



Rajshahi Royals opener Liton Das lifts one over long-off during his magnificent 75-run innings against Chattogram Challengers in yesterday's first Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

PHOTO:  
FIROZ AHMED

# Liton explains his new avatar

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi Royals opener Liton Das has presented a new avatar of himself during this Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL). The elegant right-handed batsman has never been doubted for his shot-making ability. In fact, he has long been considered one of the brightest prospects in the game, evidenced by tons of runs he scored in first-class and List A matches. However, when it came to more competitive outings – international matches and T20 franchise cricket, his consistency and temperament often left a lot to be desired.

But things are changing it seems and the batsman acknowledges that gaining maturity and picking the right shots are two things that are driving this change.

Liton played for Sylhet Sixers in last BPL in January-February last year, managing only 192 in 11 games at a strike rate of 141.7 with a solitary fifty to his name. However, this time around, despite seeing his strike rate drop a wee bit, to 139.73, Liton has scored 422 runs in 12 innings with three fifties.

"I think it is [getting more runs] because of the improvement in my maturity level," Liton said at the post-match press conference after his 48-ball 75 which helped Rajshahi Royals eclipse Chattogram Challengers' 155 with eight wickets in hand and 14 balls to spare in the

## SCORES IN BRIEF

**CHATTOGRAM CHALLENGERS:** 155-5 in 20 overs (Gayle 23, Junaid 23, Mahmudullah 48 not out, Nurul 30; Irfan 1-24, Jayed 1-12, Malik 1-11, Afif 1-18, Taijul 1-20)

**RAJSHAH ROYALS:** 156-2 in 17.4 overs (Liton 75, Afif 32, Malik 43 not out; Nasum 1-33, Ziaur 1-17)

**Result:** Rajshahi Royals won by eight wickets.  
**Player-of-the-match:** Liton Das.

two sides' last league-stage match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The win also helped Rajshahi cement their place in the top two of the table, ensuring their berth in the playoff qualifier.

The 25-year-old elaborated on the change in his batting fortunes, attributing the success to his maturity and choice of shots.

"I think, what changed is that in the past three or four BPL seasons, I had the tendency of keeping on hitting once I struck a few. I can play all types of shots and that's why I tried to play every shot. I think in this BPL I reduced playing few shots. And if you see, in the past BPL seasons I used to score 27 to 30 runs off 15 or 17 balls but then I used to get dismissed.

But in this BPL, in maximum games, I scored around 13 or 17 off 15 balls. I am actually playing normal cricket during that phase of my innings. In powerplays when you smash a boundary, the bowler tries to do something different. So I thought that I need to adjust and not play shots on every delivery," said Liton.

Not only change in approach, Liton admitted to have made changes to his stance and head position after working with the national team's batting coach Neil McKenzie.

"I actually did not use to bat like this. I worked with Neil [McKenzie] for a long time and for that there have been some changes in my feet movement. There have been changes in my head position. Even in the last two-three matches my head was getting tilted, so I worked on that," Liton said.

Liton's opening partner Afif Hossain, too, has been fairly successful in this edition of the BPL. The 88-run opening stand by this duo gave Rajshahi a brisk start in yesterday's game, with Afif contributing 32 of those runs. Liton opined that the aggressive batting nature of Afif allowed him to play his natural game.

While it was a happy outing for both the Rajshahi openers, Chattogram batsmen had not much to brag about. Skipper Mahmudullah's unbeaten 33-ball 48 and a quick-fire 17-ball 30 from Nurul Hasan saw them post a modest total, which eventually proved too little to challenge Rajshahi.

# Pak tour, Mash future among agendas

SPORTS REPORTER



There will be quite a few agendas on the table when Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) first meeting of 2020 takes place at the home of cricket in Mirpur today. Bangladesh's tour of Pakistan will be top of the agendas for discussion as BCB and its Pakistan counterpart are yet to finalise the tour scheduled for later this month. There are a few other agendas including a new central contract for the national cricketers and appointment of a new bowling coach. The Daily Star assesses the probable agendas which are expected to be raised today.

## Pakistan tour

As per the ICC FTP [Future Tour Programme], Bangladesh are scheduled to tour Pakistan later this month for three T20Is and two Tests. The tour, however, hit a roadblock when BCB raised concerns over long stay in Pakistan, proposing to play only the T20I series on Pakistan soil and having the Test series take place at a neutral venue. Following a series of communication between the BCB and the PCB, the latter offered Bangladesh to play the Test series and reschedule the T20I matches ahead of the ICC World T20 later this year.

However, the BCB is still planning to play the shortest format in Pakistan and the delay over the decision has left the cricketers ill at ease, particularly over the length of stay in Pakistan. Majority of the cricketers, who are to be part of the tour, are confused whether to start mental preparation for the tour.

Meanwhile, the recent political crisis involving Iran, a neighbour to Pakistan, has created yet another dilemma for the BCB. To make matters worse, there was a powerful bomb explosion at a mosque in Balochistan province on Friday, killing at least 16 people and leaving 20 others injured, three days after a bomb had claimed two lives in Quetta. BCB was still in a dilemma over the Pakistan tour until yesterday as the board was waiting for a government order.

## National team players' central contract

There have been a lot of talk over a new central contract of the cricketers for the year 2020. It was learned that national team's ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is likely to be handed a new central contract. According to sources, the board may not consider a contract for Shakib Al Hasan, who was banned from all forms of cricket for one year in October last year for his failure to report corrupt approaches from bookies. There are talks that the board could devise two separate type of contracts for the red and white ball cricketers, providing special incentive to those who only play the longest format. However, it will be interesting to see whether the board discusses reform in salary structure of women cricketers, something which was raised by the male cricketers during their strike last year with an aim to minimise the salary gap between men and women.

## Mashrafe's future

There are a lot of whispers over Mashrafe's future. It has been learnt that the board may consider the veteran pacer as the one-day captain in the coming days despite the inspirational cricketer not been in the best of forms since the World Cup last year. It is understood that had it not been for a ban, Shakib would have been the automatic choice for captaincy in all three formats. In Shakib's absence, the board wants to bank on Mashrafe in ODIs for some more time.

## Appointing a new bowling coach

Since Charl Langeveldt was released by the BCB following a request from Cricket South Africa in December last year, the post for the Tigers' bowling coach has remained vacant. Former West Indies pacer and coach Otis Gibson and former South African pacer Nantie Hayward, both of whom worked in the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League, are in talks with the BCB for the post.

## Other issues

Among other issues, the board is to discuss the upcoming FTP schedules for the year 2020 along with the latest developments regarding the proposed cricket stadium in Purbachal.



Bangladesh Under-19 team captain Akbar Ali poses with the trophy yesterday during an official press conference in Johannesburg prior to the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup to be held in South Africa from January 17.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

# We have a good chance: Akbar

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Under-19 team captain Akbar Ali said yesterday that his team is well prepared to make their mark in the, which begins on January 17 in South Africa.

Akbar, a wicketkeeper-batsman who is one of several potential stars of the future in a side which has set a high standard for the current generation, exuded confidence while he speaking at an official press conference in Johannesburg yesterday.

"It's a great opportunity for us to show our talent. We are well prepared and the boys are excited to perform well in the tournament. To be honest, I think, our squad is a very balanced one and our bowling, batting and fielding are in very good shape," said Akbar.

"The guys are very talented. If we can play to our potential, we have a good chance to qualify," he added.

Akbar had earlier declared that not only can his side progress from a group featuring Pakistan, Scotland and Zimbabwe, but they can also go on to win the entire tournament.

Bangladesh have won 18 of their last 30 games, which includes series wins over New Zealand and Sri Lanka and three victories on English soil. Towhid Hridoy and Mahmudul Hasan Joy went to the tournament with good form and are the only players to score more than 1,000 runs at the U-19 level since the last tournament two years ago.

Bangladesh will play two official warm-up matches against Australia (January 13) and New Zealand (January 15) before their first Group C encounter in the tournament proper on January 18 at the JB Marks Oval in Potchefstroom.

Bangladesh will also play their second group match against Scotland on January 21 at the Witrand Oval and their final group match against Pakistan at the JB Marks Oval.

# Bangabandhu school cricket from Jan 20

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangabandhu National School Cricket tournament will start from January 20 across 64 districts of the country. The major grassroots tournament, sponsored by the Prime Bank in association with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for the past four years, has this time been named after father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to mark his birth centenary celebrations.

"A number of events are taking place around the country to celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This time, the tournament is named after Bangabandhu. Every year a record number of young cricketers take part in this tournament. I hope that the tournament will be of great excitement and memorable for everyone involved," said Prime Bank CEO Rahel Ahmed at the logo unveiling ceremony at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The tournament will see a total

of 11,120 students from 556 schools participate all over the country, the number of teams and players from last year.

BCB director and game development committee chairman Khaled Mahmud explained how this age-level tournament helps youngsters, mentioning the return of lost enthusiasm and excitement surrounding the tournament.

"The school cricket tournament has slowly started to regain its legacy. In the ongoing ICC Under-19 Cricket World Cup, there are four players in the Bangladesh squad who have previously played in the Prime Bank National School tournament. In almost every age-level team, there are a number of players who played in school tournament," said Mahmud.

The tournament will be held in three phases -- district round, divisional round and national round. A total of 960 matches will be played in 70 different venues. The national round will be held between the champions of district, seven divisional champions and the best team from Dhaka Metro.



The logo of the Bangabandhu National School Cricket Tournament was unveiled at a press conference yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. The tournament has been named after Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in honour of his birth centenary.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

## NATIONAL FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

# Swadhin Bangla players made ambassadors

SPORTS REPORTER



Members of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team (SBFT) will travel to all venues of Bangabandhu National Football Championship as ambassador to inspire footballers, confirmed Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday.

The decision was made after BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, who is also a member of SBFT, met with SBFT manager Tanvir Mazhar Tanna, organiser Saidur Rahman Patel, footballers Sheikh Ashraf Ali, Suvash Chandra Saha, KM Nowsheruzzaman, Abdus Sattar and Mohammad Mozammel Haque regarding the National Football Championship, which will get underway across the country from January 17.

"I think making us ambassadors of Bangabandhu National Championship it is a good initiative as we are hardly known to others at present. Due to this effort, people will know us again," Ashraf Ali said. "Our biggest identity, though, is that we are freedom fighters who fought for the country under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

Some 63 districts and 15 teams from different universities, services sides and BKSP are taking part in the championship which is going to be held after 13 years.

## Former record holder Kipsang banned

AFP, Paris

Former world marathon record holder Wilson Kipsang was on Friday handed a provisional ban for doping by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU).

The 37-year-old Kenyan was suspended "for whereabouts failures and tampering", both violations of World Athletics' anti-doping rules, the AIU announced on Twitter.

Kipsang claimed the world record when clocking 2hr 3min 23sec in the 2013 Berlin marathon.

He won the London marathon in 2012 and 2014 and claimed bronze at the 2012 London Olympics.