

Can batters lift Bangladesh in Pindi?

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Rawalpindi

"Bangladesh's got a good bowling attack, that's what I like about them. But big concern is about the batters," Pakistan's head curator Tony Hemming said this yesterday when asked about Bangladesh's chances in today's match against New Zealand.

Tony worked as a curator educator for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) from July 2023 to July 2024 and due to his association with the Tigers, he knows about their strengths and weaknesses very well.

Bangladesh's rise in the pace-bowling department in recent years is nothing unknown but at the same time, their performance as a batting unit in bilateral and global events has been on a downward curve and has let the entire unit down many a times.

The Tigers have already suffered due to their batting in their opening Group A match of the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy against India in Dubai where their top-order crumbled and they were reduced to 35-5 in not time.

Centurion Towhid Hridoy and Jaker Ali then put up a rescue act with a brilliant 154-run partnership to bail Bangladesh out from the early collapse but it wasn't enough to avert defeat.

If Bangladesh find themselves in a similar situation against New Zealand in today's do-or-die contest, a similar rescue act would once again most likely fall short on the typically flat surfaces at Rawalpindi.

In recent years, this venue has witnessed many big chases, the latest ones coming in 2023, when Pakistan won two

games against New Zealand chasing 337 and 289 runs.

Keeping this record in mind, Bangladesh surely won't want any kind of slip ups in their batting, otherwise, their dreams of progressing to the knockout phase of the Champions Trophy could end today.

Poor form of some of the batters and the fact that three of the top six batters got out for a duck against India raises concerns and it would be interesting to see what changes the team management makes for the match against the Kiwis.

"I'm not concerned about their form. I just think that we need to assess and put together our batting in the first 10 overs a little bit better than we've done. And as you say, the middle order and the lower order have done really well. So, it's up to our top order batters to put things together in the first 10 overs, 15 overs especially," Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons told reporters during a press conference yesterday. "Some teams are different in tournament cricket than in a series, so you can't really match it up like that. So, you have to take what they're going into the tournament with now and then look at that, not look at the past series," he added.



Bangladesh's Towhid Hridoy is 23 runs away from 1000 ODI runs. New Zealand's Glenn Phillips is four runs shy of the same landmark.

Bangladesh have won 11 ODIs in 45 overall meetings against New Zealand. The Tigers lost 33 matches and one encounter between the sides produced no result.

The Tigers won the latest meeting between the sides — a maiden ODI win away to New Zealand in December 2023.

Bangladesh beat New Zealand in their previous Champions Trophy meeting, in Cardiff in 2017, thanks to a record 224-run stand between Mahmudullah Riyad and Shakib Al Hasan.

The only other time Bangladesh played New Zealand in the Champions Trophy, the Tigers were bundled out for 77 runs — their lowest total in the competition so far. Bangladesh were hammered by 167 runs in that game in Colombo in 2002.

Ex-BCB man keeps Tigers on their toes

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Rawalpindi

Soon after he tendered his resignation to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) abruptly in last year's July, renowned curator Tony Hemming joined the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on a two-year contract.

One of Tony's immediate tasks was to prepare wickets for Pakistan's home series against Bangladesh and during his

just couldn't read it," Tony, who is currently overseeing the wickets of the ICC Champions Trophy across the three Pakistan venues — Rawalpindi, Lahore and Karachi — told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Australian curator has prepared three wickets for three different games at Rawalpindi, starting with the Bangladesh-New Zealand match today, which he said would be played on a bare pitch with hardly any grass.

batters more than the bowlers.

"We will finish Pakistan-Bangladesh in the middle [pitch], some green grass are there.

"Most of them close to 300 [par score]... Normally, there's a good balance between bat and ball. But the grass has been buried because of the winter. So, for batters it would be playing beautifully," he said.

On Saturday, Australia chased down a target of 352 runs in 47.3 overs in Lahore and after the match, Australia's centurion Josh Inglis claimed that dew made life easier for them.

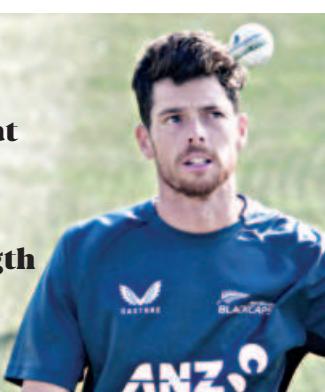
Tony said dew could play a big role in Rawalpindi as well.

"We will have dew. So normally, dew helps the second team batting, doesn't it? So, it will be a challenge," he added.

Meanwhile, during the press meet, New Zealand skipper Mitchell Santner said they would formulate a plan for the Bangladesh game keeping the wickets' behaviour in mind.

"We've got a few plans for Bangladesh, but I think we obviously have to wait and see what the wicket does. If it is pretty flat, I think it is probably similar stuff to what we've been operating in Karachi. It's hitting that hard length for a long period of time."

New Zealand skipper MITCHELL SANTNER



first assignment, Pakistan suffered their first ever defeat against Bangladesh on home soil and also lost the two-match Test series 2-0 at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in August-September.

"That was funny, wasn't it? The first Test, Bangladesh beat Pakistan on this soil and on my pitch... I was like a traitor [laughs]. The pitch I made here was a very good cricket wicket. But Pakistan

"What I can say is that there's no grass. Because we played one tournament for a month here in December, [with matches] every day. And we had ice on the field every day. So, the grass is recovering."

Tony also said that the wicket which would be used for the Bangladesh-Pakistan tie on February 27 is the greenest of the three but said all of the wickets at Rawalpindi would help the

"It is pretty flat, I think it is probably similar stuff to what we've been operating in Karachi. It's hitting that hard length for a long period of time."

"I think traditionally it's quite a high scoring ground so we have to be on it then with the bat, we just talk about trying to build partnerships and do that out there."

Shakib's name withdrawn, Liton left without a team

SPORTS REPORTER

The lead up to the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) players' transfer had been meek this year, especially in light of the ongoing Champions Trophy tournament but Legends of Rupganj created a stir by drafting in all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan on Saturday — the opening day of the two-day window. On Sunday, however, the club withdrew Shakib's name, communicating their wish via a letter to the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM).

The second and final day of the transfers took place yesterday and Shakib's news instigated some liveliness to an otherwise dull window. Meanwhile, wicket-keeper-batter Liton Das was left unregistered as negotiations with clubs regarding payment fell through.

Rupganj sent a letter to the CCDM yesterday, citing that since Shakib was unable to physically attend the players' transfer yesterday, the club also took into account surrounding 'circumstances' to withdraw the all-rounder's name, having discussed the matter with Shakib.

Afif Hossain, who was close to re-signing with Abahani, was later signed by Rupganj.

When contacted, Rupganj owner Lutufur Rahman Badal said that they thought Shakib would be able to play as an all-rounder. Shakib is currently serving a bowling ban outside of Bangladesh over illegal action.

"Shakib will go to London on March 1 and train with a coach to correct his action and until he corrects it, he won't be able to give the bowling test. We needed an all-rounder and thought of Shakib as the No. 4 [in batting order] but when we couldn't do that, we took Afif. Both parties [club and Shakib] understood that Eid will pass before he completes the test. I thought he would be able to bowl but later I learned that he can only play as a

batter. If it wasn't an ICC recognised List A tournament, he would have been able to bowl," Badal told The Daily Star.

However, BCB officials said that Shakib is allowed to bowl in Bangladesh's domestic competitions, something this newspaper had reported earlier.

Liton and Abahani could not come to terms regarding payments and although Rupganj had spoken of their interest, the player remained unsold. Liton can still find a club by taking NOC from Abahani if he wants to play for another club.

Butler banks on new team but keeps door open for seniors

SPORTS REPORTER

Putting the issue of senior and junior players aside, Bangladesh women's football team coach Peter Butler termed his 23 member squad as a new national team, which will leave for Dubai tonight for two FIFA friendly matches against the United Arab Emirates.

The 58-year-old coach felt the young team, despite the boycott saga by the seniors, have had a good preparation for the two matches, scheduled for February 26 and March 2.

"It's been a good preparation. I love to say it is really a positive and exciting squad of players; delighted with the group the way they actually did know many things and many topics last two to three weeks.

"The most important thing from my perspective is it is a group for future and looking forward to them. They can make mistakes but they will gain experience," Butler said in his opening speech at the BFF House yesterday.

Asked how challenging it would be without the senior players, Butler said: "There is no question of senior or junior players. It is a national team. In my opinion, it is a new national team which has new vision and new opportunity to look

forward. I think it is a very important fact that I picked the team which was available; I picked the team which has potential... I don't want to distinguish between seniors or juniors."

Asked whether he would accept the rebel players if they decided to return to training, Butler said: "My door is always open, the door to train is always open. The people will decide whether they want to come back. I don't mind it. It is their choice because life moves on with or without them; I will move on with another group of players. If they

don't want to come, it is okay but within the group, a small number of players whom I respect for their football quality, whether they have been misguided, or blackmailed, that is their problem, it is not my problem."

Pledging to deliver good results against the UAE, captain Afieda Khandoker said: "I don't feel the their (seniors) absence because I played with them in the U-19 and U-20 groups. The way they practised, we also practised the same way. It is just that they have experience of playing more matches and we may have less experience."

Kohli reigns supreme against Pakistan

AFP, Dubai

Star batter Virat Kohli struck an unbeaten 100 to lead India to a six-wicket win over archrivals Pakistan on Sunday and push the hosts and title holders to the brink of elimination from the Champions Trophy.

Chasing 242 for victory, Kohli hit a boundary to seal the match with 45 balls to spare and register his 51st ODI ton after an innings which also saw him pass 14,000 runs in ODIs. He is the fastest to the feat and just the third man to break the 14,000-run barrier after India icon Sachin Tendulkar (18,426) and Sri Lankan great Kumar Sangakkara (14,234).

Kohli, 36, removed his helmet and raised his bat to the Dubai International Stadium crowd after taking India closer to the semifinals with two wins in outscoring in Group A.

Pakistan have lost both their matches and will need Bangladesh to beat New Zealand on Monday to have any chance of staying in contention for a last-four spot.

"My job was clear -- to control the middle overs, not take risks against the spinners and take on the pacers," said Kohli.

"I was happy with the template, it's how I play in ODIs. I have a decent understanding of my game.

Kohli came under the cosh over his recent form, but the 36-year-old showed why he is still the man to do the job, especially Pakistan. In



major tournaments, Kohli has scored 1221 runs in 23 matches at a staggering 81.40 average against Pakistan, scoring four tons and seven fifties.

"It's about keeping the outside noise away, take care of my energy levels and thoughts. It's easy for me to get pulled into expectations and frenzy around games like these," Kohli added.

Favourites India remained clinical in their chase despite losing skipper Rohit Sharma for 20 off Shaheen Shah Afridi.

In-form Shubman Gill, who made 46 after his century in the opening win over Bangladesh, put on 69 runs with Kohli.

Kohli's hundred came in 111 balls, a knock that rolled back the years for the veteran who has 82 centuries across all formats but whose previous ODI ton came in the 2023 ODI World Cup semifinal.

Kohli and Shreyas Iyer, who made 56, put the chase back on track with a stand of 114 after Gill's departure when leg spinner Abraar Ahmed bowled the opener.

India bowled out Pakistan for 241 in 49.4 overs as left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav returned figures of 3-40.

After electing to bat, a slow approach from Pakistan batters rarely threatened the Indian attack despite a 104-run partnership between Saud Shakeel (62) and Mohammad Rizwan (46).