

‘Pride’ at stake as rain threat looms in Rawalpindi

This is the first time Bangladesh and Pakistan will meet in the ICC Champions Trophy.

Bangladesh have five victories to their name against Pakistan in ODIs. Pakistan, on the other hand, boast 34 wins against the Tigers in 39 overall meetings, including three victories in their last three encounters in ICC tournaments.

Bangladesh have never beaten Pakistan in Pakistan in ODIs. Pakistan have a 12-0 home record against Bangladesh in ODIs. The Tigers, however, have won two ODIs in the country, with both wins coming in Asia Cup contests (against the UAE in 2008 and against Afghanistan in 2023, respectively).

Mahmudullah Riyad has featured in most Bangladesh-Pakistan contests, playing in 20 encounters between the two sides, but the right-handed batter averages 23.80 and strikes it at 59.40 against this particular opposition.

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN *from Rawalpindi*

It appears that interest has waned in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, and its twin city, Rawalpindi, as fans turn their backs on today's ICC Champions Trophy Group A clash between Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The outcome of the match at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium will have no impact on the tournament after the two teams lost their opening games.

Ever since defending champions Pakistan lost to India in Dubai, most city dwellers have appeared reluctant to engage in conversation about their team's match against Bangladesh.

Among those who purchased tickets, confusion reigns; some are rethinking their plans while others, still eager to watch the game, are anxious about the unfavourable weather that has already caused the abandonment of the Group B match between South Africa and Australia.

The past two days have seen gloomy skies over the city, and forecasts indicate that the Bangladesh-Pakistan match may be similarly affected, with rain looming on the horizon.

The adverse weather led to the cancellation of Bangladesh's practice session under floodlights yesterday, while Pakistan managed only a few drills and a light football session.

During yesterday's pre-match press conference, Bangladesh's senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin claimed that although their chances of



qualification are over, they will try to win the match against Pakistan, which could be a "turning point" for their cricket.

Once considered a formidable team in the 50-over format, Bangladesh have not been enjoying a good run in the ODIs in recent years. Since the ICC World Cup 2023 in India, Bangladesh have played 23 ODIs, winning only six, with victories

against Sri Lanka (3), New Zealand (1), and Afghanistan (2).

"If you consider the future of the tournament, we have nothing to gain. But if our boys can play well, it will give us a good direction. I hope we shouldn't repeat the mistakes we made in our first two games. There is always room for improvement in every match," Salahuddin told reporters in Rawalpindi yesterday.

"You can't predict when you will gain confidence or when your moment can change. Every match is important for each player. If they perform well, it can be a big boost for them.

"This match can also be a turning point for our cricket," said Salahuddin, adding that he feels there is no room for experimentation in ICC events, while they will aim to reduce the number of dot balls in today's match.

Meanwhile, during Pakistan's press conference, their head coach Aaqib Javed claimed that the home side want to play for "pride" if the weather permits them to take the field against Bangladesh.

"Every game is played for pride, so we want to leave a mark on Thursday," said Javed.

Afghanistan opener Ibrahim Zadran smashed records with his fiery 146-ball 177 against England in an ICC Champions Trophy group-stage fixture at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Wednesday.



The swashbuckling batter initiated a counterattack after the Afghans lost three wickets inside the Powerplay, smashing 12 fours and six maximums, to propel his side to 325-7. He built a fourth-wicket partnership of 103

with skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi (40 off 67 balls), changed gears with a brisk 72-run stand with Azmatullah Omarzai (41 off 31 balls), and added a blistering 111 for the sixth wicket with Mohammad Nabi (40 off 24 balls).

Zadran's marathon knock overtook England opener Ben Duckett's 165 (scored against Australia in the ongoing edition) to become the highest individual innings in Champions Trophy history.

It is also the highest score by an Afghanistan batter in ODI cricket as it broke his own record of 162 against Sri Lanka in 2022.

325-7 is Afghanistan's highest total in ICC ODI tournaments. Their previous best was 291/5 against Australia at the 2023 World Cup.

"It's not easy to come back to international cricket, that too in 50 overs, after my injury, after seven months. I haven't played ODI cricket for the past one year. The expectation was there from me. I was trying to put a little bit of pressure on myself [to perform]. I was trying to take time and work on my basics. I always try to keep it simple. Before the game, I had a chat with Rashid. Whenever I chat with Rashid, I get a score."

CHAMPIONS TROPHY CORNER

India slammed for one-venue 'farce'

Former cricketers and pundits have slammed India's "undeniable" advantage of playing all their Champions Trophy matches in Dubai, while the other seven teams have to shuttle between three venues in Pakistan, and the UAE.

'Looks like he's here on vacation':

Wasim Akram on Mahmudullah

Pakistan legend Wasim Akram also imparted his advice about how Bangladesh should move on from veterans and bring on young blood. "They've brought guys like Mahmudullah [Riyad] and Mushfiqur Rahim who are 39 and 37 years old. Prepare young players for white ball cricket and let these veterans play red ball if they want to do it. White ball cricket is about fearlessness."

Klaasen fit again after shaking off elbow issue

South Africa batsman Heinrich Klaasen has recovered from an elbow injury that kept him out of their Champions Trophy opener against Afghanistan, skipper Temba Bavuma said. The Proteas were unsure if Klaasen would have been available to face Australia in their second match in Rawalpindi on Tuesday but the game was abandoned without a ball being bowled due to rain.

Ravindra keen to play against India in dead rubber

Rachin Ravindra has no desire to sit out New Zealand's dead rubber against India after returning to the side with a rousing century against Bangladesh at the Champions Trophy. With New Zealand already qualified for the semi-finals, selectors have the luxury of resting players for the final group match against India in Dubai on Sunday.

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Bangladesh batting stuck in archaic groove

NABID YEASIN

"Ben Duckett cost them [England] the game... scored too slow, mate... they should have got to at least 380," former South Africa batter Herschelle Gibbs said about Duckett's innings after England lost their Champions Trophy opener against Australia in Lahore last Saturday, despite posting 351 for eight -- the highest total in the competition's history -- only for Australia to chase it down with five wickets and 15 balls to spare.

The fact that Duckett's 143-ball 165 was deemed "too slow" speaks volumes about how the demands of modern cricket have changed.

And this is where Bangladesh cricket appears to have lost the plot. Their approach to ODIs not only reflects a lack of understanding of the game's current demands but also highlights their inability to adapt to a sport that has become increasingly fast-paced over the past decade, regardless of format.

The Tigers entered the Champions Trophy with hopes of winning the championship but have already been eliminated after suffering comprehensive defeats in both of their matches, against India and New Zealand.

Bangladesh have played a total of 340 dot balls in the two matches in the Champions Trophy so far -- the most by any team in the competition.

However, it is not the fact that 56.67 per cent of the overall deliveries faced by the Tigers have resulted in non-scoring shots that weighed Najmul Hossain Shanto and his team down. More importantly, modern cricket demands the ability to make up for the dots in a way that renders them insignificant in the broader



ILLUSTRATION: ANWAR SOHEL

picture -- New Zealand set the prime example when they posted 320 runs in their 60-run victory over hosts Pakistan in the tournament opener despite playing 140 dot balls, just 19 fewer than what Bangladesh had when they managed only 228 against India.

In the 11 ODIs they have played over the past 12 months, Bangladesh have batted first on eight occasions but could only cross the 300-run mark just once -- and even then, it was in a losing cause against the West Indies in St Kitts in December 2024.

All seven other teams participating in the Champions

Trophy played more than 10 matches during the same period and reached the 300-run threshold at least twice. England, the pioneers of the 'Bazball' style of aggressive cricket, made north of 300 the most times -- on six occasions.

These numbers reveal a clear shift in ODI strategy, a transformation that began over a decade ago.

The old tactic of keeping wickets in hand for a late flourish is no longer viable. The ODI format, reinvigorated by the innovation of T20 and T10 cricket, now demands scoring at an even greater pace than Duckett's strike rate of 115.38 when the pitch, conditions, and match situation allow for it.

At a time when innings like Duckett's are criticised for not being aggressive enough, Towhid Hridoy's 118-ball 100 (against India) and captain Shanto's 110-ball 77 (against New Zealand) are bound to go unnoticed.

Hence, a team that continues to repeat such outdated patterns of play is inevitably bound to be cast aside -- just as former India batter Virender Sehwag outright dismissed any chance of the Tigers winning against India.

Morsalin included in 30-man camp despite lawsuit

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team's manager Amer Khan has said that there is no reason to exclude Sheikh Morsalin from the squad after a case was filed today against the Bashundhara Kings forward over demand of dowry.

Morsalin's wife Senjuti Binte Sohel filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court in the afternoon.

According to the complaint, Senjuti got married with Morsalin on November 29 last year with a dower worth Tk 10 lakh. A few days after the marriage, Morsalin demanded a dowry of Tk 20 lakh from her to buy a car. At one stage, Senjuti was subjected to psychological pressure and torture, the complaint added.

When brought to the notice, national team manager Amer said: "There is no ground to exclude him from the squad until and unless allegations against him are proven in the court of justice. Cases can be filed against anyone, but it doesn't mean he is guilty."

Earlier in the day, head coach Javier Cabrera trimmed his original 38-member squad to 30 members including Morsalin for their preparation camp in Saudi

Arabia ahead of Asian Cup Qualifiers tie against India on March 25.

The Spanish coach had on Feb 9 announced the 38-member initial squad by drafting in four new faces as well as three Abahani defenders. However, only one Abahani defender -- Shakil Hossain -- found himself in the 30-member squad.

Out of the four new faces, goalkeeper Shakib Al Hasan and midfielder Jahid Hasan Shanto were dropped while experienced campaigners like goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico, defenders Yeasin Khan, Mehedi Hasan and Murad Hasan and young forwards Rabbi Hossain Rahul and Rafiqul Islam were also not considered for the Saudi camp, which is scheduled for February 5 to 17.

The 30-member squad also includes

Sheffield United midfielder Hamza Choudhury and Italy-based teenager Fahamedul Islam.

While Amer said that Fahamedul is expected to join the Saudi camp, he said that Hamza will join the team on March 18.

"We will get a couple of training sessions in Dhaka after returning from Saudi Arabia and we are expecting Hamza to reach Dhaka on March 18 to join training sessions before flying out for India," said the former national footballer.

The team management is also planning to play two practice matches in Saudi Arabia, subject to the availability of teams in Saudi Arabia.

The 30 selected players have been asked to report to Amer on Thursday and training will get underway the following day.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh claim kabaddi series against Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh secured the five-match kabaddi test series against Nepal with a match to spare, defeating the visitors 49-24 in the fourth fixture in Dhaka yesterday.

At the Outer Stadium Palton ground, the home side dominated from the outset and led 31-18 at halftime.

The start of the second half gave rise to a controversial umpire decision that awarded Bangladesh points after a completed raid in Nepalese territory. Nepal's appeal for a review remained unsuccessful before play resumed after a 10-minute delay.

Bangladesh's captain-cum-raider Mizanur Rahman was adjudged Player of the Match. The fifth and final match is scheduled for Friday.