

Tigers look to history but wary of creaky middle-order

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh go into the third and final ODI at Pallekele against Sri Lanka on Tuesday, hoping to clinch a first-ever ODI series win against Sri Lanka in the island nation.

Bangladesh twice drew series against Sri Lanka on their home turf but have not scaled the heights of a series win against the South Asian rivals yet.

Batting concerns remain, especially in the middle-order following the retirements of Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim. Despite win in the second ODI, Bangladesh did not bat out 50 overs while in the first ODI, a record-breaking collapse ensured that Tigers had to look for a quick turnaround in the first place.

Bangladesh's ODI form has been concerning for a while. Since their last ODI series win, incidentally against Sri Lanka at home in March last year, Bangladesh have fallen to series defeats against Afghanistan and West Indies while also exiting the Champions Trophy without a single win.

They have, however, been able to regain some confidence in the second ODI in Colombo. The win was their first after seven consecutive defeats and having clawed their way back in, the Tigers will look to repeat a feat from 2015.

Only once in their history have Bangladesh managed to win a three-match ODI series after losing the first ODI, when a confident Soumya Sarkar took

Pallekele International Cricket Stadium favours pace bowling in ODIs and is known for high-scoring games, with 15 out of 43 matches seeing totals above 300. The highest score at the venue is 381-3, made by Sri Lanka against Afghanistan in 2024. Pace bowlers have taken the majority of wickets here (329 out of 568). However, rain has heavily impacted recent matches, with the last five ODIs at Pallekele shortened or abandoned due to weather. The upcoming third ODI also faces rain threats. Bangladesh holds a mixed record here, winning once in 2013 but losing the last meeting in 2023 during the Asia Cup.



South Africa apart at home in 2015.

In comparison with Colombo, things are expected to be a bit different in Pallekele where Sri Lanka and Afghanistan have been involved in high-scoring affairs last year. But there have also been some low scoring affairs, something that should keep the batters guessing.

Bangladesh have Tanzid Hasan and Parvez Hossain, openers with a bit of flair about them. The duo has scored runs this series but has not been able to carry on for bigger scores.

It is, however, the middle-order that Sri Lanka would like to put pressure on. Tawhid Hridoy got some runs in the last game but skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Shamin Hossain or Jaker Ali did not make big contributions. It took some effort from Tanzim Sakib to take Bangladesh to a competitive total in the end.

The bowling department is where the Tigers have found solace this series. Taskin Ahmed is expected to return after being rested for the second ODI. The pacer bagged four wickets to set Bangladesh up for a chaseable total and would be keen to play a hand to clinch the series.

Spinner Tanvir Islam's filler set up the victory in the second game, turning things around at a crucial period and managing to break important partnerships. If spin comes to play, Shamin, too, is an option, having bowled nine economical overs in the second ODI.



Gill turns burden into brilliance

AGENCIES

In a summer of change for Indian cricket, it took just two Tests for Shubman Gill to silence every doubt. From stepping into the massive shoes of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to rewriting the record books in his second match as captain, Gill's Edgbaston epic announced the arrival of a new leader – and perhaps a new era.

India's thumping 336-run win over England on Sunday wasn't just a series-levelling statement – it was history made. It was their first victory in nine attempts at Edgbaston, and their biggest overseas win by runs.

At the heart of it stood Gill, composed and commanding, scoring 269 and 161 in the same match – a feat no Test batter had ever achieved before.

Gill's performances in England have transformed his Test narrative. He arrived with an average below 36. Now, after knocks of 147, 269 and 161, he has piled up 585 runs in just two Tests at an eye-watering average of 146.25.

Captaincy, often a burden for young players, has had the opposite effect on Gill. Instead of weighing him down, it has unlocked a sharper, more assured version of himself – a transformation marked not just by runs but by leadership under pressure.

"Especially when you're captain, you need to lead by example," Gill said. "If a good ball gets me out, it gets me out. But as long as I'm there, I want to play as long as possible."

What stood out wasn't just the volume of runs – it was the rhythm. His first-innings 269 was built on patience, timing and classical stroke play. In the second, with India looking to declare, he unleashed his attacking instincts, hammering 161 off just 162 balls with Rishabh Pant-like flair.

"Just as incredible as the numbers are his concentration levels," wrote former England captain Nasser Hussain. "He has elegance too."

But Gill wasn't alone in India's turnaround. After a sloppy fielding effort cost them the opener at Headingley, India were razor-sharp in the field.

Gill himself held a sharp slip catch to dismiss Ben Duckett, and Mohammed Siraj produced a stunning diving grab to remove Josh Tongue. Leading the bowling was Akash Deep, who seized his opportunity with 10 wickets for 187 – the best match figures by an Indian bowler in England.

This was also the first time India managed to level a Test series in England immediately after losing the first match – something they had failed to do in 13 previous attempts.

With three Tests still to play, Gill is now within striking distance of Don Bradman's legendary 974-run series record. But more than numbers, it's his ability to convert pressure into opportunity that suggests Indian cricket may have found its next great leader.

Will women's team receive deserved facilities?

SPORTS REPORTER

If the Bangladesh women's football team had surpassed all expectations by emerging as SAFF champions in 2022, they have completely blown it out of the water in 2025, by qualifying for the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) did not want to waste the occasion of their return from Myanmar and arranged a reception at Hatiirjheel Amphitheatre at the dead of the night on Monday.

The women in red and green looked understandably tired on the stage but not short of enthusiasm and listened intently to the current BFF president Tabith Awal promising to provide all kinds of support for their upcoming "Mission Australia" in next year's March.

"You have accomplished two things: you are making history, and you are taking us forward in our journey to changing our society's mindset," were Tabith's words of praise for the triumphant footballers.

"We, the 18 crore people, are putting our trust in you. We give our commitment that we will support you. Move forward, you don't have to look back. We will extend all of our support, prayers, and expertise for you. Please carry on," he added



"We, the girls of Bangladesh, know how to fight through adversity. Please keep believing in us. We will not let you down. Our goal is to take Bangladesh beyond Asia, to the world stage."

Ritu Porna Chakma

Tabith then concluded his speech with, "From now on, we have only one commitment, one slogan, one tagline: Mission Australia."

It was a strong message from a young leader like Tabith which should make the players feel optimistic about what lies ahead.

However, the BFF had made many lofty promises after the SAFF triumphs in 2022 and 2024 as well, but did not follow through on most of them.

The BFF, no doubt, deserves credit for the team's success as they had provided them with a foreign coach, given them accommodation, sustenance and also a salary.

But what the BFF is yet to provide the girls is a solid domestic structure from where they can earn a decent livelihood and live a better life as the salary provided by the federation is not fitting for a champion team. Moreover, the players have also gone months without receiving even that meagre amount in the past.

Hopefully, this time the BFF will fulfill all of its promises so that in the future, captain Afeda Khandokar would not have to request the BFF women's wing chief Mahfuza Akhter Kiron to clear their wages during an international tournament.

Although the BFF boss did not divulge anything specific about their 'Mission Australia': captain Afeda made a few valid demands while talking to the media in the afternoon, such as better training facilities, better grounds, improved diet, more international friendly matches against strong teams and a domestic women's football league through which female footballers across the country can earn some bucks.

Considering the many challenges the women's team have had to face, the true potential of this team is arguably still unknown. It's about time the BFF steps up with visible initiatives for this team who, according to star player Ritu Porna Chakma, "know how to fight through adversity".

'I've shaken it up': Butler credits regimen change

AGENCIES

Bangladesh women's team head coach Peter Butler admitted he had to bring about a disruption and demand more from his players to elevate their performance, a move that ultimately paid off with a historic qualification for the AFC Women's Asian Cup.

Few had expected Bangladesh to secure a spot at next year's continental tournament in Australia but the women in red and green defied the odds at the qualifiers in Yangon, winning all three group matches – 7-0 against Bahrain, 2-1 against hosts Myanmar, and 7-0 against Turkmenistan – to top their group and clinch one of the 12 places at the finals.

Butler, appointed in early 2024, implemented a new regimen, placing a big focus on fitness, making big demands on the players, asserting discipline had to be at the forefront of his agenda. He also sought to inject fresh blood into the squad.

However, his changes were not without controversy.

A group of senior players revolted earlier this year, sending a letter to the federation demanding his removal. They accused the Englishman of favouritism, team division, making inappropriate remarks about their personal lives, and using insulting language.

Despite the rebellion, Butler ploughed on with his new regimen, prioritising discipline and fitness in his program.

"It had five o'clock wake-up calls, six o'clock starts, 90-minute sessions, high tempo, high-intensity. Not easy," Butler told Reuters on Sunday, before flying to Dhaka.

"I think it was a defining moment of change in Bangladesh football when discipline came into the



forefront where previously there was none. They were put through the mill and they have reaped the rewards."

Reflecting on the state of the team when he took charge, Butler added:

"When I came into the national team ... some of the players were picking themselves. There was no discipline. Unfortunately, if there's no discipline, you're really on the road to nowhere."

In a culture where seniority is highly prized, Butler continued with his mission to bring younger talent through to complement the veterans. More than half of the squad at the qualifiers were under 20 – players he said had not been previously given a chance.

"Young players bring a competitive edge... it takes people out of their comfort zones. That's what I've done, I've shaken it up," he said.

"Our brand of football really surprised a lot of people. You've got to have the belief, and I had the belief in my players."

"I'd like to think I've helped change the women's football landscape in Bangladesh."

Respect for Lara stops Mulder

AFP, BULAWAYO

South Africa captain Wiaan Mulder said respect for Brian Lara convinced him to declare 33 runs short of the former West Indies star's world Test record against Zimbabwe at Queens Sports Club on Monday.

Mulder hammered an unbeaten 367 – a South African record and the fifth highest score in Test cricket – before declaring on 626-5 at lunch on the second day of the second Test.

South Africa's then bundled out Zimbabwe before 170 and were 51-1 in their second innings after being forced to follow on.

"Brian Lara is a legend. He got 401 or whatever it was (it was 400) against England. For someone of that stature to keep the record is pretty special," Mulder said at the close.

"I think if I get the chance again I would do the same again."

Mulder spoke to South African

coach Shukri Conrad who agreed with his decision.

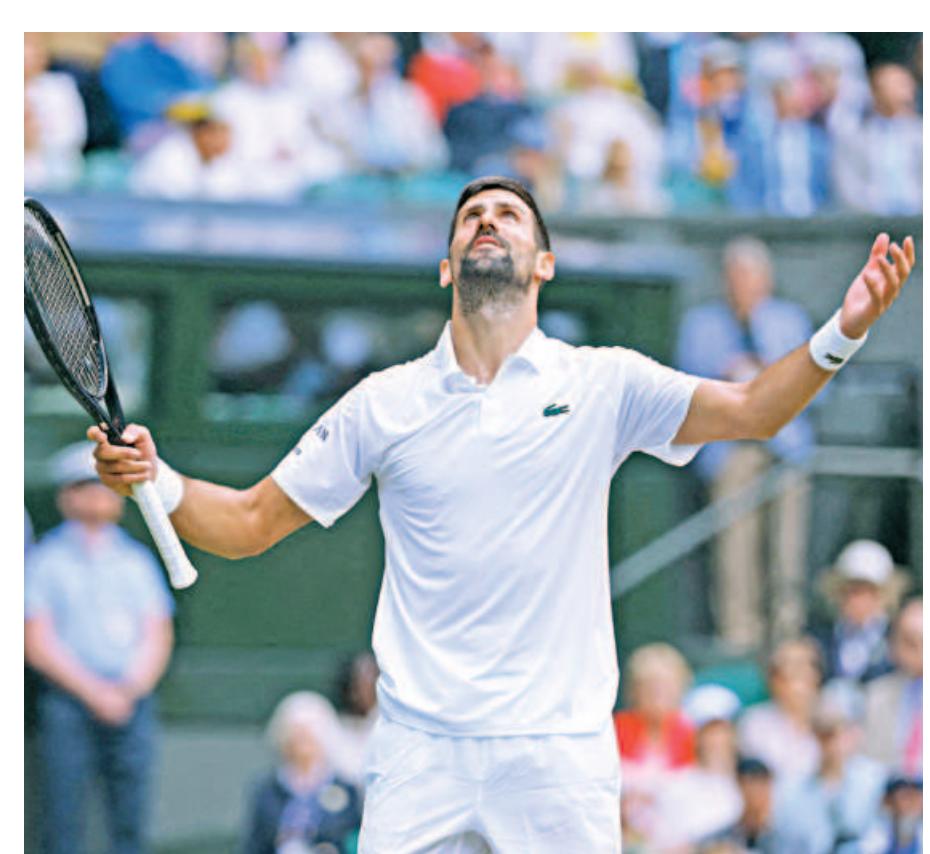
"He said to me as well, let the legend keep the record. I never know what my fate will be but letting Brian Lara keep the record is the way it should be."

Mulder took two wickets and held a catch at slip as Zimbabwe crumbled in reply.

Resuming on 264 not out, Mulder became the second South African triple centurion, reaching the mark off 297 balls – the second-fastest behind India's Virender Sehwag, who took 278 deliveries against South Africa in Chennai in 2007/08.

Mulder went past the previous highest South African individual score of 311 not out by Hashim Amla against England at The Oval in London in 2012.

Mulder faced 334 balls and hit 49 fours and four sixes off an increasingly dispirited and largely toothless Zimbabwe bowling attack.



Novak Djokovic shook off a sluggish start to defeat Alex de Minaur 1-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 and book his 16th Wimbledon quarterfinal spot on Monday, rediscovering his rhythm under the watchful eyes of eight-time champion Roger Federer on Centre Court.

PHOTO: REUTERS