

Pothas cries 'power' crisis but offers no solution

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh assistant coach Nic Pothas has argued that batters did not have the required power to have confidence about them that they are going to make up for deliveries they use up to get in.

The South African used West Indies as an example, almost a near-exception in terms of power-hitting capabilities.

"I think one thing you've got to acknowledge is you can't fight genetics. You have to have a genetic predisposition to power initially. I mean, we've seen what Rishad [Hossain] can do. Rishad has improved and come on since that New Zealand series to now. But power is something that takes a lot of time. If you're not predisposed to being strong; West Indians don't have to find power. They're born with power. We're not born with power, so we have to do it a different way," Pothas said at a press conference in Antigua on Sunday.

While Pothas urged for 'finding power', it is well documented that the team's batting unit has digressed in terms of application during his tenure, which started in May 2023. Given how



Bangladesh batters approached match phases such as Powerplays or death overs, especially during this T20 World Cup, it is evident that Pothas, like many others in the coaching panel, has failed to prepare batters tactically for the situations they face.

In fact, when asked how to solve the 'power' crisis, Pothas ended with 'we've got to find solutions.'

Generally, Bangladesh batters take a lot longer to settle in and play their shots. In majority of the competitive sides, there are big power-hitters who accelerate the scoring rate but Bangladesh have historically struggled to find batters of that nature. It should not need another World Cup to know that these problems existed.

Bangladesh batters have also struggled immensely with shot-selection in this World Cup. If it is argued that power-hitting capabilities can help them play more calmly, power would still not help batters pick the right deliveries to hit, or which bowlers to target -- the tactical nuances of batting.

Yet, Pothas found something new to learn from the defeats to Australia and India in the Super Eight stage.

"I think we would be making a very big error if we didn't learn and understand why there is the gap between where we are and where the top teams are," he said. "One thing that is very, very obvious throughout this tournament, if you

haven't got power, you can't compete. So, it's all about power."

Pothas argued that Bangladesh have not moved forward since the 2007 World Cup. When he should be answering questions about why the likes of Liton Das or Tanzid Tamim look shaky instead of being confident in their shot-making abilities, Pothas was suggesting about what questions have to be asked.

"If Bangladesh is still doing the same thing they were doing in 2007, then it shouldn't be a surprise that they haven't moved forward. And the rest of the world has become bigger. So that's the question we need to be asking. What is different now to 2007? Not what we need to do," he said, adding "we need to find power from somewhere."

He argued in the same press conference that Bangladesh needed power-hitting capabilities while suggesting that one has to find a different way if they are not born with it.

It seems that it is not just batting power that Bangladesh lack; there seems to be a need for some inspired brand of coaching too.

Powell praises Windies' revival despite exit

AGENCIES

West Indies captain Rovman Powell expressed pride in reigniting enthusiasm for Caribbean cricket during the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup, despite the team exiting in the Super Eight stage yesterday.

Needing a victory against South Africa in Antigua to advance to the semi-finals, the co-hosts fell short in a rain-affected match, losing by three wickets. Powell acknowledged the team's progress, saying, "I think the cricket that we've played in the last 12 months or so is commendable."

He praised the team for their significant improvement, moving from ninth to third in world rankings. Powell also highlighted the renewed excitement for West Indies cricket, attributing it to the team's performance and the passionate support from fans, both at matches and on social media.

"They [crowd] have been fantastic. It's good to see that some buzz is back in the Caribbean for cricket because we know for how long that has died down," he noted.

Reflecting on the team's history -- an all-conquering team whose authority faced since the late 1980s -- Powell hoped this tournament would signal a new beginning for the two-time T20 World Cup champions.

"Now is where the work starts for us to continue to work as a group [and] still be tight, and hopefully we can continue to climb the rankings and make the Caribbean people proud," he concluded.



Slowly shedding the 'Chokers' tag?

ASHEFAQ UL-ALAM

The stage was set for another classic South African choke in an ICC event when they took on West Indies in a virtual knockout fixture in the Super Eight stage of the ICC T20 World Cup yesterday in Antigua.

Even after winning all five of their previous matches, South Africa somehow found themselves in a do-or-die encounter against the Caribbean, where the winner would move onto the semifinals while the loser's campaign would come to an end.

It was a low-scoring thriller, something the ongoing edition has seen plenty of, which also included a rain interruption in the Proteas' chase, adding more drama to an already nervy affair.

South Africa had already lost a couple of wickets in the first two overs when rain stopped play and once action resumed, they were set a revised target of 123 in 17 overs.

From there, what proceeded resembled a boxing bout between two heavyweights, constantly exchanging heavy blows but no one gaining the upper hand.

Almost every middle-order batter in the South African line-up got starts, reaching scores of 20s and thereabouts. But whenever it looked like the Proteas would take the ascendancy, West



Indies would counterpunch with breakthroughs.

Eventually, with 23 needed off 24 balls and five wickets in hand, it seemed like the Proteas had this one in the bag. But then set batter Tristan Stubbs succumbed to the pressure of the situation, just like many South African batters of the past in knockout scenarios, trying to hit a six off Roston Chase only to get caught at long-on.

The echoes of South Africa's past horrors in knockouts got even louder when Keshav Maharaj got caught off the same bowler in the penultimate over, with a risky shot when only 13 were required off 11 balls.

The raucous home crowd at the Sir Vivian Richard Stadium erupted at the

dismissal, while the few South African fans present looked on fearing another heart-breaking elimination from a World Cup.

But the Aiden Markram-led side is different to the past South African sides in ICC events at least in one crucial account. Unlike past teams, this group of players have repeatedly shown they can hold their nerves till the end and eke out victories.

South Africa are the only team in the tournament who have won all of their matches, but their victories have been far from dominant. The Proteas have been in vulnerable situations in all of their matches and have had to scratch and claw themselves out of a hole, which was perfect preparation for the situation they found themselves in against West Indies yesterday.

With pressure mounting, Kagiso Rabada hit a crucial four in the final ball of the 16th, leaving five runs for the final over.

The pressure, this time, got the better of pacer Obed McCoy, who dished a ball right in Marco Jansen's hitting zone, who muscled it over long-on for a six and took South Africa to the semis.

The close wins in the first round and Super Eight, although impressive, are not enough to shed South Africa's dreaded choker tag. To get rid of that moniker, the Proteas must go all the way for the first time. But even before that, they need to win the semifinal, something they have never done in senior cricket.

Lacklustre England must make their presence felt

REUTERS, Blankenhain

While England already have one foot in the knockout round of Euro 2024 and can finish no lower than third in their group, they need to make their presence felt at a tournament that has seen optimism around them wither after two lacklustre games.

England need to avoid defeat against Slovenia in Cologne to guarantee progress and will definitely top the group with a win. If Denmark fail to beat Serbia in the other Group C match, England will qualify regardless of their result against Slovenia.

Slovenia will go through to the last 16 if they win.

Supporters and pundits have levelled scathing criticism at Gareth Southgate's England side after their 1-0 win over Serbia and anxious 1-1 draw with Denmark that saw fans boo them off the pitch.

Southgate had some concerning post-game comments, pointing to the players' conditioning after long and gruelling seasons.

"We are not pressing well enough, with enough intensity," he said.

The biggest questions are around what changes Southgate will make after he went with the same lineup in both games for the first time in 16 matches.



Southgate took off Trent Alexander-Arnold, who is struggling out of position in midfield, early in the second half against Denmark, and forwards Harry Kane, Bukayo Saka, and Phil Foden followed some 15 minutes later.

Kane, who said he is fully fit for the game amid speculation about a back injury

that bothered him late in the Bundesliga season, hit back at former England players for their scathing criticism of the team's performances.

"I would never want to be disrespectful to any player, especially a player who has worn the shirt and knows what it is like to play for England," said Kane.

"(But) the bottom line is we haven't won anything as a nation for a long, long time and a lot of these players were part of that as well and they know how tough it is."

Slovenia were heading for their first victory at a European Championship when Serbia's Luka Jovic equalised seconds before the final whistle to snatch a 1-1 draw.

"We have proven that we deserve to be at Euro 2024," Slovenia manager Matjaz Kek said. "Football can be really cruel. But I am convinced that this team will get its satisfaction."

England's defence could have their hands full coping with Slovenia striker Benjamin Sesko, who has drawn comparisons to Manchester City's towering forward Erling Haaland.

"(England) know we have played two great games, they are not at their best, they're still great of course, but I think now is the best opportunity to play against them and show them the best we can," said Sesko.

France need goals with or without Mbappe

REUTERS, Dortmund

France will try to finally get the goals flowing against already-eliminated Poland as they seek to finish top of their Euro 2024 group on Tuesday, but questions remain about the availability of key forward Kylian Mbappe.

The striker -- who broke his nose in France's opener against Austria and sat out the following game against the Netherlands -- donned a mask to take part in a practice match on Saturday.

France have so far failed to find the net themselves in Germany -- they beat Austria in their opener courtesy of an own goal and drew 0-0 with the Dutch -- so coach Didier Deschamps will be tempted to bring Mbappe back against Poland, especially since the striker scored twice and helped France to an easy 3-1 win when the two sides last met in a game in 2022 World Cup.

Netherlands sit top of Group D, having scored more goals than the French.

Should France finish in third place, they could face England or Spain in the last 16.

Orpita aims to lay women's hockey's foundation

Midfielder Orpita Pal played a vital role in Bangladesh's surprising runners-up finish in the just-concluded Women's Junior AHF Cup, scoring 10 of Bangladesh's 31 goals in six matches, during which she bagged three Player of the Match awards. Orpita, who orchestrated the build-up play and fed the scorers when required, also ended up becoming the joint second top scorer along with eventual champions Chinese Taipei's Lai Ya-Han. The 11th-grade BKSP student spoke to Anisur Rahman of The Daily Star after the team's arrival from Singapore yesterday. Following are the excerpts of the conversation:

The Daily Star (DS): Your feelings after achieving a surprising result.

Orpita Pal (OP): We were given a big reception on our arrival at the airport, which we really did not expect to get. Of course, it has been a good feeling to achieve something more than what we expected.



DS: Despite hardly any international experience, how did it all materialise?

OP: Of the 18-member squad, 15 players are from BKSP where we have been training together by availing all facilities since 2020, so there has been a good bonding and understanding among the players.

Besides, we also played under the same coach [Zahid Hossain Raju] who trained us at BKSP, so we were able

to show our strength in Singapore. The coaching staff also provided a lot of mental support.

DS: Why did you choose hockey, which has almost no future in the country?

OP: Usually, I played athletics, handball, kabaddi, and basketball at the school level where I also succeeded in athletics, but I grew interested in playing hockey when hockey was being trained at our school -- Dinaipur Jubilee High School. Then I got admitted to grade seven at BKSP in 2020. [About hockey's future in Bangladesh] Yes, there is hardly any future in women's hockey in Bangladesh, but we want to lay a foundation of women's hockey from where others will step in to develop it.

DS: Your playing experience before getting admitted to BKSP?

OP: Before getting admitted to BKSP, I had been selected for the national women's U-21 hockey team, ahead of the Women's Junior AHF Cup in 2019, and I started in the best eleven in three matches out of five we played against Kazakhstan and played two matches from the bench.

DS: What do you expect from the federation against the Women's Junior Asia Cup?

OP: We want the federation to take the initiative to have a long-term training camp and arrange warm-up matches abroad so that we can hone our skills more in a bid to produce good results against the strong teams in the Women's Junior Asia Cup. Besides, we also want the federation to introduce competitions for women, so that the girls can grow their interest in playing hockey in the future.



PHOTO: AFP