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It's been an encouraging start to the year for this young Sri Lanka team under the stewardship of new coach Chandika Hathurasingha. We definitely had a year to forget in 2017 but there were some positive signs during the recent tour to Bangladesh, where the team completed an unexpected clean-sweep.

This upturn in form and confidence makes the upcoming Nidahas Trophy very interesting indeed. It should be very competitive despite India resting some of their core players. The Indian young guns will be desperate to make an impression and Bangladesh will be striving to bounce back after their disappointing Sri Lanka tour.

Given home advantage, growing confidence under coach Hathuruasingha, and the fact that India are not at full-strength, I think Sri Lanka can be fairly labelled as the favourites. But I would definitely not write off India who are blessed with strength in depth these days.

Sri Lanka will be missing Angelo Mathews and Asela Gunaratne due to injuries and there is also no Lasith Malinga as the selectors prefer to look towards the future. All three players are top-class T20 players and they will definitely be missed. The absence of Lasith, in particular, places extra pressure on the fast bowlers.

Indeed, the pace bowling is an area of uncertainty for me. Suranga Lakmal, Nuwan Pradeep and Dushmantha Chameera are all inexperienced in this format. It's going to be a real test of their skills and I am looking forward to seeing how they perform at critical high-pressure moments when it is very tough for the fast bowlers.

It will be interesting to see what combination India go with today given the absence of most of their T20 stalwarts. The selectors will be excited about an opportunity to see some youngsters perform. Given a tough touring schedule and the IPL fast approaching, the decision to manage the workloads of some of their biggest stars is certainly understandable.

I would expect Sri Lanka to have requested good batting pitches, but with the current heat in Colombo, plus the fact that all matches are to be played at the Premadasa International Stadium, I think we will see the batsmen being challenged a little more than would be the case on typical sub-continental pitches. It should be a good balance between bat and ball.

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India will go into their third game, against Sri Lanka on Monday, with all to play for in this Nidahas Trophy. Of course, they will be disappointed to have lost to hosts to Sri Lanka in their first game, but they recovered well against Bangladesh with a very efficient performance.

Missing several senior players, Shikhar Dhawan has thus far taken on the additional responsibilities with confidence scoring 90 and 55. In T20 cricket it's always helpful when your openers are scoring runs and Dhawan has been pivotal.

I don't think India will read too much into their opening defeat to Sri Lanka. They scored a respectable 175 for five, which is an excellent score at the Pramadasa Stadium, and failed to perhaps bowl as well as they would have liked, but this is a new team with lots of inexperience.

Even then, though they may have rested some senior players, sensibly so in my opinion, India have some very talented young players eager to make their mark and it will fascinate me to see who puts their hand up.

To Sri Lanka's credit, Kusal Perera, who has been battling injury and confidence during the past year or so, produced the kind of firecracker innings, 66 from 37 balls, that makes him such an exciting talent in this format.

He should be playing such knocks with greater consistency and I hope this innings, coming as it does after an unsettled period in the team, will signal a new phase in his career. On song, he is an extremely talented and destructive player.

India rallied against a Bangladesh team that right now looks a little short of confidence. After a bruising South Africa tour and the loss of coach Chandika Hathurasingha, they have failed to regroup and that is going to be a concern for them.

We've seen some rain in Colombo in recent days and I wonder how important that might be in the next round of matches. The conditions were challenging at the start of the bowlers with the Premadasa pitch having some pace and bounce.

However, with the extra moisture we might see things change and there could be some extra assistance and juice for the bowlers. Let's wait and see what happens, but it's going to be an interesting factor this coming week.

**MAHELA JAYAWARDENE**

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The elimination of hosts Sri Lanka from this Nidahas Trophy has obviously caused lots of local disappointment. Ever since their opening win against an under-strength India, hopes have been high about playing in the final.

However, sadly, the truth is that Sri Lanka don't deserve to be in the final after three straight defeats. India have been extremely impressive after their wobbly start and Bangladesh have battled hard and shown their experience at critical times.

The virtual semi-final on Friday was marred by ugly scenes at the end, but that should not distract attention from the classy finishing of Mahmudullah. His cool-headed 43 from 18 balls was a brilliant effort.

The final-over fracas should certainly have been handled better. From a neutral perspective, it was definitely a no ball and the umpires made a mistake. They then made matters worse by not taking charge of the situation and diffusing the tension with effective communication.

That said, the reactions of the players, including the threats by Bangladesh to leave the field of play, are not the kind of thing you want young cricket fans to see. Emotions were running understandably high, but players have a larger responsibility to the game.

The heated arguments at the end aside, the game was a classic T20 contest with Sri Lanka collapsing dramatically and then clawing their way back with great knocks from Kusal Perera and Thissera Perera. Bangladesh were still in control until a shaky finale but Tamin, Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah all showed their experience.

I think it all makes for a really exciting final Sunday night because Bangladesh have nothing to lose and everything to gain against India. They can enjoy being the underdogs after two round-robin stage defeats and attack India without the pressure of expectation.

India may be missing some of their top senior players, but they have already shown that they have great depth of talent right now in all departments. They have a clear advantage in terms of their pace bowling against Bangladesh, but in terms of batting things are more evenly balanced. Bangladesh have the experience in their top order to do some damage.

At the end of the day, as is so often the case with T20 cricket, it will probably come down to who handles the pressure the best and is able to best navigate themselves through the key moments in the game.