



Stay home, says Domingo

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national team coaching staff were scheduled to arrive in the country over the next few days ahead of the third and final phase of the tour of Pakistan in late March.

But the outbreak of coronavirus led to the postponement of the tour while the Bangladesh Cricket Board also stopped all cricketing activities due to the pandemic.

According to the BCB cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan, the foreign coaching staff were advised to remain at home and await board instructions.

Head coach Russell Domingo, who is currently in South Africa, had to prolong his break and the 45-year-old is utilising the time by spending it with his family.

"No one expects such type of holidays but we have to accept reality. I am spending the entire time with my family and I hope that the disaster will come to an end soon," Domingo told BDNews24, a Bengali online portal, yesterday.

Following the Zimbabwe series, the first round of the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier League started on March 15 before being postponed due to unavoidable circumstances. Domingo urged his charges to be careful and stay safe.

"The BCB has taken the right decision [to postpone all the games]. I would tell the cricketers that safety comes first. Stay at home, be careful and stay safe. Follow the government and doctor's instructions," he said.



Home quarantine for Shadman, Mrittunjoy

SPORTS REPORTER

Opening batsman Shadman Islam and Under-19 pacer Mrittunjoy Chowdhury have both been in home quarantine since returning from Australia earlier this month after undergoing surgeries.

Shadman suffered a wrist injury during a few months back while playing for the Bangladesh Cricket Board XI in the Dr (Capt) K. Thimmappiah Memorial tournament in Bangalore last year while Mrittunjoy was sidelined midway through the ICC Under-19 World Cup after suffering a shoulder injury.

Both cricketers returned to Dhaka on Tuesday after going under the knife in Melbourne under orthopaedic surgeon Greg Hoy on March 11.

Shadman, who is in Dhaka, is due to start rehabilitation four weeks after his surgery and is set to start batting after eight weeks.

"I am just relaxing at home now. I have been advised by the BCB to not go outside and I am following it now," said Shadman.

Young left-arm seamer Mrittunjoy is currently in his hometown of Shatkira and is also staying at home.

"Me and Shadman bhai returned together. We have to follow the instructions from the government and remain careful. I decided to stay home for 14 days, starting from Tuesday," said Mrittunjoy.

BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury, who accompanied the two players to Australia, is also in home quarantine.

The quest for survival and the pursuit of dreams

EKUSH TAPADER

Have you ever heard the sweet sound of the leather hitting the willow? It sounded even sweeter to this reporter, who walked into a ground just a few miles from the Sylhet International Stadium and witnessed enthusiastic children playing the game they love. It was dusk and the urge of the young cricketers, all orphaned, to keep playing even during that time of the day only depicted how they find a shade of light through cricket amid all the darkness in this unfriendly world.

The whole world now stands still, with almost all major sporting events halted due to the coronavirus pandemic currently sweeping the globe. Even during such a crisis, there are stories scripted in an unknown ground in Sylhet's Bagbari that can shower some hope on fans and people who are panicking and struggling to cope with the fear that this deadly virus has created.

Even two weeks ago when Mashrafe Bin Mortaza had announced his retirement as the captain of the Bangladesh ODI team in Sylhet, everything was normal and regular. It was back then that this reporter discovered some interesting stories about some orphaned children who were harbouring the same dream that the inspirational leader had at their age.

After staying busy with the Mashrafe news all day, this reporter could only catch the children of Shishu Poribar orphanage in the final hour of their game. But it was not too late to talk to these children to know their inspiring stories.

A total of 170 children find their homes in a worn-out orphanage here in Bagbari. These children, some of whom are unaware of their parents' identity while others were left here by helpless mothers who could not afford to raise them, still dare to dream big -- playing for the national team.

Among the 85 Shishu Poribar institutions run by the social services department across the country, only the one in Sylhet offers children more than just shelter, food and basic education. And that is too because of the involvement of local sports brand SNP Sports -- a sports accessories wholesaler in Sylhet -- who are offering these 170 children a platform to hone their skills and chase their dreams of becoming a professional athlete.

Lutfur Rahman Zia, captain of Shishu Poribar cricket team, had finished his practice just minutes before sharing his story.

"I never thought I would play cricket like this. Now I think I have the opportunity to make a name for myself. Cricket is where I find happiness. Let's see what the future holds for me," were some hopeful words coming from a child who lost his father and was left here by his



PHOTO: COLLECTED

mother at a very young age.

Standing next to Zia was Iqbal Ahmed, who too found shelter in this orphanage after losing his father at a tender age. Iqbal however excels at a different sport -- football. Iqbal, who captains the orphanage's football team, made the shortlist of 25 players selected for a football camp after competing with students from a hundred schools in Sylhet. He now has the opportunity to play in a tournament in Portugal.

"We have been playing here since childhood. But now we have a team. We are getting the chance to play in leagues. I dream that I will play in the national team one day," said Iqbal.

Robiul Hasan, who came to this orphanage at the age of seven or eight, is however a blend of Iqbal and Zia. A hero of many a match for Shishu Poribar in the school cricket tournament, Robiul is equally capable with a football at his feet as he was also called up for the 25-member football camp alongside Iqbal. But Robiul had picked his favourite sport between the two.

"I play both cricket and football but I would like to be a famous footballer," said Robiul.

Unlike the other three, another prospect, Al-Amin, has no idea of either of his parents' identity. The 14-year-old has lived here for his entire life and finds happiness in bat and ball.

"This is my home. We did not have the opportunity to play before. Now we play and I love it. If luck favours me, one day I will also be a [professional] player," said Al-Amin.

Owner of SNP Sports, Paplu Dutta, the man who created the platform for these underprivileged children and helped them dream big, once represented Sylhet Division in first-class cricket.

"I used to go there [to the orphanage] and spend time with them. I once thought of starting a cricket academy but after talking to them I realised that I should work with these children who have no one. I realised I need to build a platform for them.

"I once played cricket with them for a while and noticed their excitement. Then I thought of doing something for them. They do not get many opportunities. These kids, who lost their parents, are fighters by birth," explained Paplu.

After that, Paplu provided the children with necessary kits -- jerseys, bats, balls, footballs and all other required accessories -- under the supervision of a coach and with that began the pursuit of dreams.

Their hard work and practice did not take long to bear fruit. Just a year later, Shishu Poribar participated in the National School Cricket tournament and went as far as playing in this year's Divisional final. Although they could not clinch the title, Shishu Poribar were able to beat schools like Aided High School, an institution that nurtured national players like Alok Kapali, Rajin Saleh and Abu Jayed and also has a rich sporting history, Blue Bird High School and Government Pilot School.

The coordinator of the social services department that runs the orphanage, Nibash Ranjan Das also mentioned his eagerness to provide the orphanage's girls with the same platform.

"This will keep on going. I am also thinking of providing the girls with all sporting facilities," said Nibash.

SNP Sports' owner Paplu was right when he mentioned these kids are 'fighters by birth' as even through the adversities the likes of Zia, Iqbal, Robiul and Al-Amin have faced, they keep fighting and chasing their dreams of becoming professional sportsmen. Maybe such fighting spirit is what people nationwide now require as they fight to survive a pandemic.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

CORONAVIRUS FALLOUT



Kohli, Anushka bat for self isolation

India cricket captain Virat Kohli and his actor wife Anushka Sharma on Friday issued a joint appeal for self-isolation to combat the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic, which has left the world in disarray.

Kohli and Anushka posted a video message on Twitter, appealing everyone to stay at home, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation to advocate self-isolation.

"We all know we are going through a very difficult time," Kohli said.

"And the only way to stop the spread of Coronavirus is by acting together," urged Anushka.

As they took turns to speak, Kohli said, "We are staying at home for our safety and for everyone else's one."

Anushka followed, by suggesting that, "... you should do it too to prevent the further spread of the virus."

"Let's make it safe for us and everyone else by self-isolation," said Kohli while Anushka concluded with, "stay at home and stay healthy."

Modi has called for a 'janta curfew' on March 22, asking citizens to stay at home from 7am to 5pm. -- PFI

Warne's gin distillery turns to hand sanitiser maker

Australian cricket great Shane Warne has halted production of gin at a distillery he co-owns to make medical-grade hand sanitiser for hospitals in these "challenging times".

The spin legend, who played 145 Tests, responded to Prime Minister Scott Morrison's plea for companies to help wherever they can during the spiralling coronavirus crisis.

"This is a challenging time for Australians and we all need to do what we can to help our healthcare system combat this disease and save lives," Warne said on his Instagram page.

"I am happy SevenZeroEight has the ability to make this shift and encourage others to do the same."

Warne is a co-founder in the company alongside two prominent surgeons with an agreement in place to supply two Western Australian hospitals with hand sanitiser at cost. -- AFP

If you stay safe, country will too: Afridi

Former Pakistan cricketer Shahid Afridi on Friday urged his countrymen to take preventive measures to contain the spread of coronavirus pandemic in the country.

In a video message posted on the official Twitter handle of Pakistan Cricket, the former all-rounder asked people in the country to frequently wash their hands and maintain personal hygiene.

"Health is wealth. We have to take some preventive measures to defeat coronavirus. While sneezing, coughing, and before and after having food we have to wash our hands properly," Afridi said in the video.

"It is very important to use alcoholic sanitiser to sanitise your hands. Use tissue paper while sneezing and coughing and put it in dustbin. If you will stay safe the country will too," he further added. -- AGENCIES

Boards brace for losses

REUTERS, New Delhi

When the mighty Indian cricket board decided this week that only the chief among its national selectors would travel business class, it merely confirmed straitened times for the game amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The uncharacteristic austerity by the world's richest cricket board follows its decision earlier this month to halve the winner's purse at this year's Indian Premier League (IPL), a cash cow with a brand value of \$6.8 billion.

The franchise-based Twenty20 league was scheduled to begin on March 29 but has now been postponed until April 15.

To many, a condensed tournament, possibly without foreign players, later this year looks like a more realistic prospect.

A curtailed or cancelled tournament would mean significant losses for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), which gets around 400 million rupees (\$5.38 million) annually from broadcaster STAR India and its central pool of sponsors.

MONITORING SITUATION
The BCCI and IPL franchises also pay 20% of a player's annual fee to his home board, which stands to lose that money if it does not allow the cricketer into the IPL due to fears about the coronavirus for example.

A shorter tournament will mean a smaller share from the shrunken central pool of revenues for the eight IPL franchises, not to mention a reduction in gate receipts.

Further afield, the Women's Twenty20 World Cup narrowly escaped the health crisis but the outbreak has cast a shadow over the men's event in Australia, which begins on Oct. 18.

The International Cricket Council (ICC), which runs the tournament, said it was monitoring the situation.

Cricket Australia stands to lose some A\$300 million (\$174 million) should the coronavirus outbreak derail their high-profile home Test series against India later this year.

IN THE BALANCE
In England, the fate of the inaugural 'The Hundred' championship hangs in the balance after the epicentre of the pandemic moved from Asia to Europe, shutting down most sport on the continent.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have invested heavily in promoting the competition in the 100-ball format, which is scheduled to begin on July 17.

"It is clear that every industry, including cricket, will be impacted by this unprecedented situation," Tom Moffat, chief executive of the Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA), told Reuters.