

Lankans' loss gives Tigers 'ray of hope'

SPORTS REPORTER

Back in 2007, Bangladesh's journey in T20 World Cups had started with a bang with the Tigers notching up a convincing win over the West Indies in their opening match of the tournament in South Africa.

But eight editions in, that win over West Indies remains Bangladesh's only victory over a higher-ranked team in the tournament, a fact that aches one of the chief architects of that victory: former captain Mohammad Ashraful.

"Comparing the way associate teams like the USA, Canada, Papua New Guinea have played, I feel that Bangladesh have regressed in T20s," Ashraful told The Daily Star.

"We still don't understand the rhythm of the format. Our only T20 tournament is the BPL [Bangladesh Premier League], which also is not up to standard. The associates mostly play T20s and are quickly improving."

Bangladesh are days away from starting their ninth edition of the T20 World Cup and their prospects aren't looking too good.

The Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side are heading into the tournament on the back of an embarrassing 2-1 series defeat against the USA last month and a 60-run defeat against India in a warm-up match.

The Tigers will begin their campaign on June 8 against Sri Lanka, who lost to South Africa on Monday.

Sri Lanka will be under pressure as another defeat will put their Super 8 chances under serious threat.

But to capitalise on Sri Lanka's vulnerability, he Tigers first have to play to their potential, feels Ashraful.

"The team is really short of confidence. They have not been able to play to their potential at all. Bangladesh's lack of options has also become really apparent. We don't have enough options in T20s. We are continuing with the same options from 2021-22, even though they haven't clicked."

Realistically, Bangladesh's chances of progressing to the next phase are very slim. The only ray of hope for them is that Sri Lanka have lost their opening game, after losing to Netherlands in a warm-up match, and are under pressure. They have a chance to capitalise on that.

Unlike most ICC events, where pitches are usually of a sporting nature, there have been a variety of pitches on display in the first few matches of the T20 World Cup.

Ashraful feels that teams cannot hope to play the same way in all pitches this time, and senses that a few upsets may be on the horizon.

"The pitches this time are not like the ones we usually see in ICC events. Teams can't succeed playing typical T20 cricket - they will have to assess the pitch first and then play accordingly. It seems that ICC's plans of using T20s to spread cricket around the world is working. The associates are showing great improvement. I expect to see a few upsets in the World Cup," he concluded.



India skipper Rohit Sharma leads the pack in training as the Men in Blue start their T20 World Cup campaign against Ireland at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in New York today. India have a 100 percent win record against Ireland, having won all seven previous matches, including a win in the 2009 T20 World Cup. PHOTO: BCCI

India face potential banana skin fixture

AGENCIES

Sceptics call them 'old wine in new bottle' but a clutch of superstar Indian cricketers would leave no stone unturned to break away from their archaic template when they take on a plucky Ireland in their opening game of the T20 World Cup in New York on Wednesday.

The team knows that it is a touch undercooked with a lot of confusion still persisting about what could be the best combination on a drop-in virgin strip. As is clear from the games so far, scoring won't be a walk in the park like it was during the Indian Premier League the last couple of months.

But the bigger concern is the baggage of being favourites who don't really make it count in the end.

Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli have individually laid their hands on global silverware but an assortment of some other 'once in generation' cricketers, including Jasprit Bumrah and Ravindra Jadeja, have not and they would be eager to finally lift one.

The most poignant sight of last year's ODI World Cup was a forlorn Rohit, after the final, desperately trying to hide his welled-up eyes from the TV cameras as he quietly climbed the steps of the Narendra Modi Stadium dressing room.

There was also Kohli, who after scoring those 765 invaluable runs, could only get a fleeting blank gaze towards the podium where the trophy was kept.

The best players sometimes don't add up to become the best team and while India have put faith in their most



India have won all seven of their meetings in T20s against Ireland, including an eight-wicket victory in the 2009 T20 World Cup - the only meeting between the two sides in the major event.

India skipper Rohit Sharma is 26 runs away from reaching 4,000 runs in T20s. He will become only the third player to reach the milestone after Virat Kohli (4037) and Babar Azam (4023).

Andy Balbirnie has scored 156 runs - the most in India-Ireland contests - at a strike-rate of 138.05. Meanwhile, India's wrist-spin dup Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal have taken the most number of wickets - seven each - amongst players from both sides.

experienced lot, it can't be simply wished away that this current batch has faltered at the final two hurdles way too many times.

At 37, this could safely be termed as Rohit's last World Cup in the white-ball format as one doesn't have to be

Nostradamus to predict that he won't be around for the next T20 World Cup in India and the 50-over World Cup in South Africa in 2027.

A very gutsy Irish team with some quality T20 players like Paul Stirling, Josh Little, Harry Tector, Andy Balbirnie, awaits India in the lung-opener.

On a slow track and a sub-standard outfield at the Nassau County ground, how India plays against Irish left-arm spinner George Dockrell will be interesting.

Where India hold the advantage is their spinners who are way better compared to what the Irish team have though the pace attack, aside from Bumrah, looks a bit weak in absence of the redoubtable Mohammed Shami.

Often having too many options isn't the best option just like Indians have at the top. To fit in skipper Rohit and team's most elite batter in Kohli, they have to probably sacrifice Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Rishabh Pant's batting at No.3 in the practice game was like a breath of fresh air and Hardik Pandya's bowling form will indicate how India fares in this competition.

Like earlier days, Ireland aren't exactly a minnow in this format and very recently, they have beaten Pakistan in their own den in the run-up to the World Cup.

Little has more than little experience of playing IPL for Gujarat Titans and the troika of Balbirnie, Stirling and Tector can more than chance their arms.

The 'Green Shirts' will be the banana peel that Rohit and his men can ill afford to slip on before they meet the more famous 'Green Jerseys' at the weekend.

T20 World Cup Corner

ICC criticised for 'spicy' New York pitch

The ICC is receiving flak from former cricketers, analysts and fans for the playing conditions at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in New York, which hosted the low-scoring South Africa-Sri Lanka Group D match of the ICC T20 World Cup yesterday.

Sri Lanka unhappy with 'unfair' travel schedule

Sri Lanka players and management are unhappy with their 'unfair' travel schedule in the ICC T20 World Cup, where they are one of only two teams alongside the Netherlands who will be playing their four group-stage matches in four different venues.

Green ready to 'plug holes' for Australia

Australia all-rounder Cameron Green says he is ready to bat up and down the order at the ICC T20 World Cup after being utilised in several roles during the Indian Premier League.

Salt eyes 'full circle' title run in homecoming tournament

Phil Salt was in Barbados to watch England win the ICC Men's T20 World Cup back in 2010. He was living there. The hard-hitting opener returns to the country that helped make him, looking to cap off a full circle title tilt with England.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star website



Djokovic out of French Open with knee injury

AFP, Paris

Novak Djokovic withdrew from the French Open ahead of his quarter-final against Casper Ruud due to a knee injury suffered in the previous round, tournament organisers announced on Tuesday.

"Due to a torn medial meniscus in his right knee (discovered during an MRI scan performed today), Novak Djokovic... has been forced to withdraw from the Roland Garros tournament," organisers said in a statement.

World number one and 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic was due to play Ruud on Wednesday for a place in the last four. Djokovic defeated Ruud in last year's final at Roland Garros.

The 37-year-old Djokovic had cast doubt over his fitness following Monday's five-set win over Francisco Cerundolo, admitting he needed anti-inflammatory drugs to get through the match.

Djokovic blamed the "slippery" Philippe Chatrier court for the injury he sustained early in the second set of his 6-1, 5-7, 3-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory over Cerundolo.

"I don't know what will happen tomorrow or after tomorrow if I'll be able to step out on the court and play. You know, I hope so. Let's see what happens," Djokovic said after the match.

Mbappe arrival ignites Madrid fans and press

AFP, Madrid

Kylian Mbappe's long-awaited arrival at Real Madrid sparked joyous reactions in the Spanish press and amongst the club's fans on Tuesday, though the French superstar will know he must live up to his billing on the pitch.

The official announcement of the 15-times Champions League winners' latest star signing on Monday was a seismic event in Madrid.

After seven years of rumour and anticipation, Mbappe had finally landed at the "club of (his) dream".

"What you dreamed of", proclaimed the front page of Marca, alongside a photo edit of Mbappe wearing a Madrid shirt, in response to the 25-year-old's social media post in which he referred to the move as "a dream come true".

"Mbappe at last", said sports daily AS, who went on to celebrate "another galactico" in Real's stable, following on from the much-heralded signings of Zinedine Zidane, David Beckham, Luis Figo and Cristiano Ronaldo earlier in the 21st century.

Popular radio station Cadena COPE called Mbappe "the cherry on the cake many years in the making thanks to the fantastic

management" of Real president Florentino Perez.

Madrid legend Iker Casillas took to social media to welcome Mbappe to "the best club in the world", adding: "The path to 16 (Champions League trophies) begins with you."

Outside the club's official store in central Madrid, Zein Mroueh, a 52-year-old French fan, believes that Mbappe "has come at the right time", but that "he's going to have to hit the ground running because he's entering another stage of his life".

Despite the glowing reception he has so far received, Mbappe will be under no illusions that he must back up his reputation as one of the world's best players on the pitch in front of the Madrid faithful.

"He's a great recruit, an immense player. But here, he will be just another player in Real's great history," Luis Caceres, president of the Penas federation (Real's supporters' groups) told AFP.

"With what happened two years ago, when he decided to extend his contract with Paris Saint-Germain, Kylian needs to know that he'll have his work cut out for him. When will he be forgiven? When he shows us on the pitch that he's now at the club he loves," added Caceres.



Reigning champion Iga Swiatek spreads her arms in celebration after winning her French Open quarterfinal match against Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland Garros on Tuesday. The Polish star thrashed the Wimbledon champion 6-0, 6-2 to set up a last-four showdown with American third seed Coco Gauff. PHOTO: X