

## Fading ODI reputation REFLECTING MAJOR FALL

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When it comes to Bangladesh cricket, finding flaws and shortcomings through examining stats and figures is disconcertingly easy.

For years, the one thing that Bangladesh had going for them in cricket was their ODI pedigree – a format in which the Tigers from time to time stood toe to toe with the big boys.

Could the same be said now? In the other two formats – Tests and T20Is – Bangladesh have had sporadic successes, but never looked convincing. It was through ODIs that Bangladesh first made a mark in the sport – from winning the 1997 ICC Trophy to qualifying for the 2015 World Cup quarterfinals and the 2017 Champions Trophy semifinals.

A cursory look through Bangladesh's ODI stats in the last few years shows how far they have fallen in the format that first brought them to the fore in the world of cricket – a glaring decline that also reflects the overall downward trajectory of cricket in the country.

Bangladesh succumbed to their third consecutive bilateral ODI series defeat on Tuesday when the Mehidy Hasan Miraz-led side surrendered by 99 runs to Sri Lanka in the third and final match in Pallekele, conceding the series 2-1.

This loss follows a 2-1 defeat against Afghanistan in the UAE in November last year and a 3-0 clean-sweep against the



West Indies in the Caribbean a month later.

With the one match the Tigers managed to win in Sri Lanka, the second ODI, Bangladesh broke a seven-match losing streak in the format.

The last time Bangladesh had such a lengthy winless streak in ODIs was during a seven-month period in 2014, when the Tigers lost 12 of the 13 ODIs they played, with one match yielding no result.

From then on, Bangladesh enjoyed a splendid run – losing just four in their next 24 games, with wins that included home series triumphs over Pakistan, India, and

South Africa, alongside knocking out England from the 2015 World Cup.

Will the Tigers be able to stage such a comeback this time too?

Looking at how the team has been operating, the odds seem slim.

During that purple patch, Bangladesh seemed to have cracked the code in ODIs, with a core set of players, namely Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, and skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza having a clear mindset on how to go about things during each phase of a 50-over match.

With the 'Big Five' of Bangladesh

cricket gone, the players who played the complementary roles during that period are now in charge and unfortunately, they are seemingly not in tune about the demands of 50-over cricket at the moment.

The likes of captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Litton Das, Mustafizur Rahman, and Taskin Ahmed should already be in a shape, or at least show signs of having their own philosophy of how to run things, at least in this one format.

But could any particular brand, or a philosophy, be unearthed from the modus operandi of Miraz and Co in the recent Sri Lanka series?

The team looked out of sorts for the most part even during their lone win in the series as that game also had almost slipped out of their hands in the final overs.

When skipper Miraz churned out worn-out excuses like leading a "young team" and needing "more time" after the Sri Lanka series, it indicated that even after possessing around a decade of experience in international cricket, he does not realise where they have gone wrong.

This lack of clarity, which is evident in other experienced players too, points to a clear failure in the transition process, a failure that has thumped Bangladesh, a team that once looked to be making their way up in the format, back to square one in ODIs.

## Archer back for England, India get Bumrah boost

AGENCIES

Jofra Archer will make his long-awaited return to Test cricket at Lord's this week, after more than four years of injury-induced exile, while India's ace Jasprit Bumrah is set to come back into the eleven as both sides look to get the upper hand in the series currently level at 1-1.

Archer was included in the England side named Wednesday for the third Test against India, returning in place of fellow fast bowler Josh Tongue in the only change to the team that suffered a 336-run thrashing by India at Edgbaston as the tourists levelled a five-match series at 1-1.

England will hope he can give their faltering attack a much-needed cutting edge.

Tongue drops out despite being the top wicket-taker in the series with 11 but fellow pacemen Brydon Carse and Chris Woakes keep their places despite toiling for a combined 9-605 across the opening two Tests.

"We've had two tough games, lots of time in the field and got through some overs as a bowling unit. Back-to-back Test matches, you feel it's the right time to get fresh legs in," England captain Ben Stokes, speaking at a pre-match press

conference at Lord's, said Wednesday.

Archer has played just one County Championship match for Sussex this season, in which he bowled 18 overs and took one wicket. But a week of training with the England squad in Birmingham has convinced team management he is now ready to add to his 13 Test caps in a match starting Thursday.

Meanwhile, Bumrah, who was advised to play only three out of the five Tests in the series due to his back issues, returns to bowl his first ball since June 24, the final afternoon of the first Test at Headingley. He bowled 43.4 overs in that Test, picking up a five-for in the first innings and going wicketless in the second. That decision to rest the 31-year-old received heavy flak as critics feared India could go down 2-0 with England taking advantage of an inexperienced bowling attack.



## BCB scraps BCL plans for this year

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has scrapped its plan of holding this season's Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) – a four-day franchise-based domestic first-class tournament, and instead will organise National Cricket League T20 in September to start the new domestic calendar year.

The BCB had shifted the BCL, originally scheduled for May, twice due to the national level teams' international engagements and extreme weather, planning to hold it in September.

However, the board has now decided to start the new season with NCL T20 at to give the players opportunity to showcase their mettle ahead of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) draft, which is supposed to take place after the NCL T20.

"We will begin the new season with NCL T20, which will be followed by the BPL, the NCL [four-day tournament] and the BCL," BCB's tournament committee chairman Akram Khan told reporters yesterday, adding that they will discuss about the venues and other matters in the next meeting.

The last time the four-day tournament took place was its 11th edition, back in December 2023 where East Zone clinched their maiden title.

## Tigers hope to turn T20I fortunes

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head into the first of the three T20Is against Sri Lanka on Thursday in Pallekele, hoping the change of format can see them turn things around after a disappointing 2-1 loss in the ODI series on Tuesday.

Bangladesh are on a run of five straight T20I losses following a bitter 2-1 series loss against UAE and a 3-0 hammering by Pakistan.

The Litton Das-led side has a few changes from the previous series, as Mohammad Naim and Mohammad Saifuddin came in for Najmul Hossain Shanto and Soumya Sarkar. Whether the additions will have an impact in the series remains to be seen, as Naim, who was also part of the ODI squad, did not get a game.

Meanwhile, Saifuddin's inclusion may see all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz sit out.

Bangladesh's opening duo showed T20I prowess in the last series against Pakistan, and the team's think tank would certainly hope the duo can offset the form deficiency of batters such as Litton and Tawhid Hridoy.

The Tigers may breathe a bit easier, however, as Wanindu Hasaranga, the highest wicket-taker in the just-concluded ODI series, has been ruled out of the T20I series after a hamstring injury on his right leg.

Jaker Ali, who has been carrying



a bit of form in T20Is among the Bangladesh batters, will be expected to provide the fireworks and the finishing touch. There are concerns over Shamim Hossain, who scored in the single digits in his last seven T20I appearances.

Pallekele International Cricket Stadium has been known to produce big scores, and the onus would be on the batting unit to find answers after the disappointing third ODI, where batters could not capitalise on a good batting wicket.

Bangladesh have played and lost three T20Is at the venue to date, the last of them in 2013. Overall, Bangladesh have played 10 T20Is in Sri Lanka, winning just three. However, they



might hold a mental advantage against the hosts, having won three of the five T20Is against Sri Lanka on Lankan soil.

Rishad Hossain is expected to bolster Bangladesh's spin attack, but the leg-spinner had been expensive against Pakistan in all three T20Is – bringing Nasum Ahmed into the equation. Shak Mahedi, meanwhile, would need improvement, having failed to create the impact that he had in the West Indies series sweep in December last year.

Pacer Taskin Ahmed also returns after sitting out the UAE and Pakistan series and will lead the pace attack as the Tigers look to salvage something from this Sri Lanka tour.



## Joao Pedro brilliance fires Chelsea into CWC final

AGENCIES

New signing Joao Pedro scored twice on his first start as Chelsea eased to a 2-0 win over Fluminense on Tuesday to seal a spot in the final of the Club World Cup.

The Brazilian striker opened the scoring in lethal fashion in the 18th minute of the last-four clash at the MetLife Stadium and struck again shortly before the hour mark as Chelsea set up a showdown with either Real Madrid or PSG in Sunday's final.

Signed from Brighton and Hove Albion last week for a reported £60 million, the 23-year-old, who was on holiday in Rio de Janeiro just 10 days ago, made his debut off the bench in the quarterfinal win over Palmeiras and was then given his first start up front here in place of the suspended Liam Delap.

Joao Pedro refused to celebrate after either goal against the club with whom he started his career as a defensive midfielder when he was just nine years old. He made 36 top-team appearances before moving to England with Watford in 2020.

"I'm very happy to score two goals and I think it's very important for me to win this trophy," he told FIFA. "I've been preparing myself for years for this moment. To score two goals in the semifinal of the Club World Cup, to win the Player of the Match, it couldn't have been any better. I'm really happy.

"Now we've got a big final. It will be a difficult game for us, but it will also be a difficult game for our opponents. We have a lot of weapons. I think it will be a great game. It will be a worthy final."

## 'Performance first' as girls launch SAFF U-20 title defence

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are aiming to continue their dominance in age-group women's football as they prepare to defend their crown at the four-nation SAFF U-20 Women's Championship, which kicks off on Friday at the Bashundhara Kings Arena in Dhaka.

Nine senior national players – including captain Afeida Khandokar, Sapna Rani, Munki Akhter, Mst Sagorika and Umehla Marma – have been drafted into the U-20 squad, leaving them with limited time to train with the squad after returning from Myanmar, where they secured qualification for the AFC Women's Asian Cup.

The U-20 side will face Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka in a double round-robin league format.

While head coach Peter Butler sees the tournament as a development opportunity, captain Afeida is focused on maintaining the team's winning streak to "keep that continuity intact" after becoming champions in the last edition held in 2023.

Bangladesh have won four of the five previous editions across U-18, U-19 and U-20 levels.

"Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are

strong opponents and we don't want to take any opponents lightly," said Afeida, who also captains the senior side, told reporters during a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

When asked about the challenge of staying motivated after facing tougher teams like Myanmar and Bahrain, she said they approach every game with full effort, regardless of the oppositions.

Butler echoed a developmental focus, calling the tournament a chance to "blood players" and emphasising performance over results.

"It's a league format. It's quite strange... [but] it is what it is. And I'm going to use it as an opportunity to blood players. The performance is really important to me.

"Everything is based on performance. It's not result first, it's performance first," said the Englishman, who added that the same mindset guided their recent matches against stronger international sides like Myanmar, Indonesia and Jordan.

On the inclusion of senior players in the youth squad, the Bangladesh coach explained that he chose eligible senior members to build a balanced side, keeping the more prestigious AFC U-20 Women's Championship Qualifiers in mind.



Iga Swiatek celebrates after reaching the Wimbledon semifinals for the first time in her illustrious career on Wednesday, beating Russia's Liudmila Samsonova 6-2, 7-5. The Polish eighth seed has won four titles on the clay at the French Open, as well as the US Open in 2022, but has struggled on the lawns of the All England Club. Her previous best result at Wimbledon was a run to the quarter-finals in 2023. PHOTO: AFP

