

Tigers can turn fortunes against India, Pak: Talha

SPORTS REPORTER

Former national pacer Talha Jubair believes Bangladesh can turn things around against India in the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy and is optimistic about their chances against hosts Pakistan in the eight-team event, set to begin on February 19.

"Whenever we play against India, we have big expectations. Having come close on many occasions, we couldn't finish the job. I hope that we'll be able to finish this time. And it's possible to beat Pakistan," Talha told reporters in Mirpur on Saturday.

Bangladesh, who started their pre-tournament preparations in Dubai on Saturday after arriving a day earlier, are in Group A alongside India, Pakistan, and New Zealand.

Since Bangladesh's 2007 ICC World Cup victory over India, the Tigers have fought hard in a losing cause several times, with the 2016 T20 World Cup being a notable heartbreak as they lost by one run in Bengaluru despite needing just two runs off three balls.

In the 2022 T20 World Cup, they suffered a narrow five-run defeat in Adelaide after a rain-affected chase. Bangladesh also fared well in the 2015 World Cup quarterfinals and the 2017 Champions Trophy semifinals but India proved a tough nut to crack.

Against Pakistan, Bangladesh's record in ICC events is rather unimpressive, with only one win in the 1999 World Cup. However, they made history last year by defeating Pakistan 2-0 in Rawalpindi in the ICC Test Championship, securing their first-ever Test series win over them. With their Champions Trophy match set for the same venue, Talha remains hopeful.

The current BCB coach also feels that bowling in partnership will be key for the Tigers in the mega event.

"Bowling in partnership is essential... So it's important to keep pressure on them by not leaking runs, even if you can't take wickets," said Talha, who was recently seen working with the Tigers during their Bangladesh phase of preparation after the end of the Bangladesh Premier League.

"There is a matter of changing the mood when you are switching from T20 to the one-day format. We worked on that aspect," he concluded.

Bangladesh will begin their tournament campaign against India on February 20 in Dubai before they take on New Zealand and Pakistan in their remaining Group A matches on February 24 and 27, respectively.

Before the tournament campaign gets underway, Bangladesh are also scheduled to play a warm-up game against Pakistan Shaheens on February 17 at the ICC Cricket Academy in Dubai.



The pace quartet of Bangladesh -- Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Nahid Rana, and Tanzim Hasan Sakib -- gears up at the ICC Cricket Academy in Dubai yesterday during the Tigers' first practice session ahead of their Champions Trophy 2025 opener against India in the UAE on February 20. India named the most spin-heavy squad among the eight teams participating in the competition but the Tigers, with three regular spinners in their squad, might have to counter that with their in-form pace unit. PHOTO: BCB

Indian spin trial awaits Bangladesh in Dubai

SPORTS REPORTER

Before leaving for the UAE for their opening fixture of the ICC Champions Trophy against India, Bangladesh underwent a five-day training camp in Mirpur, where a few extra bowlers were brought in to assist the squad.

While most of the net bowlers were either internationally capped cricketers or had extensive experience in the domestic circuit, there was also a 17-year-old spinner in the camp, with just one List-A match to his name: Nuhayat Sandeed, son of the national team's assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin. The presumed reason behind his inclusion was his unique profile as a left-arm leg spinner.

Bangladesh are in Group A of the Champions Trophy, slotted alongside three former champions: India, Pakistan and New Zealand. Interestingly, out of the three, only India have a left-arm leg spinner in their ranks in Kuldeep Yadav.

So, the Bangladesh think tank went out of their way to prepare the batters for the challenge they will face against Kuldeep in the India clash on February 20 in Dubai. However, in that match, Kuldeep will not be the only spinner that the batters would have to deal with.

Out of the eight participating teams in the tournament, India are the only side who have named a spin-heavy team. They have five spin-bowling options in their 15-man squad -- three spin-bowling all-rounders in Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar and Axar Patel -- and two spinners in Varun Chakravarthy and Kuldeep.

With star pacer Jasprit Bumrah out

with a back injury, India brought in pacer Harshit Rana. However, India also made the interesting choice of dropping batter Yashasvi Jaiswal to bring in Varun, a move to further strengthen their spin-bowling reserves.

We will take preparation for the main game from our practice match [against Pakistan Shaheens on Monday]. We will try to gather knowledge about the wicket and will also try to know which deliveries are effective here. We will also try to figure out the type of deliveries in which the batters would struggle.

Bangladesh pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib after the Tigers' practice session in Dubai yesterday.

As India will not travel to Pakistan for the tournament, all of their matches will take place at the Dubai International Stadium, which was one of the three venues in the recently concluded T20, and perhaps the Indian management is

hoping that the pitches would be worn out, allowing their spinners to dictate terms.

In their last ODI assignment before the Champions Trophy, India played three spinners in all three matches against England, trying out different combinations of the five spinners.

As Bangladesh are likely to play three left-handers in the top three -- Tanzid Tamim, Soumya Sarkar and Najmul Hossain Shanto -- chances are that India would include Washington or Varun as a right arm spinner, Axar or Jadeja as the left-arm spin-bowling all-rounder, and then Kuldeep as the wrist spinner, meaning Bangladesh batters would have to deal with at least 30 overs of quality spin bowling.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, have three genuine spin bowling options in their squad: Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain and Nasum Ahmed.

The Tigers have lately banked more on their pace attack, who have delivered for them, but in Dubai, Bangladesh might have to revert to the old days and field a spin-heavy team if the conditions demand so.

Bangladesh had their first taste of the conditions yesterday when they had their first training session in Dubai at the ICC Academy. They will play a warm-up game in Dubai on Monday against Pakistan Shaheens, which will give them a chance to better gauge the conditions.

However, the chances of a trial by spin waiting for Bangladesh in their tournament opener are really high.

BNS renamed as National Stadium

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka on Saturday, a directive from the National Sports Council (NSC), signed by NSC secretary Aminul Islam, confirmed.

Built in 1954 in Paltan as Dhaka Stadium, Bangladesh's premier sporting venue hosted some major international sporting events.



Owned and maintained by the NSC, the infrastructure was renamed from Dhaka Stadium to Bangabandhu National Stadium in 1996 after Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League first came to power.

This is the latest move in renaming sporting infrastructure across the country in recent times as 150 mini stadiums in 150 upazilas, originally named as Sheikh Russel Mini Stadiums, were renamed after the respective upazilas last Wednesday.

The NSC had, in November last year, renamed Tangail District Stadium as Shaheed Maruf Stadium and Kustia District Stadium as Shaheed Abrar Fahad Stadium.

In same boat, Spurs and United face off

AGENCIES

Two fallen titans of the English game face off in Sunday's Premier League as Tottenham welcome Ruben Amorim's Manchester United.

The two teams find themselves in unfamiliar territory in the standings with United 13th and Spurs 14th, two points behind Amorim's side.

Given the plight of both clubs, it is understandable Amorim said he shares a connection with his counterpart Ange Postecoglou.

Both managers have tried to get their players to adopt a specific style of play, which has often cost them at the back as they leak goals.

Tottenham have already beaten United twice in all competitions this season, 3-0 in the Premier League and 4-3 in the EFL Cup quarterfinals.

"I'm a huge fan of Ange Postecoglou," Amorim told reporters on Friday.

"The simple thing is that I use one system at the moment because I believe if you work on that system you can play in different systems at the same time. "But we are not winning games and I understand the connection between me and Ange, we have the same problems."

Despite Amorim being understanding of Postecoglou's situation, the latter would definitely not want anything other than a win against United. And Spurs have a good omen to forward to in this case.

Following their 2-0 win against Brentford in their previous Premier League fixture, Spurs are looking to win back-to-back Premier League games for just the second time this season, previously doing so in September when, funnily enough, their two wins were over Brentford and United.

Sinner's ban to end before French Open

REUTERS

World number one Jannik Sinner has accepted an immediate three-month doping ban after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said they had reached a settlement on his period of ineligibility, allowing him to return before the French Open in May.

WADA had appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against an independent tribunal's decision in August to clear Sinner of wrongdoing after the three-times major winner failed drug tests.

Sinner, who successfully defended his Australian Open crown last month, had tested positive for anabolic agent clostebol which the 23-year-old said had entered his system from a member of his support team through massages and sports therapy.

Sinner's ban began on February 9 and will end on May 4 while he can return to training on April 13. The French Open main draw is scheduled to begin on May 25.

"WADA accepts that Mr Sinner did not intend to cheat and that his exposure to clostebol did not provide any performance-enhancing benefit and took place without his knowledge as the result of negligence of members of his entourage," WADA said

in a statement on Saturday. "However, under the Code and by virtue of CAS precedent, an athlete bears responsibility for the entourage's negligence."

WADA has formally withdrawn its appeal to CAS after they reached a settlement while they did not seek disqualification of his results.

"This case had been hanging over me now for nearly a year and the process still had a long time to run with a decision maybe only at the end of the year," Sinner said in a statement.

"I have always accepted that I am responsible for my team and realise WADA's strict rules are an important protection for the sport I love.

"On that basis I have accepted WADA's offer to resolve these proceedings on the basis of a three-month sanction."

Meanwhile, Australian Nick Kyrgios said it was a "sad day for tennis" after several other players received longer bans for similar positive tests.

"Obviously Sinner's team have done everything in their power to just go ahead and take a three-month ban, no titles lost, no prize money lost," Kyrgios wrote on social media platform X.

"Guilty or not? Sad day for tennis. Fairness in tennis does not exist."



Midfielder Mikel Merino scored two late goals to keep Arsenal's Premier League title hopes alive with a 2-0 victory at Leicester City on Saturday after the Spaniard was thrust into a makeshift centre-forward role due to his club's injury crisis up front. Second-placed Arsenal move to 53 points from their 25 matches, four behind leaders Liverpool, having played a game more. Leicester, meanwhile, remain in the relegation zone with 17 points from 25 matches. PHOTO: REUTERS