



Would fight for my place in Test side: Mahmudullah

Despite playing international cricket for more than a decade now, Mahmudullah Riyad has perhaps endured more ups and downs than the other four among the fantastic five of Bangladesh cricket. The 34-year-old, despite scoring three centuries in four Test matches not too long ago, lost his place in the Test side following some below-par performances in the four Tests that ensued after those centuries. However, Mahmudullah has the responsibility of leading the Bangladesh team in Twenty20s. During these testing times of coronavirus pandemic, the veteran batsman spoke to *The Daily Star's* Mazhar Uddin over phone, discussing his plans about T20 captaincy, his return to Test cricket and his batting overall. The excerpts of the exclusive interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (TDS): How is life during the growing coronavirus outbreak worldwide?

Mahmudullah Riyad (MR): Life is good so far Alhamdulillah; healthy and fine. I'm spending time with my family members at home. I think because of the pandemic worldwide, we all are trying to remain disciplined and maintain safety properly. It's better to stay at home, and we know we have to wash our hands and wear masks. If we really need to go outside, we should definitely wear masks properly and maintain social distance. Cricketers-wise it's frustrating and I am especially missing my game a lot at the moment although I am working on my fitness.

TDS: What are your plans as captain of the T20 side?

MR: I always believe that to play T20 cricket, you need freedom to play your shots and obviously you have to take that freedom on to your game. You just can't carry fear of failure in your

heart and play. Being the T20 captain, I have always tried to spread these two messages to the boys within the group. Probably we still have a lot to prove in the shortest format and hopefully we can do it properly this time around. For that I need to have all the support from the management and the players so that I can gain the trust as a captain and we can do well as a group.

TDS: Do you think long-term role helps a captain? Do you also want long-term captaincy?

MR: Obviously, I think long-term captaincy always makes a difference to a person who leads the side and also with the players to gain the confidence. I think the captain needs to earn the respect and confidence from the players, of which Mashrafe (Bin Mortaza) bhai is a perfect example. He has that image within our group and probably it's a good idea to follow in this regard. Obviously, every captain has his own plans and methods to



lead the team. I have my own style to lead the team and what I always want is to be more consistent in the T20 format. We still need to prove to the world and we have to be a better and

consistent side in the shortest format. **TDS:** How do you see Mominul Haque as a captain? Many thought he was too introvert as a person for that role.

MR: I think Mominul is the right

choice as the Test captain. He is a hard-working cricketer and a performer and I believe he will definitely grow as a captain. I wish him all the best. I don't think he is introvert as a captain. He is quite expressive when he needs to be and also demanding according to the situations which is a very good sign for a captain.

TDS: What are your plans regarding a return to the Test side?

MR: I don't know because there is no cricket at the moment and we are all waiting to return to the field. Obviously, there will be plans once I return to cricket and definitely, I would like to fight for my place in the Test team. I hope I will get the opportunity.

TDS: After scoring your maiden Test hundred back in 2010, you went seven years without a century. Then you scored three centuries in four matches in 2018-19. Did you think your Test form was finally turning around?

MR: Actually, I never thought of it that way, never thought about the three centuries in four Tests. In fact Tamim mentioned that to me once and only then I got to realise that. However, I think I need to be more consistent in Test cricket and I always try to work on that. I didn't perform up to the mark in the last few Tests as the expectation is always there being a senior player. I need to step up but I didn't deliver and also, I got injured during the pink ball Test in Kolkata. But I am looking forward to getting back to the Test side and to try to perform as much I can to make an opportunity for myself.

TDS: Among the four tons, which one do you rate the highest?

MR: My maiden Test hundred is always very special to me. I think we were struggling at a certain position in that Test against New Zealand back in 2010 in Hamilton. Shakib and I had a very good partnership and I always cherish that hundred.

Reminiscence: My first match

We are taking turns at *The Daily Star Sport* talking about what our first live experience at a sports venue was. It is my turn today to share experience after our very own Sakeb Subhan, who wrote yesterday with the byline 'from London, 1996'.



Naturally, when I first tried to go down memory lane to reminisce about my first match at a sports venue, my first international match as a sports reporter came to mind -- the Bangladesh-India opening match in the Silver Jubilee Independence Cup in January 1998. It was the match through which I was introduced to the etiquette of not clapping in the press box. I could recall all the details and enthusiasm surrounding the match that Bangladesh lost by four wickets at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

That match, however, immediately faded once I went deeper down memory lane as an old film strip in my mind emerged... me perched atop trees at Circuit House Playground in Mymensingh to watch the fast bowling craft of Golam Nawsher Prince in a local tournament.

How can I forget the enthusiasm, madness and festivity when I watched the Lila Devi Shield -- the annual football tournament for boys? The northern district headquarters in Bangladesh had a rich football culture, but there was no shortage of cricket tournaments.

We grew up listening to our seniors talking about a match between the visiting Sri Lanka side and a local side in 1978 in Mymensingh, to the extent that it now seems that I had actually watched this match at the venue.

The first match I remember watching at a proper venue was between Hyderabad Blues and Central Zone, led by Roquibul Hasan, if I am not wrong, at the district stadium in 1982. My memory of this match is mostly unclear but one thing is as clear as if it happened yesterday was the madness among the fans who had thronged the stadium in huge numbers. It was not easy, especially

for a boy, to enter the stadium with a few friends, sneaking past the huge crowd. The other thing was the roar of the crowd after a young batsman smashed consecutive boundaries against Bhagwat Subramanya Chandrasekhar, the captain of the visiting team who is one of the best leg-spinners of all time.

The term pinch-hitting was unfamiliar to many cricket followers before the 1992 World Cup, when New Zealand employed a slightly different form of the tactic to considerable effect with Mark Greatbatch playing the role. So, definitely we had no idea about what role young Nazim Siraji had employed when he came to the crease to punish the Indian maestro during his sparkling knock, but he had established an everlasting memory of what actually a 'dashing batsman' means.

That's it from Bishwajit Roy, from Mymensingh in 1982.



The Circuit House Playground in Mymensingh was a welcome destination on a trip down memory lane to the year 1982.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Stadiums open for coronavirus treatment

SPORTS REPORTER

All the stadiums of the country, especially the indoor ones, can be used as hospitals to treat coronavirus patients if needed, state minister for youth and sports, Zahid Ahsan Rasel, said yesterday.

"The government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already taken all possible preparations to face coronavirus, and thanks to Almighty Allah, coronavirus is yet to turn into an epidemic in Bangladesh due to the steps taken timely. But, we don't want to sit with complacency; rather we are ready to face any situation," the minister said in a press release yesterday.

"As per demand, the health directorate and local administration can use all the stadiums of the country, especially the indoor stadiums, to treat coronavirus patients," the press release added.

There are 80 stadiums at district, division and metropolitan areas apart from 125 mini stadiums at upazila level, informed Rasel, who is also chairman of National Sports Council, the state-run organisation bestowed with the responsibility of maintenance and renovation of sports facilities across the country.

Olympics from July 23, 2021

AFP, Tokyo

The Tokyo Olympics will begin on July 23 next year, organisers said on Monday, after the coronavirus forced the historic decision to postpone the Games until 2021.

The announcement comes less than a week after the organisers were forced to delay the Games under heavy pressure from athletes and sports federations as the global outbreak worsened.

"The Olympics will be held from July 23 to August 8, 2021. The Paralympics will be held from August 24 to September 5," Tokyo 2020 chief Yoshiro Mori told reporters at a hastily arranged evening news conference.

Messi confirms pay cut, fires at board

AFP, Madrid



Lionel Messi confirmed on Monday that Barcelona's players will take a 70 per cent pay cut and make financial contributions to ensure the club's other employees are paid in full during the state of alarm in Spain.

After announcing the pay cut, he added: "We want to clarify that our desire has always been to apply a drop in salary because we fully understand that this is an exceptional situation and we are the first ones who have ALWAYS helped the club when asked. Many times we have even done it on our own initiative when we thought it necessary or important. Therefore, it never ceases to amaze us that from within the club there were those who tried to put us under the magnifying glass and tried to add pressure to do something that we always knew we would do."

Messi's message was soon posted by teammates, including Gerard Pique, Sergio Busquets, Luis Suarez, Jordi Alba, Antoine Griezmann and Frenkie de Jong. Barcelona released their own statement shortly afterwards, which said members of "all professional sports teams and most of the basketball team" had agreed to reduce their salaries.

Earlier, Atletico Madrid said they will impose salary reductions on staff whose hours have been affected while Espanyol confirmed pay cuts for sporting staff.

Chayan prepared for the sacrifice

ANISUR RAHMAN



While most people of the country including sports stars are staying indoors to contain the spread of coronavirus, some national hockey players, especially the ones employed by Bangladesh Navy, are mentally gearing up to step out and serve the people in their hour of need.

National hockey players such as Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Farhad Ahmed Shitul, Sarwar Hossain, Asharful Islam, Mainul Islam Koushik, Fazle Hossain Rabbi and Ruman are serving Bangladesh Navy while playing for the national team.

The last time they represented Bangladesh was in the Asian Games in Jakarta in late 2018. Domestically the Navy players last played in the Shaheed Smriti Hockey tournament in February, winning the title by beating Bangladesh Army, which is now playing an important role by assisting local administration in distributing relief materials and keeping people at home.

The duty of Bangladesh Navy's employees under the players' scheme is not like other soldiers or officials, instead they have a basic military training to deal with any emergency situation and they are always ready to serve the people as members of the armed forces.

"We are physically alright but not good mentally because of the coronavirus situation. We are employees of Bangladesh Navy which is our first identity and then we are hockey players. Wearing the Navy uniform, our first job is to ensure the safety of our country. As members of the armed forces, we don't have any vacation.

Bangladesh Army is working at district level while Bangladesh Navy is working at remote coastal areas where Army officials can't go. As we are in Dhaka, we are performing administrative tasks," veteran player Mamunur Rahman Chayan told the *Daily Star* on Sunday.

"We are physically and mentally ready to work with the people if we are asked to work at the ground level. Of course, we will think ourselves lucky to serve the people and save them, especially after representing Bangladesh in hockey. I think serving people is more prestigious than representing the nation at international level as a player," said Chief Petty Officer Chayan, who joined Bangladesh Navy in 2013.

Chayan first represented Bangladesh at international level in 2004 and captained the national team for five to six years since 2010 and he has been a key factor behind many victories, thanks to his deadly penalty-corner conversions. He retired after the 2018 Asian Games, with the last match against South Korea in that tournament also being the last international match that Bangladesh have played.

"The situation has been stable in the last two days [Saturday, Sunday], but if it worsens, we will wholeheartedly obey any order that comes from the high-ups.

"We had basic training on how to deal with emergency situations. All the armed forces officials know they might get infected, but they are putting those thoughts aside to enforce social distancing because the main task of the armed forces is to sacrifice themselves to save the country's people. If we die doing this, we know we will be honoured as shaheed," said the 32-year-old from Faridpur.

