

## PACERS DELIGHT but Tigers suffer New York heartbreak

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Before Bangladesh fans got their hearts shattered to a million pieces with an agonising four-run defeat to South Africa, they were treated with the sight of their pace trio making the opposition batters dance to their tunes on an unpredictable pitch at the Nassau Country Cricket Stadium in New York yesterday.

Although the Group D fixture of the ICC T20 World Cup ended in a gut-wrenching defeat for the Tigers, they had plenty to take from the game, especially from the bowling front as their pacers returned to the basics to torment the batters on another testing pitch.

The Tigers pace trio of Tanzim Sakib, Taskin Ahmed and Mustafizur Rahman dominated the Proteas and restricted them to 113 for four, which in the end proved four runs too many.

Tanzim was the star performer of the lot, finishing with a career-best of 3-18, while Taskin took 2-19. Mustafizur went wicketless but conceded a miserly 18 off his four overs, including a four-run final over.

The three pacers collectively conceded just 4.59 runs per over in the 12 overs they bowled, six of which occurred in the Powerplay.

The irony was, in a format where bowlers usually have to depend on their bag of tricks

to contain the onslaught of batters, the Bangladesh pacers found all their success by sticking to the basics and letting the erratic pitch do the rest.

"We saw all matches have been low-scoring in New York. Tried to stick to the basics and that worked," Tanzim said after the conclusion of the first innings.

There was a deliberate attempt from the pacers of both teams to pitch the ball on a good length or maybe just a little behind to extract variable bounce from the pitch.

South Africa, who had played their previous

### SCORES IN BRIEF

South Africa: 113-6 in 20 overs (Quinton de Kock 18, Klaasen 46, Miller 29; Sakib 3-18, Taskin 2-19, Rishad 1-32)  
Bangladesh: 109-7 in 20 overs (Shanto 14, Hridoy

37, Mahmudullah 20; Rabada 2-19, Maharaj 3-27, Nortje 2-17)  
Result: South Africa won by four runs.  
Player-of-the-match: Heinrich Klaasen



Bangladesh players look dejected after falling short by four runs in their T20 World Cup fixture against South Africa in New York on Monday. Pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib's (R) sizzling effort - in which he returned three wickets for 18 runs to help restrict South Africa to 113 for six - went in vain as the batters failed to capitalise on a golden opportunity to snap their losing streak in T20Is against the Proteas.

PHOTOS: AFP

made up for it with determination.

In the end, though, it all boiled down to Mahmudullah Riyad, who was presented with the perfect chance to complete a historic win - a full toss from Keshav Maharaj with just six needed off two balls.

The batter had hit a six off a full toss in the previous match against Sri Lanka at a crucial stage but failed to deliver this time, getting caught right at the edge of the boundary.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was proud of his bowlers but rued the defeat, feeling that it was a match they should have won.

"Tanzim really worked hard last couple of games, we needed new-ball wickets and he showed his character. This is a match we should have won, we nearly did but the last couple of overs they bowled well. It can happen in cricket," Shanto said after the match.

One team scoring 113 for six in 20 overs and the other team falling agonisingly short of it, is not something that usually happens in modern cricket, where flat pitches and dynamic batters often make the bowlers seem replaceable by bowling machines.

Cricketers will remember the stadium in New York as the place where the game momentarily returned to its retro days. The Bangladesh fans will remember it as a place where the Tigers almost slayed the Proteas.



## Bangladesh dreaming of humbling Lebanon

SPORTS REPORTER

With the curtain falling down on Group I fixtures of the second round of FIFA World Cup Qualifiers today, Bangladesh are looking forward to securing all three points against superior Lebanon, an outcome which will give the men in red and green a better draw in the upcoming Asian Cup Qualifiers.

The game is set to kick off at 10:00pm (Bangladesh Standard time) at the Khalifa International Stadium in Al-Rayyan City, Qatar.

Bangladesh are dwelling in the bottom of the four-team group, with only one point in five matches, two points less than third-placed Lebanon. This means a win will enable Bangladesh to surpass Lebanon, following a 1-1 draw at Bashundhara Kings Arena in Dhaka last year where Sheikh Morsalin cancelled out a 67-minute Osman strike in the 72nd minute.

Nevertheless, securing a victory over Lebanon is going to be an uphill task for the charges of head coach Javier Cabrera, who, however, are thinking of pulling an upset against a side Bangladesh had beaten 2-0 in Dhaka in 2011, during the pre-qualifying match of 2018 World Cup Qualifiers. In the remaining meets between the two teams, Lebanon have been victorious.

Lebanon, on the other hand, will surely hope to end their campaign on a high, but Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan wants to capitalise against a reconstructing team under a new coach in Mirodrag Radulovic.

"Our goal is to secure three points against Lebanon, which is a big challenge. We will be trying to give our best because everyone believes we can collect three points," Jamal said in a video message sent by Bangladesh Football Federation.

"Lebanon changed three coaches in a year. If the coach is often changed, the structure falls down, and we discussed this thing. We also discussed their strong and weak points. So, if we can exploit those areas, then it's going to be a positive result for us."

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera said, "We expect to be very competitive tomorrow [today], we came from a good effort and performance against Australia. We know that to complete a good window and quite a good group stage, we want to get a positive result. Our objective is to fight for everything, fight for three points and hopefully achieve at least one point in the last game."

"The motivation is not only to produce good results but also it will have an important impact on the ranking, that will also be decisive for the draw for upcoming Asian Cup Qualifiers. It is also important to get points, also for the 2025 SAFF Championship," the Spaniard added.

## A typical Pakistan conundrum

NABID YEASIN

As it so often happens in major ICC events, Pakistan have very little in their hands regarding the prospect of advancing in the ongoing T20 World Cup in the USA and the West Indies.

And, as always, it is mostly a making of their own.

Even till the 14th over of the second innings during the Pakistan-India blockbuster clash in New York on Sunday, the broadcaster's win predictor accorded over a 90 percent chance for Babar Azam and Co in their chase of a meagre yet tricky 120-run target - and it was only understandable as Pakistan needed 40 off the final six overs with seven wickets in hand.

However, Pakistan did what Pakistan usually do with their long-earned 'unpredictable' tag - given due to their nature of flipping an imminent outcome on its head - kicking in as they went on to lose the game by six runs.

Pakistan's Super Over loss to co-hosts USA in their tournament opener was definitely a major upset in the tournament. However, none can claim it was an absolute shocker - especially for the way the USA have been playing in recent games and also due to Pakistan's pedigree of being at the wrong end of upsets on big occasions.

For Pakistan to progress, on top of winning against Canada today, at the same ground where they had let India snatch the game away from their grasp, and then against Ireland in their final group game on June 16, Babar and Co will have to hope for either India or the USA

to lose their final two group fixtures.

Then again, if the clash between India and the USA - both of whom have won both their matches so far and lead the points table - gets washed out in New York on June 12, that would also end Pakistan's chances of progressing with both India and USA making it to Super Eight.

Meanwhile, if Canada manage to pull off an unlikely upset over India and the USA go on to lose their remaining games then it would bring the net run rate into the equation in determining whether Pakistan, Canada, or the USA would progress.

However, among teams that are usually touted as title contenders before the mega T20 event, Pakistan may be the only side to be familiar with such complex scenarios. Having lost their first two matches against India and Zimbabwe in the 2022 T20 World Cup, Pakistan were backed into such a corner that needed them to win their final group game and the materialisation of the unlikely event of the Netherlands beating South Africa in the group phase - and that's what exactly happened.

Despite their see-saw nature in such events, Pakistan are one of the most successful sides in the T20 World Cup - with them playing the semifinals six times in eight previous editions, ending as runners-up in 2022 and 2007, and lifting their solitary trophy in 2009.

The odds may be stacked heavily against Pakistan, but they will hope for a typical Pakistan solution for the typical Pakistan conundrum that they are faced with.



### SHORT CORNER



#### Di Maria on target as Argentina down Ecuador 1-0

Angel Di Maria scored the only goal as Argentina warmed up for the defence of their Copa America crown with a 1-0 friendly victory over Ecuador in Chicago on Sunday. Di Maria made way for Messi on 56 minutes but the Inter Miami star was unable to help Argentina add to the scoreline. The reigning world champions face Guatemala in Landover, Maryland, on Friday to cap off their Copa America preparations.

#### Fans get 8 months jail for racism targeting Vinicius Jr

Three Valencia fans were handed eight-month jail terms on Monday for racist abuse towards Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior at a La Liga match last year that sparked international outrage, a court ruling showed. The defendants were also slapped with a two-year match ban.

\*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

## Two former champions in opposite arcs

STAR SPORTS DESK

Two former champions, Australia and Sri Lanka, are faced with completely polarising scenarios of advancing in the ongoing ICC Men's T20 World Cup ahead of their third group stage fixtures on Wednesday.

Australia, with two wins in two matches so far, are overwhelming favourites to seal an early-bird entry into the Super Eight phase as the 2021 champions take on Namibia, while Sri Lanka will aim to blow away Nepal in Antigua to avoid an embarrassing early exit from the main event - one that has been no short of horrendous for the 2014 champions so far.

The men in yellow could not have started their campaign in a better fashion, taking down eternal rivals England by 36 runs after shrugging off Oman in their tournament opener. Despite the rich vein of form, the Pat Cummins-led side will not be complacent since an upset could set the stage for them in a potential must-win game against Group B leaders Scotland - whereas a win has additional incentives since it will leave holders England's campaign hanging by the thinnest of threads.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, having lost to South Africa and Bangladesh, not only need to win



but win big - so that the islanders could somehow stay mathematically alive before talking on another Super Eight aspirants from Group D in Netherlands in the teams' final group-stage clash.

On the other hand, as far as the associates are concerned, results in their favour will mean a world to them and their fans. Nepal are yet to win a T20 World Cup match after four outings while Namibia, who stunned Sri Lanka in the 2022 edition and have hard-earned a victory over Oman this time, will have another taste of humbling a Test-playing nation and, more importantly, an unforeseen shot at the Super Eight.

## Afghanistan chase football milestone

AFP, Hong Kong

Afghanistan hope to achieve a footballing milestone on Tuesday by snatching a spot in the third and final phase of Asian qualifying for the 2026 World Cup.

The team ranked 151 in the world are on the brink of history and a place at the 2027 Asian Cup under their English coach Ashley Westwood.

Once on the books of Manchester United, he took over the Afghan team seven months ago and has masterminded a significant upturn in fortunes for the footballing minnows.

They play away at Kuwait on Tuesday in the final round of games in the second qualifying stage knowing they need to better India's result at Qatar to progress further. Afghanistan held already qualified Qatar, the Asian champions, to a precious 0-0 draw on Thursday in a "home" game for the Afghans that was played in Saudi Arabia.

"When we took over in November just before the first game against Qatar, which we lost 8-1, (if) you told us that we'll be giving ourselves a chance of qualifying with one game to go, we wouldn't have believed it," Westwood said afterwards.

India are also trying to reach the final stage of World Cup qualifying for the first time.

Igor Stimac's side currently occupy the second qualifying berth from Group A on goal difference from the Afghans.

Just to complicate things, Kuwait are also in with a shot of progressing, with the group going right down to the wire.