

Can Tigers’ batting thrive as a unit?

Australia have six wins to their name against Bangladesh's four in 10 T20Is. All four of the Tigers' victories came in Mirpur.

Bangladesh have never beaten Australia in the T20 World Cup, losing in five meetings.

Average first innings total at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium is 118. Pacers and spinners have had similar experiences at the venue as both have conceded runs at less than seven an over. In this T20 World Cup, however, spinners have conceded more, 8.45 runs an over, than pacers (7.74).

Bangladesh pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib has taken seven wickets in the Powerplay, joint-most with Afghanistan Fazalhaq Farooqi for most scalps taken in the first six overs in the tournament. Meanwhile, Mustafizur Rahman's 67 dot balls is the joint-most in the group-stage of the tournament alongside New Zealand's Lockie Ferguson.

At the batting front, Marcus Stoinis (10) and Travis Head (9) both are in the top five for most sixes hit in the edition so far. Towhid Hridoy is in the top 10 with six maximums.

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib, who will be on a hattrick whenever he comes to bowl against Australia, needs one wicket to become the first player to take 50 wickets in T20 World Cup history. He is also two wickets away from becoming only the second player after Tim Southee (164) to take 150 scalps in the format.

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh are set to step into the Super Eight stage against Australia on Friday at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua, in what will be their biggest test so far in this T20 World Cup.

The bowlers have carried the Tigers through to this round, but from here on the batting will have to turn the tide of disappointments as the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led team look to make a case against far stronger opponents.

Australia, winners of the 2021 edition, have come to the Super Eight with a perfect record of four wins on the trot. They have largely not come under a great deal of pressure, and with Antigua providing some of the bouncier pitches in the Caribbean, the wicket may suit the Aussies against the slower cutters of Mustafizur Rahman, who has been incredibly difficult to hit so far in this tournament.

However, some rain has reportedly seeped into the proceedings, leading to an expected drop in zip from the surface than is the norm there. Yet, it doesn't provide much room for optimism for Bangladesh's batting, which has been in dire straits, often stretched too thin.

Despite having encountered two Associate teams in four matches, the top order is still looking for runs, with Tanzid Hasan Tamim showing some resistance on one occasion. Liton Das has not been in his elements, even



though he looked good against Sri Lanka, while skipper Shanto remains entangled in a torrid run of batting form.

On top of that, Shakib Al Hasan's batting contributions have been sporadic. The onus thus falls too hard on the likes of Towhid Hridoy and Mahmudullah Riyad, who have often had to bat to stage rescue acts rather than playing their natural game.

Bangladesh's bowling plans have worked out magnificently, but the cue now begins for the batters to share the burden of responsibility. Up against one of the best in the business, what can Shanto and company do to leave a mark?

ASSESS CONDITIONS QUICKLY

If Bangladesh bowl first, there will be enough time for the struggling batting unit to come up with a plan, but the same cannot be said if they bat first. The Tigers have lost 10

wickets in the Powerplay across four games, making them wary of a collapse at the very top. Therefore, the opening pair needs to put on a more solid effort to keep the Australian pace attack at bay in the Powerplay. The Aussies have played all their games in the Caribbean and may assess conditions better than any other side, which does not exactly play into Bangladesh's hands.

BETTER SHOT SELECTION CAN BUCK TREND

The wicket is not the only issue behind batting failures. The Tigers also need to look at some of their shot selections. Bangladesh batters repeatedly played poor shots against Nepal, leading to a score of just 105. Shanto himself reverse-swept a delivery to slip against the Netherlands, while Hridoy was also at fault against Nepal, going for a slog sweep when the ball was not there for

that particular shot. On these wickets, the batters need to show resilience and game awareness to maximize impact.

SOMEONE NEEDS TO CARRY THE BAT

Just how Shakib carried the bat against the Netherlands, one from the top order must put a heavy price tag on their wicket once they get set.

MORE LOWER-ORDER MOJO

Both Netherlands and Nepal fixtures showcased some beneficial mojo from the Bangladesh lower order. While being cautious with shot selection, the Tigers

TIGERS' SUPER 8S FIXTURES	
JUNE 21	06:30 AM
Bangladesh vs Australia	ANTIGUA
JUNE 22	08:30 PM
Bangladesh vs India	ANTIGUA
JUNE 25	06:30 AM
Bangladesh vs Afghanistan	ST. VINCENT

cannot forego aggression when required. Rishad Hossain got some crucial hits against Nepal, and so did Jaker Ali in the Netherlands game, but Bangladesh will hope that the frontline batters take the lion's share of responsibility against the mighty men from Down Under.

Foden promises ‘improved’ Bellingham partnership

REUTERS, BLANKENHAIN

After a shaky start to England's European Championship campaign that had critics questioning his starting spot, Phil Foden insists his partnership with Jude Bellingham will only flourish.

England, who sit atop Group C, face Denmark on Thursday in Frankfurt before closing out the group stage against Slovenia on June 25.

Foden was a headliner this past Premier League season, pouring in 27 goals for Manchester City across all competitions to win Premier League Footballer of the Year honours.

But lining up on the left of a front three in England's 1-0 win over Serbia, with Jude Bellingham occupying the central No. 10 position in which Foden has thrived with City, he drifted out of the game.

"Jude's obviously an exceptional talent," Foden said in a Football Association video. "He's a leader now, I think he's turning into a leader. I think our link-up play is good at times and I think it's improving as well, and can keep getting better. So he's an exciting talent and I enjoy playing with him."

While some chalked up Sunday's performance as just a bad game for Foden, it drew criticism from some pundits.

Former Spain midfielder Cesc Fabregas said players with Foden's talent have the quality to hold the ball anywhere on the pitch.

Spain and Italy face off to extend record Euro rivalry

REUTERS, DORTMUND

When Italy and Spain meet in Gelsenkirchen on Thursday, they will write a new chapter in what has developed into the most intense head-to-head rivalry in European Championship history.

No two countries have met more often at Euro tournaments than the Azzurri and La Furia Roja - the Red Fury - who will line up against one another for the eighth time since 1960.

It will also be the fifth edition in a



- Italy have lost just one match in their last 10 meetings against Spain in Euros and the World Cup (W4 D5). The sole defeat came in the 2012 Euro final.
- This will be the 11th encounter in major events between Spain and Italy - Euros (8) and World Cup (3) - a record between two European sides.
- Alvaro Morata, with 10 goals, became Spain's second-highest goalscorer at major international tournaments (Euros/World Cup combined), behind only David Villa (13). The 31-year-old also netted his seventh goal at the Euros and only Cristiano Ronaldo (14) and Michel Platini (9) have netted more in the competition.
- Morata also scored against Italy in the semi-final of the previous edition.

row that the two heavyweights have met head-to-head at a European Championship.

Over much of the country's sporting history, Spain's fans looked enviously across the Mediterranean Sea as Italy racked up four World Cup titles and the Azzurri battled for European supremacy with the mighty Germans.

But of the three Euro crowns won by the two countries over the last four tournaments, two have gone to Spain, underscoring their rise as a soccer superpower that also saw them crowned world champions in 2010.

In the most recent European Championship showdown, Italy defeated Spain in a nail-biting Euro 2020 semifinal that went to penalties at Wembley.

In a last-16 encounter in 2016, Italy were again victorious when defender

Giorgio Chiellini scored from close range and Graziano Pelle volleyed home in the dying moments for a 2-0 win.

But in their most important meeting in all competitions, Spain triumphed in the final of Euro 2012 when Vicente del Bosque's all-conquering team thrashed Italy 4-0 in Kyiv which remains the biggest win in a European Championship final.

The stakes will not be as high in Thursday's Group B game at the Arena AufSchalke. Spain and Italy both won their opening matches against Croatia and Albania, respectively, and look well placed to advance into the knockout rounds.

But if they finish first and second in the group, they could be on course for another meeting, this time in the final in Berlin on July 14.

SHORT CORNER

Williamson steps down as New Zealand

Kane Williamson has stepped down as captain of New Zealand's white-ball teams and opted out of a national contract for the 2024/25 season following the Black Caps' early exit from the T20 World Cup. Williamson's decision marks the end of an era for a New Zealand team which made the semi-finals of the previous three T20 World Cups and the 2021 final but ultimately missed out on a maiden white-ball title.

Suryakumar happy to temper aggression on slow tracks

Suryakumar Yadav has proved time and again the kind of havoc he can wreak with the bat but India's Lynchpin believes being able to control that aggression is equally important on the slow pitches in the ongoing T20 World Cup. The group stage of the 20-team tournament, especially its U.S. leg, proved a low-scoring affair with no batter managing to score a hundred.

Junior AHF Cup Hockey: Men's team in semifinals

Bangladesh men's U-21 team continued their winning streak in Junior AHF Cup to ensure their semifinal berth with a 4-2 win over Thailand but women's U-21 side tasted their first defeat in a 3-0 loss to Chinese Taipei in Singapore yesterday. The three wins from as many matches means the Men in Red and Green topped Pool A with nine points, which also made sure of their place in Junior Asia Cup.

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BRAZIL, ARGENTINA FIXTURES

Keeping in mind the massive fan following of Brazil and Argentina in Bangladesh, the two teams' group-stage fixtures, according to Bangladesh time, are as follows:

BRAZIL			ARGENTINA		
June 25	Brazil vs Costa Rica	7:00 am	June 21	Argentina vs Canada	6:00 am
June 29	Paraguay vs Brazil	7:00 am	June 26	Chile vs Argentina	7:00 am
July 03	Brazil vs Colombia	7:00 am	June 30	Argentina vs Peru	6:00 am

GROUPS	A. Argentina, Peru, Chile, Canada	C. USA, Uruguay, Panama, Bolivia
	B. Mexico, Ecuador, Venezuela, Jamaica	D. Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay, Costa Rica

Spotlight on Messi, Endrick IN 48TH COPA AMERICA

AFP

World champions Argentina get an expanded Copa America under way on Friday morning with Lionel Messi looking to add a second continental title in what is almost certainly his final appearance in the tournament.

The 108-year-old competition is being held in the United States with the host nation among six teams from the CONCACAF region joining the 10 South American nations looking for a place in the July 14 final in Miami.

Whether this is Messi's goodbye to elite international football remains to be seen, but what is certain is that the eight-times Ballon d'Or winner would relish the chance to win a third straight major tournament with his country, having won the last Copa America in 2021 which featured 10 teams and the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

"It's great to have records and continue to achieve things but I won't take part in a World Cup just to say I've done six," Messi told ESPN last week.

After facing Canada, Argentina have Chile and Peru to deal with, but they know that tough opposition awaits in the knock-out stage with rivals Brazil and Uruguay the two expected challengers for the title.

Brazil have struggled in CONMEBOL qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup having won just two of their opening six games and they currently sit in sixth place in the standings hav-

ing lost to Uruguay, Colombia and Argentina. There are several familiar names missing from Dorival Junior's Brazil squad with Case-miro, Gabriel Jesus and Thiago Silva left out while Richarlison and Neymar are both missing due to injury.

The pressure will be on the Real Madrid attacking pair of Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo to translate their club form into success

raising expectations with wins over Argentina and Brazil.

Colombia, unbeaten in over two years, boast Liverpool's Luis Diaz and a rejuvenated James Rodriguez, making Nestor Lorenzo's team formidable.

The USA aim to regain momentum after a World Cup last-16 finish, while Mexico, Copa finalists in 1993 and 2001, look below par but

- Copa is the oldest active international football tournament, having started in 1916, with Uruguay winning the first edition of the tournament.
- Argentina and Uruguay are the most successful teams in the Copa America, with 15 titles each while Brazil,

another South American giant and the most successful team in the FIFA World Cup (with five titles) is second with nine titles.

The Copa América which was held in the United States in 2016 to celebrate 100 years of the tournament, was the first

edition of the competition that took place outside the South American territory and had featured 16 teams.

The 48th edition of the tournament will be held in 14 cities across the United States, with each location hosting 2 or 3 games.

for the Seleccion while there is much excitement around the senior tournament debut of 17-year-old talent Endrick, who is set to join Real next month from Palmeiras.

Meanwhile, 15-time winners Uruguay have impressed under 68-year-old coach Marcelo Bielsa, who has infused his high-energy style,

enjoy strong support in the USA. While FIFA will be looking closely at the organization of the event, two years out from the World Cup which will be co-hosted by the USA, Canada and Mexico, the tournament's rich history and prestige means it is much, much more than a 'trial event'.