



'I thought it was enough'

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet



It was a long wait for the journalists under the hot sun at the Sylhet International Stadium yesterday as a relaxed Mashrafe Bin Mortaza -- Bangladesh's most successful ODI captain -- headed towards the press conference room with a piece of paper in his hands yesterday.

Unaware of what was to come, journalists were

I have always said that whatever I am today, is through cricket. If I did not play cricket, I could have probably been in the fish business. It is actually my family business and there are enclosures there. Whatever I have become is because of cricket. And in the future, whatever plans I might have, cricket will be a major part of that.

MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA
BANGLADESH ODI CAPTAIN

busy preparing for the press conference ahead of the third and final ODI against Zimbabwe before a calm and composed Mashrafe arrived and said that he had something to announce before the interaction began. The entire room went silent and the inspirational cricketer shocked everyone, reading out from the paper and announcing that the final ODI against Zimbabwe would be his last as captain. Excerpts of the historic 34-minute press conference are given below:

Q: Has this decision come from you or the

board?

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (MM): I have taken the decision.

Q: Would you like to mention a name for your successor?

MM: It is tough to name someone. It is for the BCB to decide but I believe it should be someone among the seniors that we have now. Shakib [Al Hasan] is not available. I am not sure what the way forward is and what will happen after Shakib returns. We will need to see first if the process starts from now but I am sure the three we have now [Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad] are capable of leading the team. I hope the best one will be given charge.

Q: How emotional was this decision for you?

MM: I never saw myself leading the team as very important. I was rather proud that I was representing the country. Captaincy was given to me by the board and I have tried my best. Sometimes I got results and sometimes I did not. But I had to come to a decision. We have the 2023 World Cup ahead and everyone was discussing the preparation for that. I think it is the right time for the next captain to come and for him to have his team ready, starting now. But I hope they will stick to the plan that has been set now. This captain should remain till 2023.

Q: A couple of days ago you had said you were still thinking. How did you come to this decision all of a sudden?

MM: To be honest, I did not think much about it. Everyone is looking for a new captain for the 2023 World Cup so I also thought about it,

albeit not much, and came to this decision.

It was this morning that I thought it was enough. But the discussions that are happening would even make you think. It is a normal process but I hope the discussion and the plan remains as said. The next captain should remain till 2023. It should not happen that one year ahead of the World Cup, the next captain is changed with the reasoning that he is unable to manage the team because that is not very unusual in Bangladesh.

Q: Which moment hurt you the most as captain?

MM: The most painful was when we lost by one run against India [in the 2016 World T20]. That night was, not only for me, the ugliest for the whole team. We all were sitting in the corridor of the hotel. I think looking at them was a very sad part as captain. And then obviously many challenging periods have gone by. The World Cup; we were in the competition till a certain time, but it was also tough at the end. Whoever is the captain, he tries to win. If that does not happen... any match that Bangladesh lose is a tough time for Bangladesh. Individually, I think every defeat was tough for me.

Q: What is your plan from here?

MM: Whatever I am today, it is because of cricket. I would have been in the fishing business if I was not a cricketer. Fishing is my family business. My plan from here on will of course mostly involve cricket. I will have to work for my jurisdiction [as an MP] but I will not back off from cricket. It is in my blood. I will be there for cricket and cricketers for any kind of help and will try to support them in the best way possible.

Pre-planned or spur of the moment?

MAZHAR UDDIN from Sylhet



Was it a sudden disclosure that Mashrafe Bin Mortaza made yesterday at the Sylhet International Stadium?

There is a precedent of the dramatic announcement in Mashrafe's career as the inspirational skipper had announced his retirement from T20 Internationals at the toss of the first T20I between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in Colombo in April 2017, which was followed by a statement on his official Facebook page.

It had been then said that there were some issues which had forced him to bid T20I cricket goodbye and that was a big surprise for millions of fans.

The scenario might not be the same as in 2017, but still there was some curiosity over whether Bangladesh's most successful ODI skipper would suddenly step down as captain as nobody could guess that Mashrafe was going to make the announcement on the eve of the third and final ODI against Zimbabwe.

So, it was something of a surprise for everyone yesterday, especially as uncertainty has prevailed regarding the future of Mashrafe in Bangladesh cricket since a disappointing ICC World Cup campaign in England last year.

Mashrafe walked towards the press conference area with a page in his hand and it was not until he said that he would announce something ahead of the pre-match press conference yesterday that anyone had a clue of what was to come. And then he finally said it, it's over for captain fantastic!

Had Mashrafe made up his mind before going to Sylhet or did he overcome all the confusion about his future as captain following some internal discussions during the series, after his outburst before the first ODI?

One thing was however understood -- all the happenings surrounding him played a big role in him calling it a day as captain.

The whispers about his retirement have been doing the rounds after the dismal World Cup campaign, with many thinking that the inspirational cricketer

should have announced his retirement in the last game against Pakistan at Lord's. There was also a lot of criticism over his fitness and performance.

There had also been talk about whether Mashrafe wanted to call time at home in front of his people and family, but it was an issue shrouded in suspense as there were no fifty-over series since he missed out on the Sri Lanka tour in August last year at the last moment due to injury.

Mashrafe himself fueled the criticism by stating that if he does not remain as ODI captain, he will continue playing as a cricketer and even said that his recent performance does not justify selection.

But it was on February 19 this year when Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan strongly hinted the ODI series against Zimbabwe would be the last for Mashrafe as captain.

And since then, the Mashrafe issue once again took centre stage and the three-match ODI series against Zimbabwe emerged to be the ending

of the entire saga. The media personnel were curious to follow every move from Mashrafe since he joined the side in Sylhet on February 28 and were desperate to get his views on whether this series would be his last.

The situation reached such an extent that Mashrafe uncharacteristically lost his cool in response to a question during a pre-match press conference ahead of the series.

Perhaps even Mashrafe felt bad for reacting to the question as he called that reporter the next day and said it was nothing personal towards him, but a general comment on what has been going on over his captaincy in recent times. And the most interesting part was that a jolly and fun-loving Mashrafe did not, even for a brief moment, look subdued nor changed his nature towards his teammates or the media over the next few days.

But he probably sensed that it would be better to clear the air regarding captaincy when there has even been talk about prolonging his captaincy role after the series victory against Zimbabwe.

MASH'S STATS AS CAPTAIN



Test: 1, W- 1, L- 0, NR- 0, Win- 100%; ODIs: 87, W- 49, L- 36, NR- 2, Win- 56.32%
T20Is: 28, W- 10, L- 17, NR- 1, Win- 35.71%

Series records as ODI captain (current tenure, since Nov, 2014):

Bilateral series: 15, W- 10, L- 4, D- 1; Tri-nations series: 3, W- 1, L- 2

Bangladesh's record in major 50-over tournaments under Mashrafe:

ICC World Cup: Appearances- 2, Best result: Quarterfinal (2015)

ICC Champions Trophy: Appearances- 1, Best result: Semifinal (2017)

Asia Cup: Appearances- 1, Best result: Runners-up (2018)

'Honour to be playing against Mash'

SPORTS REPORTER



The third ODI between Zimbabwe and Bangladesh holds a very special meaning for the fans, cricketers and everyone related to Bangladesh cricket as today's game in Sylhet will be the last time that inspirational captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will lead the Tigers in any format of the game.

Just like Bangladesh and Mashrafe's fans, today's match will also be a 'special' occasion for Zimbabwe leg-spinner Tinotenda Mutumbodzi, even though his side go into the match 2-0 down in the three-match series.

"First of all it is an honour to play in that sort of game in which Mashrafe is playing. I have grown up seeing him playing and he has done well for

Bangladesh. It is special that I am going to play against him in his last game," said Mutumbodzi in Sylhet yesterday even before Mashrafe had announced his resignation from the captain's post.

Mutumbodzi also mentioned that Mashrafe has also encouraged a lot of players all over the world.

"I started watching him playing on TV and I am sure a lot of young Bangladesh cricketers have learnt a lot from him in the past years and even players from all over the world. Most players have learnt a lot from him and it is special to be playing against him," said Mutumbodzi.

The 29-year-old leg-spinner also mentioned that Zimbabwe would take some confidence in tomorrow's game from their brave effort in the second ODI, which they lost by just four runs while chasing a mammoth 323.



Zimbabwe, who already lost the three-match ODI series 2-0, trained hard at the Sylhet International Stadium yesterday ahead of the third ODI against Bangladesh today.

PHOTO: STAR



WHAT THEY SAID

MUSHFIQUR RAHIM

There is no replacement for Mashrafe bhai. He is part of the family; he is not only an elder brother to us but a big part of it. I will miss him as a captain. We had a big change, not only on the field but off the field too, since he took charge as captain. I will hope he will continue playing as long as he can. It is an experience in itself to play with him and under him. I hope he will be able to give more to Bangladesh cricket in the future.



MOHAMMAD MITHUN

We all know how he was to the cricketers as captain and he is exceptional as an elder brother. We would go to him for any sort of trouble and he would always be there to support us. I got to know a little while ago that he would not be captain anymore and that it will be his last game [as captain] tomorrow [Friday]. Of course, we will miss him a lot. Will definitely see him as a leader, doesn't matter where we get to play next.



MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD

I have enjoyed a lot playing under him not only because he has been a fantastic captain but also because he has been a friend and a brother. It has been six years since he took charge and MashAllah, a lot of success for the team. I wish him luck for his future and there is no doubt that he is a legend of the game for Bangladesh.



TAIJUL ISLAM

Not only for me, but he has affected all the players in the country. He was always there as an important support when we got into the national team. We will miss him as a person and as a captain.



MEHEDI HASAN MIRAZ

I have played around 40 ODIs under him and no day was different, he was always there as a support to me and to the team. We will miss. We, the juniors in the team, got a bit of him but this is an experience for us to remember for the rest of our lives and we were lucky. We have won a lot of matches under him.



AL AMIN HOSSAIN

He is the most successful captain in the country. He was always there as a protector of the team and had never let negativity touch us. It would have been better if he had stayed a bit more with us as captain. But then again, it depends on the policy-makers and individuals. I will pray so that he remains with us as a player for some more time.



TAMIM IQBAL

It is tough to express Mashrafe bhai in words. The cricketers, cricket board and the supporters should never forget his contribution for Bangladesh cricket. He should remain in us all the time. We were at a stage in 2015 and then got lifted until 2019, led by him. The way we are treated in ODIs around the world now has been possible only because of him. It is impossible to forget what he has done for me and for us. I wish him luck and hope that we will get to see more of him as a player.



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

I have been sad since I heard about it [Mashrafe's decision to step down]. I do not have words to express bhai [Mashrafe]. He was the one who got me into the team. It is a sad day for all of us.



LITON DAS

I will definitely miss him. He is the best captain we had in Bangladesh. You cannot express the support that he has been to cricket, especially to the juniors. I made my debut under him, so it was a big achievement for me. He was always beside me and I saw his support to anyone who comes into the team.



HABIBUL BASHAR

Mashrafe gave his best. He changed the team and if you look at our winning percentage, it's huge. It is not easy to lead a team where there are so many star players. When you will play with many star players, you will have an advantage but it is not easy to get them to gel. Mashrafe however did it extremely well. We will definitely miss his captaincy. Mashrafe is one of the best captains I have ever seen.

