

SPORT



Skipper Mushfiquir Rahim's unbeaten 98 off 57 took Khulna Tigers to a mammoth 218 for 2 in a BBPL clash against Cumilla Warriors in Mirpur yesterday. Khulna won the match by 92 runs and clinched the last play-offs spot.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Saifuddin in line to return on Pak tour

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chief physician Debashish Chowdhury informed yesterday that all-rounder Mohammad

Saifuddin is all set for a return after over four months on the sidelines due to a recurring back injury.

Chowdhury also said that, should he fully recover in time, the BCB are preparing Saifuddin for the tour of Pakistan set to take place later this month.

Saifuddin had been suffering from back pain for quite a while and was forced to sit out the World Cup match against Australia last year. He also missed Bangladesh's tour of Sri Lanka and the three-match T20I series in India last October due to the injury.

"We did a scan and the report was good. We have already started his rehabilitation from today [Friday]. We will assess his healing process and monitor his workload. His injury was mainly caused by technical reasons like his bowling action. We are hopeful and are looking to prepare him for the upcoming Pakistan tour," Debashish told The Daily Star yesterday.

The 23-year-old Saifuddin, whose last international match was against Afghanistan in September last year, informed that he



will begin bowling under Bangladesh team physio Julian Calefatto's supervision from today and is confident about making his return on the Pakistan tour.

"I have started my rehabilitation and will also begin bowling under the supervision of Julian from tomorrow [Saturday]. As I was out of cricket for the past three-four months and haven't bowled enough, it will be important to observe my progress after the injury. At the moment I am confident and the rest will depend on how it goes after I start bowling in the nets," said Saifuddin.

Bangladesh are scheduled to play a three-match T20I and two-match Test series in Pakistan later this month, but the BCB is yet to finalise the tour.

I will play if the selectors want me: Mashrafe

After Dhaka Platoon lost their Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League game against Rangpur Rangers by 11 runs yesterday, skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza had to answer many questions, not just about the game but also about a few burning issues regarding the national team. The Bangladesh ODI skipper's replies hinted at a level of dissatisfaction with Bangladesh Cricket Board officials and selectors, who he said had not discussed his future in the national team with him. He also offered his observations on Mustafizur Rahman and Bangladesh's upcoming tour of Pakistan. The following are excerpts of the press conference:

SPORTS REPORTER

On whether he would go to Pakistan if he were playing Tests or T20Is

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (MBM): To be honest, I would have gone but obviously I would have consulted with my family. I don't know what my family would have said as this is the first time I am discussing this matter. But if you ask just me about going Pakistan, I would say yes, I would go, but not sure as it depends on my family too. But that doesn't mean that those who do not want to go are at fault as obviously, life comes before the game. So, it's important that the individual makes the call and with due respect, everyone is right from their own perspective.

On his much-talked about retirement issue and the idea he was not retiring due to ego

MBM: I don't have such ego and when it comes to my retirement everyone has already made me retire. I haven't decided yet whether I will retire, but if such a situation arise and the BCB thinks so, I might think about it. I have never given such priority to myself that everyone will give me a big, elaborate farewell at the ground.

On whether he would continue if he is given the opportunity to play for the national team

MBM: It depends on the selection, as I would expect that I won't be picked in the side after taking just one wicket in eight matches in the World Cup. To be honest it depends on the selectors and if they think that they will give me the opportunity then I will try my best. But at the moment how can I say, after picking only one wicket in eight games, that I will get a chance in the national team. If there was someone else in my place, he may have been dropped much before.

On his selection for the Sri Lanka series after the World Cup

MBM: Yes, I was in the Sri Lanka series as there was a chance for me to make a comeback and then there was a gap. Shakib was also not there



in the Sri Lanka series so I might have had a chance. But after that I was not in the game as I don't know what the selectors are thinking about me as I didn't have any discussions with them. They spoke to other players but I had no discussion. If the ODIs come and if they think I

should play then obviously I will be there as at the end of the day cricket is everything for me. The rest depends on the selectors, board and the captain, which I am, but that too depends on their decision.

On nurturing Mustafizur Rahman...

MBM: If we continue to criticise Mustafizur... it's a different case for the media and spectators, but my question is when I have the responsibility for a player's improvement, why would I criticise him in front of the media? It's my duty to protect him as even if we have half a Mustafizur in Bangladesh, it's fine. Show me one half of Mustafizur in Bangladesh? There's none, so who is trying to prepare Mustafizur, who has picked 21 wickets in the World Cup? There might be questions over his economy rate but how can we improve this? There is always a way to improve it as there are a lot of players in world cricket who managed to make a comeback after suffering from poor form, but why isn't it happening in our country? Because those who are working with Mustafizur are talking in the same tone as you guys, so where is the individual thought to improve him. The same people who criticised Mustafizur are working with him the next day. When I am working with Mustafizur and being and at the same time criticising him, the question arises that what work have you done to improve him.

On whether Mustafizur's treatment is similar to his

MBM: No, there is a problem here too. What happened with me is behind closed doors and with Mustafizur it is in front of you, those who are talking to the media about him.

On whether there is a gap between him and the other players, as he was not informed about the players' strike

MBM: You haven't come to the dressing room (smiles). If you don't come to the dressing room, how would you know? There is no question about a gap with the players as they are my family.

'Trying to learn from the stars'

22-year-old Afif Hossain is one of the young cricketers who managed to emerge out of Bangladesh cricket's ongoing gloom. The attack-minded left-hander had a promising start to this year's BBPL for Rajshahi Royals and sat down with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi to talk about his scintillating opening partnerships with national teammate Liton Das, the upcoming T20 World Cup and much more. The following are excerpts of the interview:

The Daily Star (TDS): How was it growing up and playing cricket?

Afif Hossain (AH): I have enjoyed cricket ever since I was very young. When I was playing in Khulna at the very beginning, my father was the one who supported me a lot. When I was at BKSP from class seven, it was hostel life and it was difficult to stay alone. After five to six months I made new friends and little by little things became easier. It did not affect my cricket as most of the time during my BKSP days I was on the field and it was enjoyable, but when I used to return to my room, I felt different.

After BKSP, when I finished my HSC exams, I lived with my aunt in Dhaka and she supported me a lot.

TDS: Secret to your formidable partnerships with Liton Das?

AH: We have been playing together for a long time. Even in last year's BPL, I opened with Liton bhai for Sylhet. So that works in our favour; there are no problems with communication. The consistency has been there because both of us are going through a good patch.

TDS: Thoughts on prolonging the partnerships with Liton?

AH: We have been able to provide good starts in the Powerplays. In T20s, you have to maintain the run-rate even after the Powerplays and one of the batsmen needs to take risks, which sometimes works out but when it doesn't, a wicket may fall, but it's all for the team.

TDS: Do you have a certain tendency towards dominating proceedings, such as during your 76 against Cumilla Warriors?

AH: I like to keep scoring as long as I am batting and that day, Malan had struck a hundred for the opposition and the target was big, so we had to attack from the beginning.

After Malan struck his ton, I felt that if I



could manage to play a big innings in the BPL then it would be good for me and build my confidence. So, I was trying to learn something from that innings, which I then tried to apply to my own innings. I was hitting the ball well that day and I wasn't really aiming for a ton but thinking that I would stay until the end and finish the game. I tried to get the team into a position where even if I got out, the match would be

finished easily.

TDS: Is there a BPL ton in future?

AH: Everyone wishes to score big runs but thinking that is not enough. I obviously wish to do that too and I will try to do it but first of all I try to play for the team. If the team demands that we need a big score then risks will have to be taken and I can't just play for myself.

TDS: Experience of the BPL this time around?

AH: It's a matter of luck to be able to play with such big-name players every year. There are players who I didn't imagine I would be playing with or against when I was young. We watched them play while we were growing up and there is a lot to learn from them and I am trying to absorb things to use in my game.

TDS: Thoughts on the upcoming T20 World Cup?

AH: I have only recently played a few matches for the national team. If I get the opportunity to play the World Cup, I will try to do something good and contribute to the team's cause. I will try to give my team and my country something but I am not focusing on anything outside this [BPL].

TDS: Thoughts on current U-19 team and are you expecting them to contribute to Bangladesh cricket in the future?

AH: Yes, obviously. If you look at the last U-19 batch where me, Saif [Hassan], [Mohammad] Naim, [Mahidul Islam] Ankon, Hasan Mahmud and many more have played, most of our U-19 batch are playing here. Those who have gone for the U-19 tournament this time around are even more experienced. When we were playing for the U-19s, only me and Saif were playing the Dhaka Premier League while the rest were in First Division. This time, at least 12-13 out of a squad of 15 or 16 have played the Premier League so my hope is that they will do well.

When you play the Premier League, U-19 becomes easy since in the Premier League you are exposed to national players.



Pacer Taskin Ahmed (R) bagged two wickets for Rangpur Rangers against Dhaka Platoon in a BBPL match in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Rangpur end with win

SPORTS REPORTER



Rangpur Rangers successfully defended a relatively modest target of 150 runs and clinched an 11-run win over

Dhaka Platoon in the days' first game of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Despite the win, it was the end of Rangpur's campaign as they managed to win just five out of twelve games and were out of contention for a play-off spot before the match started. They finished in sixth place, ahead of Sylhet Thunder in the seven-team table.

Dhaka, on the other hand, had already secured a play-off spot with seven wins in eleven games and are in second place, behind Chattogram Challengers.

Chasing 150, Dhaka kept losing wickets at regular intervals and eventually ended the 20 overs on 139 for nine.

Opener Tamim Iqbal's 33-ball 34 was the highest score for a batting side unable to put up any significant partnership, which was the major reason for the defeat.

Rangpur pacers Junaid Khan, Taskin Ahmed and left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny bagged two wickets each and more importantly, kept the Dhaka batsmen

SCORES IN BRIEF

RANGPUR RANGERS: 149 for 9 in 20 overs (Gregory 46, Al-Amin 35, Jahurul 28; Shadab 2-25, Perera 3-23)

DHAKA PLATOON: 138 for 9 in 20 overs (Tamim 34, Mahedi 20; Junaid 2-22, Taskin 2-25, Arafat 2-29)

Result: Rangpur won by 11 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Lewis Gregory.

quiet from the start.

Earlier, Rangpur also struggled after being asked to bat. Dhaka skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza removed Shane Watson (10) cheaply, Naim Sheikh (17) and Cameron Delpport departed in quick succession before Lewis Gregory and Al-Amin held the ship together.

The pair added 49 runs for the fourth wicket before Gregory was dismissed, top-scoring with 46 off 32 balls, by Thisara Perera, who got three wickets for Dhaka. Al-Amin also followed soon after scoring 34. Jahurul Islam hit 28 in the late stages to lift the score to 149 for nine, which was enough for Rangpur to end the tournament on a high.