Afghanistan Reaches T20 WC Semis

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Kingstown, June 25 (IANS) Afghanistan clinched a low-scoring thriller against Bangladesh by eight runs in a rain-hit Super Eight match on Tuesday to enter semifinal of the T20 World Cup for the first time and in the process, also knocked Australia out of the tournament.

Putting into bat first, Afghanistan posted a below-par score of 115/5 in 20 overs. But in defence, Rashid Khan and Naveen-ul-haq showcased scintillating bowling to successfully defend the total as Bangladesh were bowled out for 105 in 17.5 overs chasing a DLS target of 114 in a match that was reduced to 19 overs due to rain interruptions.

Rashid finished with figures of 4-23 while Naveen claimed 4-26 in a historic win for Afghanistan.

Batting first, Afghanistan had a slow start as they 27/0 at the conclusion of the Powerplay and easy runs were proving hard to come by. On the very first ball, opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz was nearly run out of a quick single, only just making it through.

The opening duo Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran made a 50-run stand early in the ninth over, becoming the first pair to put together four partnerships of at least 50 in a T20 World Cup.

Despite Bangladesh controlling the run rate, they gave away 13 extras in the first nine overs. Afghanistan were 58/0 at drinks and needed to increase their pace.

The breakthrough wicket came on the fourth ball after the mid-innings break, as Zadran (18 off 29) attempted to float one over long off, but didn’t get enough on it. The 12th over was a well-timed maiden, as more nerves kicked in for Afghanistan's batters.

The breakthrough wicket came on the fourth ball of the 11th over when Zadran (18 off 29) failed to clear long off. The 12th over was a well-timed maiden, increasing the pressure on Afghanistan's batters.

Azmatullah Omarzai was removed cheaply, and Gurbaz (43 off 55) fell two balls into the 16th over after his crucial contribution for Afghanistan to post a remotely competitive total.

Bangladesh took two more wickets before the 18th over, leaving Afghanistan at 99/5 with two overs remaining. Rashid Khan's entertaining cameo, including three sixes and frustration over the running between wickets, helped Afghanistan reach 115/5 in 20 overs.

Rain then arrived in St. Vincent, leaving Australia and the competing teams anxiously waiting to see how long it would last.

Defending 115, Gurbaz was back in focus as play finally resumed, but not on a positive note. An awkwardly bouncing ball struck the keeper on the knee and he limped off the ground.

Fazalhaq Farooqi removed Bangladesh opener Tanzid Hasan (0 off 3) in the second over of the chase. And Naveen-ul-Haq struck two huge blows in the third over, including the captain Najmul Hossain Shanto for 5.

Midway through the fourth over, the rain arrived again. The second delay would exhaust the match’s time reserve – any more delay and DLS would come into effect.

Bangladesh clawed their way to 46/3 at the six-over mark, as Litton Das and Soumya Sarkar stitched a partnership across the back half of the powerplay.

Then came Rashid into the attack, who removed Soumya Sarkar (10 off 10). The pressure was again on Bangladesh, who needed to complete the run chase in 12.1 overs to overtake Australia and qualify for the final four.

Back-to-back boundaries from Towhid Hridoy in the eighth over swung momentum away from Afghanistan, but Rashid took care of Hridoy's next over, making another twist in the game.

Litton steadied the ship, as drinks approached, finding assistance from reliable veteran Mahmudullah. The pair had their team at 77/5 at drinks.

Rashid then took back-to-back wickets, including Mahmudullah, to end the 11th over and balance the contest. His figures stood at 4-17 off three overs, showcasing his exceptional efforts.

Suddenly, the rain arrived again, as the Afghans were two runs ahead of the DLS par score. But the third delay was only short-lived, as players returned to the field. Bangladesh edged back in front of par in the 13th over, despite their semifinal chances officially coming to an end.

With 20 runs needed from the last four overs, a timely boundary helped Litton to reach a 41-ball half-century. Taskin Ahmed (2 off 9) then chopped on a Naveen-ul-Haq delivery, leaving Bangladesh at 109/9, needing nine runs from eight balls.

Mustafizur Rahman walked out to bat, focused on survival, but was out LBW first ball to Naveen-ul-Haq, who claimed his fourth wicket and sealed a dramatic win to qualify for the semis.

Brief scores: Afghanistan 115/5 in 20 overs (Rahmanullah Gurbaz 43; Rishad Hossain 3-26) beat Bangladesh 105 all out in 17.5 overs (Litton Das 54\*; Rashid Khan 4-23, Naveen Ul Haq 4-26) by 8 runs (DLS Method)