

Tigers in search of intent against buoyant Afghans

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will take on Afghanistan in their last Super Eight fixture of the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup on Tuesday at the Arnos Vale Ground in St. Vincent, hoping to salvage pride following dismal outings against Australia and India respectively which has left their semifinal hopes hanging by a thread.

Afghanistan have beaten Australia handsomely at Arnos Vale Ground, a win that would surely see them enter the contest against the Tigers as favourites in terms of form.

The Tigers, meanwhile, would be hoping that their unbeaten run in ICC events against Afghanistan, which currently stands at four, would help them thwart the Afghans once again under the bright lights.

In St. Vincent, Afghanistan's openers set the plot for the win as they kept Australia on a tight leash throughout the game and sealed a convincing win. Now, if the Australia-India game goes in India's favour, Afghanistan can make the semis by beating Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, go in to the game, still in search of impetus to take the game by the scruff of the neck in key match situations.

First and foremost, the Powerplay effort with the bat has been grim. Against India on Saturday, Bangladesh managed just 42 for 1 in chase of 197, which forced them to play catch up for the rest of the way.



» Afghanistan edge Bangladesh in head-to-head records in T20Is with six wins against the Tigers' five in 11 meetings. However, in their only meeting in the T20 World Cup, Bangladesh beat Afghanistan by nine wickets in the 2014 edition.

» The average first innings total at the Arnos Vale Stadium in St. Vincent, the venue for the match, is 132 after four T20 World Cup matches. Bangladesh won both their group-stage fixtures against Netherlands and Nepal while Afghanistan pulled off their historic upset over Australia at the venue.



With batters out of form and no one settled in well enough to score runs on a good batting surface, Bangladesh could not make a game of it.

Barring the skill gap, the lack of intent has been Bangladesh's problem in games against

big sides, which was glaringly evident against India on Saturday.

Such was the brunt of the defeat, that Shakib Al Hasan, one of the team's most experienced players, gave up any hopes of making it to semifinals, even though after

Afghanistan's win over Australia yesterday, the Tigers have a route to the semis, no matter how unlikely it seems at the moment.

"To be honest, I don't think we have a chance to play the semifinal anymore after today's [Saturday] loss," Shakib said after the

defeat against India.

"But having said that, the next game will be an opportunity for us to get a win under our belt before we finish up this tournament. We'd love to finish this tournament on a high.

"We have to face Afghanistan which is a very good side. So, we have to be at our best to be able to win against them," he added.

With Afghanistan flying high, finding themselves at ease in conditions in St. Vincent, Bangladesh will have to bring their A game to even be competitive.

The wicket is unlikely to be very batting friendly and Bangladesh found that out for themselves during their game against Nepal in the venue, where they were unable to even play the full 20 overs.

While Bangladesh have been unable to show signs of improvement against big sides, Afghanistan excelled in that challenge and conjured up a win against Australia which will be remembered for a long time.

"It's not just like a bilateral game. It's a World Cup game, and definitely in a World Cup, you're beating a best side. It's a great achievement," an overjoyed Rashid Khan said after leading his side to win over Australia.

Even though Bangladesh will have a mathematical chance of making it to the semis if India beat Australia today, the only realistic target for the Tigers would be a better showing against Afghanistan and try to end with a win. Anything past that will be the very definition of bonus gains.

SHORT CORNER

Mbappe recovery continues but return for France remains unclear

France forward Kylian Mbappe is continuing to recover from his broken nose even though it is not yet sure whether he will play on Tuesday in his side's last group game at the European Championship, coach Didier Deschamps said on Sunday. France's captain fractured his nose last Monday in their opener against Austria.

Cummins creates history with second consecutive T20 WC hat-trick

Australia quick Pat Cummins created history in St Vincent on Saturday when he became the first player to register a hat-trick in consecutive ICC Men's T20 World Cup matches. Cummins registered a hat-trick over two overs against Bangladesh on Thursday and the right-arter completed the feat once again against Afghanistan.

De Bruyne leads from front to get Belgium firing again

Belgium's fearsome forward line needed only 73 seconds to finally come alive at Euro 2024 on Saturday but almost 80 minutes later they were still trying to deliver the knockout blow on Romania. Then the masterful Kevin De Bruyne took matters into his own hands with his 28th goal for his country to totally change the feel of the night.

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Qualification race heats up as India face Australia

AGENCIES

Afghanistan exercised the demons of their defeat against Australia in the previous ODI World Cup with their victory over the Aussies in yesterday's Super Eight fixture and in the process have thrown open the Group 1 with all four teams in with a chance to make it to the semifinals with one match in hand.

The first of the remaining two Group 1 fixtures - India-Australia - will take place today in St. Lucia, where India have a chance to exact revenge for the scarring defeat in the final of last year's ODI World Cup final in home turf by putting Australia at the precipice of getting knocked out.

If India win, they would move onto the semis with six points and Australia would remain on two points and their qualification hopes will depend on the outcome of the Bangladesh-Afghanistan match the next day.

If the Afghans defeat the Tigers, they would move onto the semis for the first time as group runners-up with four points, sending Australia and Bangladesh packing.

However, if the Afghans lose, Australia, Bangladesh and Afghanistan will finish the Super Eight stage with two points and the qualification race will be decided on the basis of net run



rate, which would put Mitchell Marsh's team in poll position to qualify.

Even if Afghanistan lose by just one run, Australia will need to lose by 31 for their run rate to slip below that of Afghanistan. Bangladesh will need to win by 31 runs for their net run rate to sneak ahead of Afghanistan's, but they will also need Australia to lose by 55 runs, to finish second in the group.

However, if Australia come out on top against India, it would end Bangladesh's hopes of playing the semis and the other three teams will finish on four points.

If Australia win by a run, Afghanistan will need a 36-run win over the Tigers to overtake Australia on net run rate. If Australia win a run-chase off the last ball, Afghanistan will have to win their

game in 15.4 overs or sooner, assuming first-innings scores of 160.

For India to get knocked out, Australia will need to beat India by 41 runs to go past them on run rate, while Afghanistan will have to beat Bangladesh by at least 83 runs.

Despite the precarious position of his team, Marsh remained confident to win against India and making it to the semifinals.

"We have a lot of belief in our group. Yes, tonight [yesterday] we had an off night, but I guess there's also a positive in the fact that in 36 hours we go again," Marsh said after the 21-run defeat against Afghanistan. "I think if you look back at the short history of this team, I know for a fact that it brings out the best in our guys."

JUNIOR AHF CUP

Girls pull a big surprise as boys retain title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh men's team became unbeaten champions in Men's Junior AHF Cup with a 4-2 win over China in the final while women's team emerged runners-up in Women's Junior AHF Cup with a 7-1 win over Singapore in their last pool match in Singapore yesterday.

The achievements also ensured qualification for the Junior Asia Cups for both men and women.

The title for men, under coach Ashiquzzaman, was quite expected as they had won this twice in five previous editions, those two coming in 2014 and in 2023. However, the women's achievement was far more difficult, given that their only previous experience was in the same tournament five years ago where they finished fifth out of six teams and a five-a-side tournament last year.

The women in red and green, however, did a tremendous job as they won five out of six matches this time and gave stiff challenge to eventual champions Chinese Taipei before going down 3-0.

"To be honest, we also did not expect such results from the girls because they did not get the opportunity to play any practice matches before the tournament. No one knew the hidden power of this group of girls, who have been training together since 2000 at BKSP," head coach Zahid Hossain Raju told The Daily Star yesterday.

Out of the 18 players, 15 are from BKSP. "We have been training the girls two sessions each day in a scientific way which has built a good bonding, understanding among the players," Raju said. "So, they were confident to perform collectively on the pitch."

Croatia face Italy in survival clash

AFP, Leipzig

Group B was dubbed Euro 2024's 'Group of Death' but while Spain soared through with a game to spare, heavyweight Italy and Croatia meet on Monday fighting to stay in the competition.

Both sides were outclassed by Spain, and while reigning champions Italy edged Albania 2-1, Croatia could only draw 2-2 with the minnows.

It gives Italy the upper hand ahead of their clash in Leipzig, with Croatia's golden generation at risk of a disappointingly early exit if they fail to win.

Croatia, who reached the 2018 and 2022 World Cup final and semifinal respectively, may make several changes as they scrap for Euros survival.

Midfielder Marcelo Brozovic, playing in Saudi Arabia, has come in for criticism after sub-par outings in the first two matches, while Real Madrid's Luka Modric, 38, has also struggled.

Full-back Ivan Perisic has looked a shadow of himself, still to find his footing after a long injury lay-off.

Youngster Luka Sucic could replace Brozovic, as he did at half-time against Albania.

Striker Bruno Petkovic, who missed a penalty in the 3-0 beating by Spain, called on Croatia to deliver for their vast support in Germany. "The responsibility is on us, we



» This will be Croatia and Italy's third meeting at a major tournament, all taking place in the group stages.

» Since gaining independence in the early 1990s, Croatia are unbeaten in their eight meetings against Italy (W3 D5). Their last three encounters have all ended 1-1.

owe it to our fans to show more," he said.

"I expect us to beat Italy, and I hope it's going to happen."

Italy need a draw against Croatia to claim second place but after being thoroughly outplayed in their 1-0 loss to Spain, expectations are not high for the Azzurri.

Italy coach Luciano Spalletti could also ring the changes with striker Mateo Retegui in contention, along with defender Matteo Darmian, who

could replace Giovanni Di Lorenzo after a torturous night against Spain's Nico Williams.

Even Italy's opening victory over Albania was not without its challenges - Sassuolo's Nedim Bajrami put Albania ahead with the fastest goal in Euros history on 23 seconds. Hence, as things stand, with defending champions Italy fighting to regain their old glory days and Croatia desperate to bounce back, fans can expect a fiery clash.

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