



“Extremely disappointed to play ourselves out of the tournament. We have a proud record in World Cups in the last ten years and it has now come to an end.”
New Zealand pacer Tim Southee after consolation win against Uganda

Will Shanto's willow stop snoozing?

ASHFAQ UL-ALAM

Bangladesh's campaign in this year's ICC Men's T20 World Cup has been refreshingly devoid of any off-field drama surrounding captaincy, thanks to Najmul Hossain Shanto who has taken the captaincy mantle on his stride and has done a commendable job so far.

That being said, in a playful attempt to spark some off-field spice, here's a whimsical conspiracy theory: Bangladesh have two Shantos playing in the marquee event.

At one end, there is captain Shanto, a smart leader who has been brave with his use of bowlers, excellent with his on-field decisions, has taken a number of gutsy calls, and almost all of his gambles have come off.

At the age of 26, leading the team for the first time in an ICC event as a fulltime captain, Shanto has shown the wits of a seasoned veteran and has been rightfully showered with praises for it.

But at the other end stands the batter Shanto, who looks fidgety, indecisive, unsure whether to press on or grind it out in the middle.

Since arriving in North America, he has batted six times, including a warm-up match against India, and has made three, 36, zero, seven, 14 and one, in that order – the last three of which have come in the T20 World Cup.

It's not like Shanto has been struggling against a particular type of bowling either.

He has been dismissed twice against off-spinners, stumped against the USA's Steven Taylor and caught at slip to the Netherlands' Aryan Dutt, lost his stumps to India's Mohammad Siraj, got caught trying to pull

South Africa's Anrich Nortje and gave a straight-forward catch to extra cover against Sri Lanka's Nuwan Thushara.

The only time he got going was the 34-ball 36-run knock against the USA in the second T20I of the three-match series last month, which ended with a run-out dismissal.

Realistically, had Shanto not been the captain of the team, his place in the starting eleven would have been under serious threat.

But while batter Shanto has been a liability for the team so far, captain Shanto has been indispensable. Most notably, his use of leg-spinner Rishad Hossain has been inspiring, arguably the key move in Bangladesh's winning encounters against Netherlands and Sri Lanka.

Giving Shakib Al Hasan just one over and completing his quota with three overs from Mahmudullah Riyad against South Africa was another inspired decision, one that paid dividends.

In a team where former captains like Shakib and Mahmudullah are in the middle, Shanto has emerged as the clear leader on the field; always communicating with the bowlers from mid-on.

But even his excellent captaincy is not enough to hide his blushes with the bat.

Liton Das, who also came into the tournament with questionable form, contributed in the win over Sri Lanka with a steadfast 36 off 38 balls while Tanzid Hasan Tamim gave glimpses of his abilities at the top with a flashy 35 off 26 balls against the Dutch.

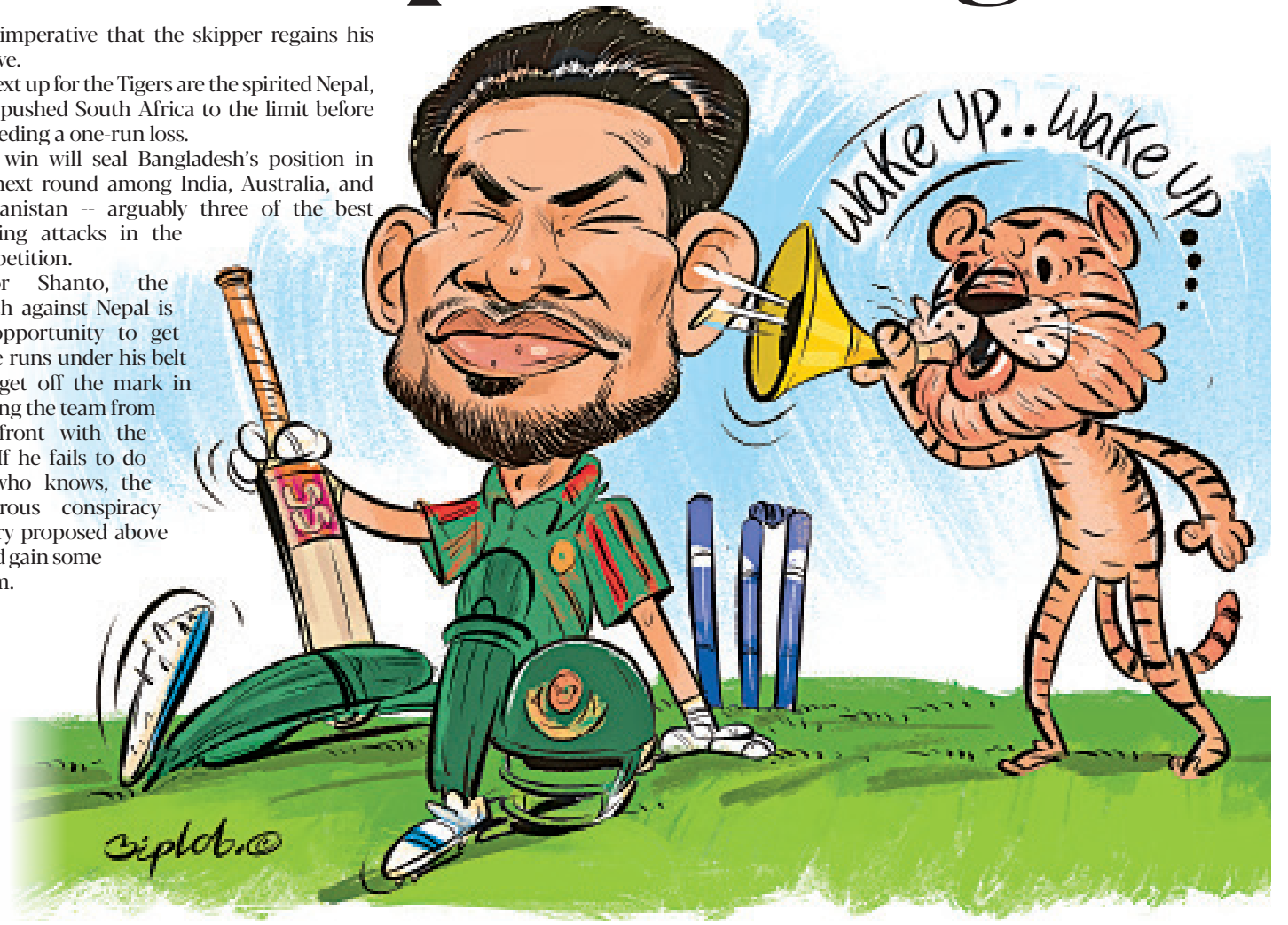
Shanto is the only top order batter who is yet to play an effective knock and, with Bangladesh in pole position for Super Eight,

it is imperative that the skipper regains his groove.

Next up for the Tigers are the spirited Nepal, who pushed South Africa to the limit before conceding a one-run loss.

A win will seal Bangladesh's position in the next round among India, Australia, and Afghanistan – arguably three of the best bowling attacks in the competition.

For Shanto, the match against Nepal is an opportunity to get some runs under his belt and get off the mark in leading the team from the front with the bat. If he fails to do so, who knows, the ludicrous conspiracy theory proposed above could gain some steam.



SPORTS ON TV
During EID Holidays

NAGORIK TV AND STAR SPORTS 1,2,3
T20 World Cup
Australia vs Scotland
Live from 6:30 am
Pakistan vs Ireland
Live from 8:30 pm

June 17, Monday
Bangladesh vs Nepal
Live from 5:30 am
Sri Lanka vs Netherlands
Live from 6:30 am
New Zealand vs Papua New Guinea
Live from 8:30 pm

June 18, Tuesday
West Indies vs Afghanistan
Live from 6:30 am
June 19, Wednesday
USA vs South Africa
Live from 8:30 pm

T SPORTS & SONY SPORTS
Euro
Poland vs Netherlands

Live from 7:00 pm
Slovenia vs Denmark
Live from 10:00 pm

June 17, Monday
Serbia vs England
Live from 1:00 am
Romania vs Ukraine
Live from 7:00 pm
Belgium vs Slovakia
Live from 10:00 pm

June 18, Tuesday
Austria vs France
Live from 1:00 am
Turkey vs Georgia
Live from 10:00 pm

June 19, Wednesday
Portugal vs Czech Republic
Live from 1:00 am
Croatia vs Albania
Live from 7:00 pm
Germany vs Hungary
Live from 10:00 pm
Scotland vs Switzerland (Thursday)

Nepal's near-upset chimes CHARM OF CRICKET

AGENCIES

In a match decided by the slimmest of margins and filled with twists and turns, Heinrich Klaasen's decisive run-out from the final ball secured South Africa's unbeaten record at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup and eliminated Nepal from Super Eights contention in a thrilling one-run victory in St Vincent yesterday.

Needing two runs from the final delivery to keep their Super Eights hopes alive, Nepal's Gulsan Jha was run out at the non-striker's end by Klaasen, as the match seemed destined for a Super Over.

This heartbreaking conclusion was particularly harsh for Nepal, who had been the superior team for much of the contest. Their spinners dominated South Africa, restricting them to 115 for seven, and their top-order batsmen were in control, reaching 85 for two in the 14th over with the required rate well within reach.

Despite the narrow loss, Nepal captain Rohit Paudel expressed pride in his team's performance. "I feel like the way we played today shows that we belong here," Paudel said.

Nepal's efforts, backed by their spirited fans who continued to flock in numbers,



There have been six instances of one-run wins in Men's T20 World Cup: South Africa (SA) vs New Zealand (NZ), Lord's, 2009; NZ vs Pakistan (PAK), Bridgetown, 2010; India (IND) vs SA, Colombo, 2012; IND vs Bangladesh, Bengaluru, 2016; Zimbabwe vs PAK, Perth, 2022; SA vs Nepal, Kingstown, 2024.

Teams with multiple 1-run wins in T20Is: SA (5), England (2), IND (2), NZ (2), Ireland (2), Kenya (2).

did not go unnoticed. South African legend Dale Steyn commended the atmosphere created by the vocal and invested Nepalese fan base at the Arnos Vale Ground, which had seen international action return after almost ten years in Thursday's nail-biter between Bangladesh and the Netherlands.

"It would've been the talk of the tournament if Nepal had gotten over the line," Steyn said on ICC's Digital Daily show, hailing the match as the tournament's best so far. "It was fantastic, and they deserved to win. This was the match of the tournament. The matches have gone down to the wire in the USA, and now in the Caribbean, we've seen nail-biting thrillers. I saw people crying in the stands; it shows how much it means to them, and that's what cricket is all about."

The disappointment of a narrow loss and early exit should be hard to overcome for the Himalayan nation. However, on a global platform which could set the fate of an emerging team on course for prosperity, Nepal's near-upset against a top-tier team like South Africa has undoubtedly demonstrated their potential and belonging on the global stage.

England out to dispel Euro doubts

AGENCIES

England's attacking arsenal sees them start Euro 2024 as the bookmakers' favourites to end a wait since 1966 to win a major tournament, but doubts persist over the Three Lions ahead of Sunday's opener against Serbia.

Gareth Southgate's men have won just one of their last five matches – a run that includes a 1-1 draw with North Macedonia and a shock 1-0 home defeat to Iceland in their final warm-up match before flying out to Germany.

England are still expected to cruise through a group that also includes Denmark and Slovenia.

The biggest question over England's credentials to be European champions is at the back as injury has robbed Southgate of his settled back four from previous tournaments.

Harry Maguire failed to make the squad due to a calf problem, while Luke Shaw is included as the only natural left-back despite not having played any minutes for club or country since February.



John Stones is therefore even more crucial as the one experienced centreback at international tournament level, but the Manchester City man has also been dogged by fitness problems this season.

Kieran Trippier, a right-back by trade, is set to start against Serbia at left-back.

Crystal Palace's Marc Guehi is the leading candidate to partner Stones for his first major tournament start.

England's defensive deficiencies have already been exploited by Brazil, Belgium and Iceland in 2024.

And Serbia have the firepower to hurt them with their powerful strike pairing of Aleksandar Mitrovic and Dusan Vlahovic.

Vlahovic, who has scored 18 goals in 38 outings for Serie A side Juventus this season, is drawing inspiration from Iceland's 1-0 victory over England in a friendly at Wembley last week.

"No one is invincible," Vlahovic said ahead of Sunday's match in Gelsenkirchen. "We looked at the match against Iceland and there are things that can be copied from them, because they beat them at Wembley in front of 80,000 people. Everything is possible."

Southgate's paucity of options at the back are compensated by the abundance of weapons in attack. The quartet of Phil Foden, Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka and Harry Kane is the envy of Europe.

However, Southgate is still to find the right balance to help them perform on the international stage to the same level as they have for their clubs this season – the quartet scored a combined 114 goals in club football in the 2023/24 campaign.

Germany strike balance, promise resurgence

REUTERS, Munich

Germany's young attackers sent a clear message that they are ready to lead the team into a new era, with 21-year-olds Florian Wirtz and Jamal Musiala putting on a sparkling display in their country's opening 5-1 Euro 2024 win over Scotland on Friday.

The two wingers scored the opening goals in the Group A victory, while Kai Havertz, 25, converted a penalty and substitutes Niclas Füllkrug and Emre Can scored in the second half against the reeling 10-man Scots.

But it was Wirtz and Musiala who drew the eyes of the expectant, yet anxious, home fans who had been chastened by Germany's underperformance in the past decade – with the team going out of successive World Cups (2018, 2022) in the group stage and losing in the last 16 at Euro 2020.

Wirtz underlined his status as one of European football's most exciting young talents with his goal, having already tested goalkeeper Angus Gunn in the opening minutes of the match.

His 10th-minute strike was a perfect example of his play this past year, with 11 goals and 12 assists for Bundesliga champions Bayer Leverkusen, ghosting in



at the edge of the area to power the ball home, despite Gunn getting a hand on it.

It meant Wirtz became the youngest scorer for Germany at a Euros at 21 years and 42 days old, beating the previous record of Havertz who was 22 when he scored at Euro 2020.

Musiala, who grew up in England and played for their youth team but then opted to represent the nation of his birth, got a much cleaner strike when he smashed the ball high into the net nine minutes later having been teed up by Havertz in the box. The forward, given the prestigious No.

10 shirt by Julian Nagelsmann, is only 67 days older than Wirtz and ran Scotland's defence ragged with his deft technique while travelling with the ball, which has earned him the nickname "Bambi".

While stalwarts like keeper Manuel Neuer, 38, and captain Ilkay Gundogan, 33, are still in the starting lineup, there is a sense of a passing of the torch, particularly in the attacking area of the pitch where Germany has struggled in recent years.

They are ably helped by the precision passing of 34-year-old Toni Kroos. The midfield maestro, who will retire from playing after the tournament, had a 99% passing accuracy rate during his 80 minutes – though tougher opponents will come.

He has won a glut of titles at club level with Bayern Munich and Real Madrid and was part of the Germany team that won the World Cup in 2014. But helping to win their first Euro title in almost 30 years at home would be a perfect climax to his career.

Nagelsmann, who made history on Friday as the youngest coach at a Euros aged 36 years and 327 days, eclipsing Slovenia's Sreco Katancic, could have found the perfect balance between youth and experience to take his country to glory.