

Tigers target 'unconventional paths' in 'bonus' quest

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh had specific dreams going into this T20 World Cup: to make the Super Eight stage by qualifying from Group D. With that target achieved, a bigger mountain now stands before them.

What coach Chandika Hathurusingha said at the press conference on Wednesday may not reflect the team's overall sentiment, but it remains to be seen whether it can ignite the passion required for the task ahead.

While the likes of Towhid Hridoy and Soumya Sarkar had oozed optimism in going far ahead of the tournament, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto remarked that fans should not have high expectations since the Tigers often wear expectations like a burden. Past World Cups and many big tournaments, especially finals, are cases in point.

There are no Associate teams in Bangladesh's way in the Super Eight. First comes Australia, shortly followed by India, before the Tigers take on Afghanistan in their final Super Eight game.

"Yeah, I mean, when we came into the tournament, our first target was to get into this Super Eight. So, I think



we achieved that with... what can I say, our bowlers kept us in the game? So, we played the conditions really well, used the conditions in our favor," Hathurusingha said.

"So going forward for us, being here, we're very happy to be here. And then anything from here for us is a bonus. So, we play with a lot of freedom. And we are going to challenge all three teams the best we can," he further claimed.

It might be that he wanted to downplay the pressure. For Bangladesh, as they are not one of the Associate

nations at this World Cup, winning is the only target. But given Bangladesh's lackluster performances in the T20I format, even making the Super Eight was a big achievement.

Thus, along with the freedom to express their game, Hathurusingha reminded the players that they would have to play the roles they are responsible for.

"This game, why do we start playing this game? To enjoy," Hathurusingha said about why players come into cricket. "So that fact of enjoyment, we don't

take it away from the players. How big is the game? That doesn't mean that they have a free license to go and do whatever they want. So, the enjoyment factor is always at the forefront, but they have to do their role for the team," he added.

But this World Cup has served playing conditions that helped Bangladesh's cause so far. Going forward, there is no guarantee of that happening. Bangladesh had not been able to see the wicket for the game but were able to assess conditions with wind directions coming into play in quite a few games. Clear planning with the ball has been evident in this tournament. Hathurusingha said they might do something unique when asked if they want to beat Australia.

"Planning and decision-making give them a lot of belief that if you are not afraid to make decisions and be brave, you can compete with them [Australia]. We will probably take some unconventional paths to beat some teams," he added.

It remains to be seen whether Hathurusingha downplaying pressure is the first step in the Tigers' "unconventional path" as they look to secure a maiden berth in the knockout stage of the premier event.

India to open next home season against Tigers

AGENCIES

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) confirmed on Thursday that India will be kicking off their upcoming home season against Bangladesh in September before hosting New Zealand in October and England next year.

India will welcome Bangladesh for a two-match Test series, which will be played in Chennai and Kanpur from September 19-23 and September 27-Oct. 1, respectively. It will be followed by three T20Is in Dharamsala, Delhi and Hyderabad.

This will only be the third instance of India hosting Bangladesh in a bilateral series. Bangladesh played a solitary Test in their first-ever tour to India for a bilateral series in 2017 while the last time the Tigers travelled across the borders was back in 2019 for a similar itinerary of three T20Is and two Tests.

Bangladesh's only win – across all formats – away to India was during the 2019 tour when the Tigers beat India by seven wickets in the first T20I in Delhi.

Following the home series against Bangladesh,

BANGLADESH'S TOUR OF INDIA

FIRST TEST: September 19, Chennai
SECOND TEST: September 27, Kanpur
FIRST T20I: October 6, Dharamsala
SECOND T20I: October 9, Delhi
THIRD T20I: October 12, Hyderabad

India will then host the Black Caps for three Tests, with the first Test starting on October 16 in Bengaluru.

England will visit India in January next year to play five T20Is and three ODIs. Chennai, Kolkata, Rajkot, Pune and Mumbai will be the venues for the T20s, while Nagpur, Cuttack and Ahmedabad will host the ODIs.

England's tour of India will begin on January 22 and conclude on February 12.

Clash of hosts with survival at stake

STAR SPORTS DESK

West Indies and USA are set to collide in a high-stake Super Eight fixture of the T20 World Cup in Barbados on Saturday, in the two teams' first-ever international meeting, the result of which will leave one of the co-hosts all but eliminated.

With both the co-hosts opening their Super Eights journey on the losing side, with the former going down against South Africa before the latter succumbing to holders England, the Kensington Oval is poised to stage a spectacle.

Although a colossal gulf of experience exists between the two teams – since the two-time champions are up against a side that advanced from the group stages in their maiden World Cup appearance – the on-field show may not reflect this, given how the USA have fared in the ongoing marquee event.

USA have scripted a fairytale by coming this far on the back of a monumental win over Pakistan in Texas. Therefore, despite an 18-run defeat to South Africa, the Aaron Jones-led side have every reason to fancy inflicting another massive upset.

West Indies, meanwhile, have done justice to their pedigree as T20 specialists, having won all four group-stage encounters.

The Men in Maroon came up short against England despite having totaled 180, but their bowling exploits left a lot to be desired. Their team management may consider fielding young pace sensation Shamar Joseph, who this year had scripted the Windies' first Test win in Australia after 27 years.

Batters come alive as England take on South Africa

STAR SPORTS DESK

Batters have started to come alive in the T20 World Cup following a shift to the West Indies and a blockbuster contest between two of the best batting lineups, at least on paper, in the tournament will face off when reigning champions England take on hot favourites South Africa at the Darren Sammy Cricket Ground in St. Lucia today.

In six meetings in T20 World Cups, South Africa have had the better of England on four occasions. England won the other two.

The venue for the contest has already seen two 200-plus first-innings totals in the four matches played so far and boasts a 194.75 average first-innings total, and on that basis, another run-fest is expected to be on the cards when the two sides lock horns.

Both sides come into the contest having won their opening Super 8 contests. Despite having flirted with group-stage elimination, England seemed to have found top gear after a dominant display in an eight-wicket victory over co-hosts West Indies in St. Lucia yesterday, courtesy of a match-winning unbeaten 47-ball 87 from opener Phil Salt.

The right-handed batter smacked five sixes and seven fours and put together an unbeaten 97-run stand with Jonny Bairstow (48 off 26) to help England



chase down an 181-run target with 15 balls to spare.

England will be further boosted by the fact that their encounter against South Africa will be at the same venue whereas the Proteas played their last match in Antigua.

On the other hand, South Africa qualified for the Super 8s with a 100 percent record but barely got over the line in at least three of the four encounters – a four-wicket win against the Netherlands, a four-run win over Bangladesh, and a one-run victory against Nepal. South Africa batters struggled to get going on wickets in New York, where they played three matches, as well as in Kingstown where they beat Nepal to cap off the group stage. Batting first in two of those contests, the South Africa batters managed a best first innings total of 115.

Against the USA, however, South

Africa's batters were able to get rid of their shackles as they posted 194 for four – their highest total this tournament so far. Opener Quinton de Kock found his mojo as he smashed five sixes and seven fours in a 40-ball 74 while skipper Aiden Markram notched up his highest score in the tournament – a 32-ball 46 which was followed by a 22-ball 36 from Heinrich Klaasen.

England are expected to go unchanged from their eleven that played against the West Indies, while Markram has a big call to make – whether to continue with two spinners or to go with an extra pace option. Tabraiz Shamsi took a solitary wicket but went for 50 runs in his four overs against the USA and should the Proteas skipper opt to go with one spinner, it would likely mean that Ottneil Baartman will return to the lineup.



Mbappe injury leaves France thinking

AFP, Paderborn

France boast fearsome strength in depth but remain hugely reliant on Kylian Mbappe for inspiration and are now facing the prospect of being without their injured superstar for at least their next Euro 2024 game against the Netherlands on Friday.

Captain Mbappe is recovering from a broken nose suffered in Monday's 1-0 win over Austria in Dusseldorf in their opening match at the tournament.

The French Football Federation later said Mbappe would not need an operation but did admit he would need to be fitted with a mask before he could return to action.

In any case, the lack of time between matches means the clash with the Dutch in Leipzig is set to come too soon for the 25-year-old.

And France coach Didier Deschamps will hope his team can get a positive result which could seal their last-16 place.

But can Les Bleus beat a strong Netherlands side without arguably the world's most lethal striker?

"Of course, he is an important player, the captain, a leader. So that will have an impact, but we have an

exceptional squad," midfielder Adrien Rabiot said on Wednesday.

France met the Netherlands twice in Euro 2024 qualifying, and Mbappe scored a brace on each occasion, in a 4-0 win in Paris and in a 2-1 victory in Amsterdam.

Above all, it is worth

considering how France have done in recent games without Mbappe.

Deschamps' team lost 2-1 in a friendly in Germany last September when Mbappe was left on the bench. They also laboured to a 0-0 draw against Canada in their final pre-tournament friendly when he only appeared as a late substitute.

Another option for Deschamps is to move Marcus Thuram in from the left wing and to a central role. Thuram, though, has only scored twice for his country in 20 caps, and one of them came against Gibraltar.

Then there is Randal Kolo Muani, but he appears low on confidence after a difficult season in Mbappe's shadow at

- Kylian Mbappe, who is doubtful for the game with a broken nose, has scored more goals against the Netherlands (six) than he has versus any other nation.
- Mbappe, France's third highest scorer of all time, is yet to score at Euro – he was unable to score in four games in the last edition of the tournament in 2022.
- This will be the fourth Euros meeting between the teams.
- France have, however, won seven of their last eight matches against the Dutch in all competitions, the exception being a 2-0 defeat in the UEFA Nations League in November 2018.



Luka Jovic celebrates after scoring a last-gasp header to snatch an equaliser for Serbia after Slovenia were put ahead by Zan Karnicnik in a Group C fixture of Euro 2024 yesterday. Even though the 1-1 draw kept both teams in contention for a place in the last 16, the head of the Serbian football association threatened to pull the team out of the tournament over chants, including "Kill, kill, kill the Serb", made during the draw between Albania and Croatia.

PHOTO: REUTERS