



The second round of the ongoing Dhaka Premier League (DPL) has been postponed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in the wake of coronavirus pandemic. However, a few players have been continuing individual training, but even among those who came at the BCB Academy ground in Mirpur yesterday like Mohammad Mithun (L) and Mustafizur Rahman, the main topic of discussion was about how to stay safe.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Being dropped has its perks, says Fizz

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI



Mustafizur Rahman's yorkers have become a thing of the past for many, with the effectiveness of that particular skill not quite where it was when he first burst into the international scene with great feats against India before a brilliant season in the Indian Premier League in 2016.

Since his shoulder surgery in August 2016, his pre-delivery stride has been different and the point of release has seen him get away from the stumps and bowl from wide of the crease. The ball would usually miss the stumps due to the angle and it led to batsmen taking their chances against the paceman.

On March 15, Fizz came in and barreled down a yorker to Soumya Sarkar while playing for Prime Bank against Gazi Group in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL). It threw Soumya off balance and he fell over while trying to get his bat down on time.

The ball rapped his boots fiercely before Mustafizur went up in appeal. The umpire did not agree with the left-armed and turned him down, perhaps thinking that it was going to miss the stumps. The yorker had almost got him his man but, more importantly, there were certain signs that the 24-year-old was reinventing himself during this DPL stint.

For starters, he was coming in from closer to the stumps as he did pre-surgery. Mustafizur practiced at the BCB Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday with the second round of the DPL postponed due to the outbreak of coronavirus. Speaking to reporters, Mustafizur said that he had been working on a few changes and trying to hone his skills from before the Zimbabwe series and cited playing local matches as a chance for players to 'increase their skill'.

Asked about the yorkers and whether he had been facing any issues since his shoulder surgery, he replied: "I think there is something... some issue there. These days it's going in [block hole deliveries] well again. I am not getting the same confidence and will need to practicing well. I think my hand changed slightly since the operation, it's nothing significant."

That one of his latest yorkers nearly found its mark is a good sign and the left-armed opined that the 'ball was going at pace so it's [shoulder issues] not significant.

Not picked in the line-up for the two-Test series in India last year despite being in the squad, Fizz would later be dropped from the lone Test against Zimbabwe at home this year after head coach Russell Domingo saying that the pacer was 'not ready for Tests'.

Mustafizur caught on fast and yesterday reiterated that he wanted to play all formats and has been putting in time with bowling coach Otis Gibson, who has been talking to the left-armed regarding grip and wrist action.

"I think it's going well. The Zimbabwe ODIs were especially good since you get 10 overs and I tried to bring the ball back in during my first spell. It's not something you can do in a day. I have worked for two weeks on bringing the ball back in with Otis and hopefully it will get better as time passes," Fizz remarked.

There have been suggestions that the effectiveness of his cutters have also waned but Mustafizur said that the cutters were still going well for him and it was about the kind of wicket on offer. Most importantly, he wanted to improve. Being dropped gives him an incentive to do just that.

"I have been trying a few things to find out what works for me. The cutter is also there along with getting the ball to come back in. There will be up and downs in cricket. If you cannot accept that, you will never become a great player. It's [being dropped] good for me since it gives me a chance to improve. I think I am not up to the level to get the chance and if I don't improve then I won't get the chance," he concluded.

In the beginning a lot of players didn't know about me but they know me now. I would usually take wickets but it's tougher now. It [being dropped] is good for me since it gives me a chance to improve. I think I am not up to the level to get the chance and if I don't improve then I won't get the chance.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

Anxiety mounts as players wait

SPORTS REPORTER



All domestic and international events have been postponed as the entire country is now concerned about the outbreak of coronavirus, but there was a different scenario at the home of cricket in Mirpur till yesterday.

With the ongoing Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier League being postponed after the first round, there are a few players who are still waiting to learn whether they will remain in the camps of their respective clubs or return home.

The likes of Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Mustafizur Rahman, Mohammad Mithun, Ebadot Hossain and a few other players looked confused and concerned as news about the threat of coronavirus has kept popping up on their social media newsfeeds over the past few days with increasing intensity.

Cricketers who have been staying at the national academy dormitory are working on their fitness. But the players want a clear message from the authorities about whether the league will start anytime soon or if they could leave, as staying away from home has increased their anxiety.

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Life is above everything and there is nothing more important than this. Security comes first and then everything else... if we remain alive, we will obviously be able play cricket again. The cricket board and the government will definitely take appropriate steps for everyone and they will take the decision after thinking about it.

MEHEDI HASAN MIRAZ

steps for everyone and they will take the decision after thinking about it," Mehedi told reporters at the Academy building in Mirpur yesterday.

On the other hand, although the DPL comes under the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) purview, it is the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) that is actually responsible for taking decisions regarding the tournament.

From the clubs' point of view, they have already made payments to many cricketers and running the residential camps is also a matter of concern for them

as they have to consider the financial aspect.

The clubs are yet to get any announcement or directive about when the league would resume and it was learned that the CCDM will have a meeting today about the current issue. According to sources close to developments, the decision about the league may follow the meeting.

According to the club officials they are ready to cooperate with any decision if it is taken by a majority, and they are waiting for a clear instruction.

"With the situation of the coronavirus [outbreak] developing, there is honestly a concern amongst the players. Many of them are saying it is better for them to leave if the league does not resume within the next 8-10 days. I understand the players and their families' anxiety but then again, we cannot simply take a decision until the BCB decides something. We are hoping the board will reach a decision soon and till then we have asked our players to remain on stand-by," said Mohammed Sporting Club official Tariqul Islam Titu yesterday.

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi club executive director Anwarul Iqbal also echoed the sentiment and said they would accept any decision from the BCB.

"Whatever the board decides is our decision. Playing in a tournament, we cannot take a decision on our own. Most of our players live in Dhaka and there are a few who are in club camps. All of us are waiting for a decision from the board," Anwarul told yesterday.

KOHLI'S AGGRESSIVE CELEBRATIONS

Made me feel like a punching bag: Langer

PTI, Melbourne



Australian coach Justin Langer has revealed that he felt like a "punching bag" after Virat Kohli's aggressive celebrations during India's 2018-19 tour while also calling out the "double standards" when it comes to sledging in cricket.

India, led by Kohli, enjoyed an unprecedented summer Down Under, winning the Border Gavaskar Trophy 3-1, their first-ever Test series win on the Australian soil. It was followed by a 2-1 victory in the ODIs, while the T20 series ended in a 1-1 draw.

During the series, Australia, who were determined to patch up their severely dented image in the wake of the ball-tampering scandal, had decided to not engage with the Indian captain verbally during the series.

However, Kohli's on-field antics angered Langer but he could not be expressive about it.

"I remember that afternoon (feeling) like a punching bag. We can't fight back because it felt like we had our hands behind our backs and we just had to take it," Langer said in Amazon's recently released docu-series titled 'The Test'.

"You must be feeling the double standards the way their captain is carrying on and we sort of have to be careful. Imagine if we behaved two out of ten (of



that," he said.

Langer asked his players to take on Kohli but warned the hosts not to cross the line between banter and abuse.

"There is a difference between abuse and banter. There is no room for abuse. We don't need to abuse him but there is banter where you stick up for your mate."

On day four of the second Test at Perth, Kohli and his Australian counterpart Tim Paine were involved in a verbal spat. That was time Paine thought he had enough.

"I sort of just had enough and thought you also have to stand up for yourself and your teammates and that was one of the reasons I thought, 'no, I'm the captain, it's my turn, I have to stand up and show him we're here for the fight'," Paine said.

Malik, Inzy pay moving tributes to Woolmer

PTI, Karachi

Former Pakistan captains Shoaib Malik and Inzamamul Haq sent out moving tributes for former coach Bob Woolmer who passed away on this day 13 years ago.

Woolmer died on March 18, 2007 just a few hours after Pakistan's shock defeat at the hands of minnows Ireland at the ICC World Cup in West Indies.

Pakistan were subsequently knocked out of the multi-national event but Woolmer's untimely death left everyone stunned. Malik took to social media to pay tribute to late Woolmer and his post read: "Miss you coach #RIPBobWoolmer."

Inzamam, who was captain of the team during Woolmer's tenure, dedicated an entire show on his YouTube channel to pay tribute to the late coach.

"Woolmer and I spent time together in the Pakistan team in the capacity of coach and captain," Inzamam said. "We shared many great moments together. He was the most organised coach that I ever came across."

"I got to learn a lot from him. He never used to force things upon the selectors."



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has taken measures to tackle the spread of the deadly coronavirus. The BCB arranged for sanitising hands at the entrance of the its headquarters in Mirpur.

PHOTO: STAR

SA team in self-isolation

AFP, Johannesburg



Members of the South African cricket team have been told to undergo a 14-day period of self-isolation and social distancing to prevent the spread of coronavirus following their return from an aborted tour of India.

The players arrived back in South Africa on Wednesday ten days after departing on a tour during which they played no cricket. The first of three scheduled one-day internationals was abandoned without

a ball bowled because of rain and the remaining two were cancelled.

Dr Shuaib Manjra, Cricket South Africa's medical officer, who accompanied the team on the tour, during which they stayed in or travelled through Dubai, Delhi, Dharamsala, Lucknow and Kolkata.

"CSA had engaged in a risk assessment before the tour," said Dr Manjra. "We deemed the risk to be very low. While on tour the world became a different place and we had to take cognisance of the fact that there was a change in the global environment."

'Monkeygate was lowest point of my captaincy'

PTI, Melbourne

Australia's two-time World Cup-winning former skipper Ricky Ponting considers the 2008 'Monkeygate' scandal the lowest point of his captaincy stint as he feels he was not in control of what was happened at that time.

The scandal unfolded when senior Indian off-spinner Harbhajan Singh was charged with racially abusing Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds during the second Test at Sydney.

"Monkeygate was probably the lowest (point in career as captain). Losing the 2005 Ashes series was tough but I was in full control of that. But I wasn't in full control of what happened during the Monkeygate thing," Ponting, who led Australia to 48 wins from 77 Tests and 164 triumphs in 228 ODIs, told a 'Skysports' podcast.

Harbhajan was eventually cleared of the charge and Symonds' career went into a downward spiral after the incident.

"It was a low point and also because it dragged on for so long," Ponting added.