

SPORT



The halls of the BCB headquarters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium (Inset) are empty as part of steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus, but work continues for the groundsmen who are busy with the upkeep of the playing area.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tigers' pace story starting to change?

MAZHAR UDDIN



Fast bowling has traditionally been Bangladesh cricket's weak link due to a lack of exposure, hardly any role models for youngsters to follow and, possibly the most prevalent, a lack of motivation on the not-so-friendly pitches and conditions that predominantly favour spinners.

There has always been a shortage of a consistent fast bowler in Bangladesh with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza probably the first and still the only pacer who has made a mark in the international circuit over a long period.

The former Bangladesh ODI captain is the highest wicket-taker in the 50-over format with 269 wickets in 218 games, and Rubel Hossain is second among the pacers with 126 scalps in 101 matches.

Rubel, who despite playing international cricket for nearly a decade, has till now not become a regular across formats. Despite having all the attributes of a genuine fast bowler, Rubel however has not been able to fulfil his potential properly.

is a huge difference between domestic and international cricket. It gives an immense confidence to any player if he is backed by the team, which helps a player grow," Rubel told The Daily Star.

There was a lift in the Tigers' fast-bowling department in 2015, when Mustafizur announced himself in grand style alongside another promising fast bowler Taskin Ahmed, and that raised hopes for the Tigers fast bowling department but both failed to take themselves to the next step.

There are other seamers like Mohammad Saifuddin, Shafiqul Islam, Al Amin Hossain and newcomers Ebadot Hossain and Hasan Mahmud in the Tigers' fast bowling unit, none of whom have yet set the world alight.

Things have started to change in tune with the Tigers' thought process with the selectors preparing separate fast bowling units across formats -- Bangladesh played with totally different fast bowling attacks in the Test and limited-overs games against Zimbabwe.

Jayed can be a good example of a bowler given the license and being prepared as a specialist pacer for the Tigers in Test cricket.



RUBEL HOSSAIN



ABU JAYED

Rubel's record in the longest format of the game is much worse than his limited-overs figures, as he has taken just 36 wickets in 27 Tests at an average of 76.77. He was recently dropped after the first Test against Pakistan at Rawalpindi earlier in February this year. Although Rubel picked up three wickets, it was his bite-less bowling during which he conceded 113 runs from 25.5 overs that led to him being dropped yet again.

Rubel was the joint-highest wicket-taker in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League T20 tournament alongside Mustafizur Rahman, taking 20 wickets, but was not considered for the limited-overs sides against Zimbabwe earlier this month.

"I think I could have definitely worked hard on my skill to improve over the years. Although I have played over 100 ODIs but you will notice that I have not featured regularly during these 11-year career. Fast bowling is a tough art and the more you play, the better you get. There

Jayed, who played nine Tests, has been the stand-out pacer for the Tigers recently as he showed the hunger in testing situations while all other seamers failed to make an impact in India, Pakistan and against Zimbabwe at home recently.

"My aim is to be among the top fast bowlers in Test cricket. I know it's not going to be easy as the conditions and pitches do not favour the seamers much in the sub-continent. Considering my pace, I want to become a workhorse who could bowl longer spells, hitting the right areas consistently with my swing," said Jayed.

Rubel idolised Andrew Flintoff and Jayed follows James Anderson, but both pacers echoed the same sentiment of not having a role model from their own soil apart from Mashrafe to look up.

It will be important for the youngsters to have enough motivation to become a fast bowler and perhaps the likes of Jayed and others would want to be the role model for many in the coming days.

'Kohli is the best in the world'

AGENCIES

West Indies legend Shivnarine Chanderpaul, who was present in India for the Road Safety World Series 2020 this month, has given a huge praise to India captain Virat Kohli.

Speaking in an interview to Sportstar, Chanderpaul picked Kohli as the best batsman in the world. "Obviously, it's Virat Kohli. He has been working on all the aspects of his game, and the results are showing," he said.

"He is working hard on his fitness; he works on his skills. You see him putting in the hard work, and he is one of those guys who always wants to do well. He's proven it, day in and day out," the former left-handed batsman added.

"You have to give credit to him for that. It's not easy to stay at the top of your game for so long. You got to put in your work, and the results are showing," the 45-year-old further said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan legend Javed Miandad had also praised the Indian captain in a Youtube video earlier this week. "Whenever he wants to score, he can. He is powerful and has the ability to clear the ropes easily. But the best thing about him is that he is humble. It is visible that he loves his cricket a lot and respects his fellow cricketers a lot," he had said in the video.

"I have seen his conduct and he is friendly with the opposition also. I have played cricket at the same level, I can say this. Indian cricketers are now said to be aggressive. But there has to be some aggression on the field. However, there has to be a limit," he added.

It's a good time for introspection: Pollard

PTI, Port of Spain



West Indies' limited-overs skipper Kieron Pollard believes the break brought upon them by the COVID-19 pandemic is a good time to "introspect" about careers and players should use it to "stay mentally and physically fit".

The coronavirus outbreak, which has claimed over 12000 lives and infected more than 250,000 globally, has led to the cancellation and postponement of all sports activities across the world.

Pollard said it is a good time to reflect on his own's game.

"It is a good time for introspection, a good time for reflection, a good time to look at where you are as an individual in your career and what you want to achieve going forward," he was quoted as saying by Jamaica Gleaner.

Pollard, who was ruled out of the Pakistan Super League due to a niggle in his right thigh early this month, said it is time to work on his fitness and prepare for the season ahead.

"You have to take this time in order to do that and also keep yourself in good physical shape, and mentally as well, because when the bell rings and they say 'ok, everything is back to normal and we need to go on tour', it might not be enough time to be prepared, but you as an individual have to be prepared mentally in order for you to try to perform at your best," he said.

Cricket West Indies (CWI) had recently delayed the domestic season by a month in the wake of the deadly disease.

On Friday, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) suspended all professional cricket till May 28, delaying the start of the new season.

West Indies were scheduled to play a three-Test series from June 4, following warm-up matches against England Lions and Worcestershire on May 22 and 28, respectively.



The unsung hero of Bangladesh cricket

Reza-e-Karim, the former general secretary of the Bangladesh Cricket Board, was a shining beacon for the country's cricket. The history of Bangladesh's cricket cannot be put forward without noting the contributions of this giant. BCB director Ahmed Sajjadul Alam Bobby reflects on the life of the unsung hero, who passed away yesterday, leaving Bangladesh with a future to relish.

A legendary organiser, Reza bhai spent all his life with cricket. I remember the time when the EPSF (East Pakistan Sports Federation) used to run all sporting activities before the independence of Bangladesh and Reza bhai has been involved with cricket from that period.

During the Pakistan period, there were no separate headquarters for various sports. What is now the National Sports Council (NSC) was once the headquarters of the EPSF and on the ground floor was a conference room where the cupboards would each represent one of the national sports bodies like the hockey federation, the cricket board, the football federation and others.

One has to understand that cricket back then was not a very popular sport in the Bangladeshi scenario. It was, at best, a second-tier sport or even lower. It was a not an apt time to be involved with cricket since there was no money in the game and even a cup of tea had to be bought with one's own money.

In this state, people like Reza bhai and Raisuddin Ahmed took the initiative to move the country's cricket forward diligently. That cupboard was the cricket board and their activities were all related to those files in the cupboard. Late in the afternoon, the people in charge of the different federations would gather in the common room just as teachers



Reza-e-Karim shakes hands with players during a local tournament in the early 90s at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. Ahmed Sajjadul Alam Bobby is to his left. PHOTO: COLLECTED

do in schools or universities and there were times that Reza bhai was seen working on cricket-related papers with only the light from a candle to help him.

Reza bhai, who used to play cricket and participated in organising clubs, had also

umpired First Division matches, where the rivalry was fierce. Many of the clubs had an army of supporters and not many umpires were interested in officiating the matches. Reza bhai would don an apron and a hat to get on the field. He was always well-respected

by the clubs and not only did he maintain standards on the field, but also acted as a mediator from the cricket board's side to resolve conflicts between clubs.

Muzzafar Hossain Paltu, the first general secretary of BCB, Raisuddin and Reza himself worked tirelessly to keep cricket going when there was no money to work with following the liberation war. It was a difficult time to organise cricket, with the country in tatters following the war. But through their initiatives, they were able to start the Dhaka League in an independent Bangladesh.

Cricket is an expensive game if you think about it. You need clothing, bats, balls, stumps and also refreshments for the players. They were able to reintroduce cricket through their organisational skills and even though the country was financially stressed after the war, in 1974 the first league was completed. Then in 1977, Ted Clark's MCC (the first cricket team to tour Bangladesh) visited Bangladesh to play a series of matches and it became apparent that there was a support for cricket among the general populace as people turned out in droves. That love from people was what they capitalised on to pave the way for Bangladesh to get ICC's associate membership.

When played in our first-ever international tournament during the ICC Trophy in '79

at England and Reza bhai was the assistant manager of the side. So, he was a member, joint secretary, treasurer, vice-president and later on acted as the general secretary as well. His contribution to cricketing laws is tremendous too and, along with journalist Ataul Haque Mollik, we published MCC's 'laws of cricket' in Bangla which was distributed throughout the country.

In Kenya in 1994 we lost the ICC Trophy but prepared for the 1997 edition, knowing that matches would be played on astroturf. We brought three astroturfs with Reza bhai's foresight and Rais bhai's (former director of Bangladesh Biman) influence, the latter helping to bring them in for free from England on Biman flights. We played the league for two seasons on astroturf and it had a huge impact on us winning the 1997 ICC Trophy -- the turning point for our cricket and also how we got to where we are now -- and later playing the World Cup.

Reza bhai has left us but he has left us and Bangladesh cricket with many of his contributions. He has departed with our love but there is a lot of history of Bangladesh cricket which he has taken with him and we couldn't know them. We only learnt from our personal dealings and from watching him at work. He is the dedicated, knowledgeable, unsung hero of Bangladesh cricket.