moment

Paris Saint-Germain are bidding to overturn a 1-0 first-leg deficit and beat Borussia Dortmund in their Champions League semifinal return match Tuesday, with the aim of bringing the curtain down on the Kylian Mbappe era at the club in the final at Wembley.

The only time PSG managed to qualify for the final was in 2020 when they lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich behind closed doors. Meanwhile, Borussia Dortmund played the Champions League final twice - winning the trophy against Juventus in 1997 and losing to arch-rivals Bayern Munich in 2013.

Kylian Mbappe has managed 32 direct goal involvements in the 31 home games he's started in this competition (21 goals, 11 assists).

PSG have only failed to score in two of their last 38 home games in the Champions League (93 goals scored in this run).

Mbappe has 48 goals in the Champions League and Tuesday's second leg against Dortmund would be the ideal time for him to bring up the half-century.



The flamboyant football romantic

AFP, Buenos Aires

Cesar Luis Menotti, who led a dashing Argentina team to victory in the 1978 World Cup, has died aged 85, the country's football federation announced on Sunday.

Menotti, who was born in Rosario, Argentina, in 1938, won 11 caps for Argentina in the 1960s and then managed 11 clubs, some more than once, and two national teams in a coaching career that lasted 37 years.

He is best remembered for leading Argentina to the 1978 World Cup and the under-20 title the following year and for his commitment to a romantic ideal of football when Argentina had a reputation for approach straying

World Cup defeated the extra-time with tournament twice against Johan Cruyff, play in the

The triumph was accomplished with flair but was surrounded by controversy. Many felt Argentina's repressive junta made it an unsuitable host.

Menotti also opted not to pick 17-year-old phenomenon Diego Maradona, who had made his international debut the year before.

"I did what I thought I had to do. To take care of him more than anything else, I was infatuated with Diego," Menotti told El Grafico. "He was so young, so small."

In the second group phase, Argentina kicked off their last game shortly after the final whistle in Brazil's victory over Poland, knowing they needed to beat Peru by at least three goals to reach the final.

They won 6-0 with Kempes and Leopoldo Luque each scoring twice. Even though Argentina played well, the victory has long attracted suspicion.

Menotti, fondly known as the "Thin One", presented a memorable figure on the touchline, smoking and staring impassively from under his shaggy mane.

"I never go to the barber. I cut my own hair," he said. Even though his father died of cancer when Menotti was 16, he too became a heavy smoker. It was "my friend in loneliness," he said. He quit after a lung operation in 2011.

In 1979, with Maradona in the squad, Menotti led Argentina to the under-20 World Cup, beating the Soviet Union 3-1 in the final.

His reign ended after the 1982 World Cup in Spain, which kicked off just before Argentina surrendered in the Falklands War. Argentina were eliminated by Brazil 3-1 in a second-round defeat that ended with Maradona being sent off.

Menotti won two cups in two seasons with Barcelona, the last trophies in a coaching career that took him to Italy, Mexico and Uruguay and back to Argentina.

He maintained a lifelong feud with coaches in the more pragmatic Argentine tradition and believed football styles are political.

"Left-wing football is generous and committed only to the public," he told German magazine Kicker in 2006. "It is sincere and does not put the result above everything."

Menotti, a striker, started his playing career with the club he supported, Rosario Central.

Menotti became national manager in 1974 and, despite being a member of the Communist Party, stayed on when the military seized power in 1976.

In 2018, he told El Grafico, an Argentine sports magazine, that "it was better to fight from the inside than from the outside".

