

Tigers hope batters step up in series decider

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will desperately hope their batters finally produce their A game when they take on Pakistan in the series deciding third and final ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur today.

Although the Mirpur wicket usually comes under scrutiny for making batting difficult with its slow nature, the surface in the ongoing series has, for the first time in years, consistently provided even pace and bounce.

Despite getting a rare batting-friendly track in Mirpur, Bangladesh's batters faltered badly in the second ODI on Friday, which they lost by 128 runs under the DLS method.

They had earlier won the opening game by eight wickets, meaning today's match will decide the fate of the series.

The victory in the opening match was largely orchestrated by a brilliant bowling display along with

If Bangladesh defeat Pakistan, they will win the series 2-1 and move up to 9th place in the ICC ODI rankings with 79 points, two points ahead of the West Indies. If Bangladesh lose, they will remain 10th with 77 points, fractionally behind the Caribbean side in rating points.

Pakistan's poor batting effort. Nahid Rana claimed his maiden five-wicket haul as Pakistan were bowled out for just 114 runs, a target that did not pose a challenge for the Bangladeshi batters.

However, Bangladesh's batting frailties were exposed in the second game while chasing 275 under lights.

For a large part of Pakistan's innings, it seemed that they would be posting in excess of 300 but they lost wickets in clusters at the final stretch and eventually failed to play out their full 50 overs.

Despite staging a strong comeback with the ball in the latter part of Pakistan's innings, the failure of the top-order, with Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Saif Hassan and Najmul Hossain Shanto all departing within the first five overs, effectively pushed them out of the contest.

After a lengthy interruption due to a hailstorm, Bangladesh were set a revised target of 243 in 32 overs, but the way the batters approached the chase suggested the target was always out of reach.

Liton Das looked in control until his dismissal, but Tawhid Hridoy, Ahif Hossain and even skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz appeared uncomfortable during their time at the crease.

Apart from the batting concerns, Bangladesh's Powerplay bowling will also be an area of focus. In both matches they struggled to make early breakthroughs. In the first match Pakistan reached 41 for 1 in the opening 10 overs, while in the second game Pakistani openers Mazaqat and Sahibzada Farhan smashed 85 runs in the Powerplay.

Meanwhile, the ICC ODI rankings will also be in focus. If Bangladesh defeat Pakistan, they will move up to ninth place with 79 points, gaining a two-point lead over West Indies.

However, a defeat would see Bangladesh remain 10th, fractionally behind the Caribbean side in rating points.

To qualify directly for the 2027 ICC World Cup, Bangladesh must remain at least ninth in the rankings. Although several ODI series are scheduled ahead, a win in the decider could ease some immediate pressure.

Pakistan, meanwhile, will be aiming to win their first ODI series against Bangladesh in 11 years. The last time the two sides met in a bilateral ODI series was in 2015, when Bangladesh secured a historic 3-0 sweep on home soil.

A captain searching for his place

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, had famously said that individuals who contribute the most in the workplace often end up becoming the best managers.

While selecting who would manage a cricket team on the field as its captain, sides often go by the same logic and hand the mantle to the best performer or at least someone whose position in the side is indisputable.

For a captain, the trouble begins when either their performances don't match expectations or when their team starts to underperform.

Almost nine months into his tenure as Bangladesh's ODI captain, Mehidy Hasan Miraz is facing both.

The ODI team has been inconsistent for a while now, a fact that has been on full display in the ongoing ODI series against Pakistan, where they decimated the visitors in the first ODI before getting outplayed in the following game.

In both games, skipper Miraz excelled with the ball, picking up five wickets in total and conceding around three runs per over.

His performances as a bowler more than justifies his place in the side. The problem, however, is that he is in the side not as a bowler, but an all-rounder.

In the absence of Shakib Al Hasan, Miraz is Bangladesh's main all-rounder in the ODI setup, and is expected to bowl 10 overs in most games and score runs while batting in the top 7.

Since becoming the ODI skipper on June 12, 2025, Miraz has batted 10 times in 50-over affairs at four different positions – five times at No.5, thrice at 6, and once each at 7 and 9.

Even before he was named captain, Miraz,

who had spent the first six years of his ODI career as a lower-order batter, was getting opportunities in the middle-order.

Since 2024, he had batted at No.4 in seven straight matches and even came out at one-down against New Zealand in the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy.

Although he averaged close to 40 at No.4, his strike rate was below 70, which is abysmal by modern ODI standards.

After becoming captain, he demoted himself in the batting line-up, but his returns remained disappointing.

In this period, his average tanked to 19.33 and his scoring rate is just a shade above 70.

This can't just be cast off as a dip in form either. He has batted 21 times at No.6 or 7 in his ODI career so far, amassing 281 runs at a paltry average of 14.05 at a strike rate of 70.6.

There are 11 Bangladeshi batters who have scored more runs at these positions with a better strike rate and average than Miraz.

On Friday's second ODI against Pakistan, Miraz came out at No.7, with Bangladesh needing 148 runs in 93 deliveries.

He took a single off the first four balls he faced and then skied the ball against pacer Faheem Ashraf and got caught at deep midwicket. Just five overs after his dismissal, Bangladesh were bundled out.

Miraz has around three months left in his 12-month contract as the Bangladesh skipper and is set to get a few more opportunities, including today's series deciding third ODI against Pakistan in Mirpur, to carve out a place in the batting order. Otherwise, he stands at risk of not just losing his captaincy, but also his place in the side, just like he has in the T20I format.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



HISTORIC SHARED T20 STAGE

[L-R] Keshav Maharaj, Mitchell Santner, Laura Wolvaardt and Amelie Kerr pose at the beach as South Africa and New Zealand's men's and women's teams gear up for a five-match T20I series in New Zealand. The tour marks the first time both national teams will contest full series side by side against the same oppositions. South Africa women last faced their New Zealand counterparts in the 2025 T20 World Cup final, while the men's sides locked horns in the semifinal of the recently concluded T20 World Cup, with New Zealand winning on both occasions. The five-match double-headers will take place across Mount Maunganui to Christchurch from March 15 to 25.

PHOTO: NZC

88 DAYS TO GO



Argentina trail only Brazil and Germany

Defending champions Argentina have featured in 88 matches in the World Cup so far. Of these, the Albiceleste have secured 47 wins against 24 defeats, while the remaining 17 matches ended in draws. In the history of football's showpiece event, only two teams have played more matches than Argentina. Record five-time champions Brazil lead the pack with 114 matches, followed by four-time winners Germany (including the former West Germany), who have taken the field 112 times.

**** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Maradona of the Desert'**



PHOTO: AFP

CHINA, SOUTH KOREA QUALIFY FOR WORLD CUP

China players celebrate an extra-time goal by Shao Ziqin during their 2-0 victory against Chinese Taipei Taiwan in their AFC Women's Asian Cup quarterfinal at the Rectangular Stadium in Perth yesterday. The fiercely-contested match, with political undertones, went into extra time before Ziqin's strike and an own goal later settled it in favour of the defending champions, who will meet hosts Australia in one of the semifinals. Meanwhile, South Korea thrashed Uzbekistan 6-0 in the other quarterfinal on the day. Both China and South Korea ensured their places in next year's World Cup.

Title-race thriller as Dorielton hat-trick sinks Fortis

SPORTS REPORTER

Matchday 11 of the Bangladesh Football League (BFL) delivered a day of high stakes drama and significant movement in the standings as leaders Bashundhara Kings edged Fortis FC 3-2 in what proved to be a classic encounter in Dhaka yesterday.

The victory kept Kings atop the standings with 24 points from 11 matches, while Fortis remained on 21 points after suffering only their second defeat of the season.

At the Bashundhara Kings Arena, the match was a truly topsy-turvy battle and a heated affair from the opening whistle, characterised by a physical intensity that kept the crowd on the edge of their seats throughout the ninety minutes.

Fortis drew first blood in the 19th minute when Pa Omar Babou threaded a perfectly timed pass through the Kings' backline for Onyekachi Okafor, who finished with composure to give the visitors an early advantage. Kings, undeterred, responded swiftly: Rakib Hossain charged down the right flank only to be felled inside the box by Abdulla Omar, and Dorielton Gomes calmly converted the resulting penalty to restore parity in the 26th minute.

The second half saw the Kings assert



PHOTO: BFF

themselves more aggressively. Dorielton struck again in the 52nd minute, meeting a precise cross from Foyzal Ahmed Fahim to guide the ball past the goalkeeper with a volley. Fortis, however, refused to capitulate, with Dawa Tshering delivering a dangerous corner in the 75th minute that defender Ananta Tamang slotted

home to level the scores, setting the stage for a tense finale.

Brazilian forward Dorielton, however, had the final say, completing his hat-trick in the 78th minute to seal the win and take his tally to 12 goals, further solidifying his position as the league's leading scorer.

In the day's other fixture, Abahani secured a 2-1 away win over Brothers Union in Munshiganj.

Nigerian forward Emeka Ogburn gave Abahani an early lead in the fifth minute and doubled it in the 70th at Shaheed Bir Shreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium. Pakistani forward Shayak Dost pulled one back for Brothers in the 87th minute, but the late surge was insufficient to earn a point.

The victory moved Abahani up to third with 19 points from 11 matches, while Brothers remained seventh.

Elsewhere, Arambag beat PWD SC 3-0, courtesy of a first-half double from Ghanian forward Kwame Kizito and his compatriot Shadrach Lantei-Mills putting the game to bed in the 73rd minute at Shaheed Barkat Stadium in Gazipur.

The BFL will resume on April 10 after a near four-week break, with the Abahani-Mohammedan fixture headlining Matchday 12.