

SHAKIB, FIZZ

key in Bangladesh's bid to turn fortunes

NABID YEASIN

Ardent followers of Bangladesh cricket might laugh out at the notion that there still lies signs of positivity in the Tigers' recent run of form, especially now that the Test-playing nation have hit the nadir in the shortest format with a deserved series loss to associates USA in the build-up to the ICC T20 World Cup.

However, when trying to map out the chances of how far a team could go in the upcoming T20 mega event, there actually is one thing -- at least statistically -- that propels Bangladesh ahead of most nations. Bangladesh boast a 60 percent win ratio in their last 10 T20Is, a figure that is only bettered by India (70 percent) and matched by Australia.

But in reality, Bangladesh are probably the one team that would not be able to take anything positive even from the positive signs -- the few that could now be unearthed -- into the showpiece T20 event.

While it goes without mentioning that Bangladesh's pedigree in all formats is far off from India and Australia, both of whom will be heading to the USA and the West Indies as title contenders, the Tigers now find themselves fearing yet another subpar outing in the T20 World Cup.

However, if Bangladesh are to recover from the slump, two of their leading performers in T20s -- star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and ace left-arm paceman Mustafizur Rahman -- would need to be at their very best.

Shakib and Mustafizur are the two faces that had the most impact in imprinting Bangladesh's presence in the ever-evolving global T20 landscape -- with them playing almost regularly in lucrative franchise-based T20 tournaments around the world, including the Indian Premier League, the highest revenue-generating project in this regard.

Mustafizur, especially, comes fresh off a successful stint in the recently concluded 17th edition of IPL. The left-arm pacer's 14 wickets



in nine matches for Chennai Super Kings (CSK) this season is only bettered by his best-ever showing in the tournament -- 17 wickets in 16 matches -- that came in his maiden IPL appearance in 2016 and had helped Sunrisers Hyderabad win their only title.

With Mustafizur recalled for national duty -- a reality that was deemed as 'disappointing' by CSK coach Stephen Fleming -- compounded by a few injuries and unavailability of other key players, the joint record five-time IPL winners failed to make it

to the playoffs for only the third time in the tournament's history despite winning half of their matches this season.

While Mustafizur was a party to Bangladesh's horrendous failure in defending 54 runs off the final four overs that led to the Tigers losing their first-ever T20I played against a feeble USA last month, he did outperform himself with a record six-wicket haul in the third and final T20I.

Although it was in a dead rubber and against a USA side missing four key players,

Mustafizur setting a new benchmark for bowling excellence in Bangladesh cricket -- his six for 10 in four overs now being the best-ever bowling figure and the only instance of a six-wicket haul by a Bangladeshi -- will not only act as a morale boost for the player but should also give Bangladesh hopes of seeing the ace pacer carrying on his form into the T20 World Cup.

While Mustafizur's performance with the ball in hand, especially in the death overs, would go a long way in Bangladesh's ability

to restrict teams to a total that they find comfortable chasing, it is the experience and the big-name stature of Shakib that would determine at what stage Bangladesh could eventually end up in the T20 mega event.

Shakib, who has been at the summit of all-rounder rankings in at least any of the three formats for the most part of the past decade, had recently been knocked off that pedestal when he was pipped by Sri Lanka's leg-spinning all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga.

The poster boy of Bangladesh, Shakib, has also been far from his usual self with the bat in hand -- his last fifty in T20Is coming back in October 2022, against Pakistan in a tri-nation series including hosts New Zealand.

How Shakib managed to chop one onto his stumps, failing to help Bangladesh to coast to a win when 20 was needed off just 18 deliveries with four wickets in hand in the second T20I against the USA last month raised a lot of questions as to how much he is now invested in the Tigers' stake at any stage of a game.

His quirky replies following that game, including his blatant admission of 'not knowing what's going wrong with the team', only added to those burning queries regarding the current elected lawmaker of Bangladesh.

But come tournament time, when Shakib is involved in the team, a lot of hopes for the side unsurprisingly hinge on the all-rounder. This time will be no different and Shakib will need to be much more involved with the side that has gone into the T20 World Cup under a young captain in Najmul Hossain Shanto and with a number of youngsters like Towhid Hridoy, Tanzid Tamim, Rishad Hossain, Jaker Ali and Shoriful Islam all of whom would largely benefit from the all-rounder's experience in such a grand stage.

The omens might not be all good for Bangladesh, but if there is some hope, it is that both Shakib and Mustafizur would be able to make their presence felt come June 8, when the Tigers open their World Cup campaign against Sri Lanka in Dallas.

MEET THE T20 WORLD CUP 2024 CAPTAINS



INDIA
ROHIT SHARMA

Skipper Rohit Sharma believes India's powerful middle order can end their global title drought at this T20 World Cup. India have not secured a global title since the 2013 Champions Trophy.



PAKISTAN
BABAR AZAM

Pakistan, dangerous in major tournaments, may struggle to win their first T20 World Cup since 2009 after recent changes. But with their pedigree in the shortest format, don't yet just rule them out.



ENGLAND
JOS BUTTLER

No team have ever defended the T20 World Cup title, and England do not have to go far back in the record books to understand the magnitude of the task facing them in the West Indies and USA.



AUSTRALIA
MITCHELL MARSH

Australia enter the tournament with an aging squad but retain the confidence that won them last year's Test and ODI championships. If they win, they would be the first to hold all three major trophies.



NEW ZEALAND
KANE WILLIAMSON

Kiwis excel at handling challenges one at a time, a strategy that has proven effective in major tournaments. The Black Caps have reached the semifinals in four of the eight T20 World Cups and lost the 2021 final.



WEST INDIES
ROVMAN POWELL

Co-hosts West Indies aim for a third title and to redeem themselves after missing last year's 50-over World Cup. Having won it in 2012 and 2016, they seek to be the first to win three T20 World Cup titles.



SOUTH AFRICA
AIDEN MARKRAM

South Africa's power hitters could make them contenders for this T20 World Cup, but their bowling remains a concern. Their World Cup struggles in both formats are well-known, tempering expectations.



SRI LANKA
WANINDU HASARANGA

Sri Lanka won the 2014 edition after being runners-up in 2009 but since then the islanders have been underachievers. But as they so often do in major tournaments, they can surprise anyone.



AFGHANISTAN
RASHID KHAN

Afghanistan's presence with nine players in this season's IPL underscores their reputation in T20 cricket. Led by Rashid Khan, their team is packed with versatile players and game-changers.



BANGLADESH
NAJMUL HOSSAIN SHANTO

Bangladesh aim to rewrite their T20 World Cup history. Bangladesh had lacked notable achievements in T20 World Cups, with their most memorable victory against Windies in 2007.



CANADA
SAAD BIN ZAFAR



IRELAND
PAUL STIRLING



USA
MONANK PATEL



NAMIBIA
GERHARD ERASMUS



OMAN
AQIB ILYAS



SCOTLAND
RICHE BERRINGTON



PAPUA NEW GUINEA
ASSAD VALA



UGANDA
BRIAN MASABA



NEPAL
ROHIT PAUDEL



NETHERLANDS
SCOTT EDWARDS