

PONTING'S FAVOURITE MEMORABILIA

Ponting on Sunday shared a photograph of the Australian baggy green that he wore throughout his Test career and the new one that he had received from his wife Rianna Jennifer Cantor and Cricket Australia when he retired in 2012. "This is my favourite piece of memorabilia gifted to me by Rianna and Cricket Australia when I retired. A brand new cap on the left and my pride and joy on the right, looking a bit worse for wear after about 140 odd tests," he said in his tweet. Widely rated as one of the greatest Australian captains and batsmen of all time, Ponting won three back to back World Cups in 1999, 2003 and 2007 and the latter two victories came under his captaincy.



Croatian tennis player Borna Coric posted this picture of himself doing exercises at home and went with the simple caption: "Stay home but stay active."

PHOTO: TWITTER

There must be stories to tell

BISHWAIT ROY



"Why is only Test cricket being remembered?" The grandson suddenly asked this question of his grandfather while he was minutely reading every line of a report in the newspaper where a cricket legend has recalled a great Test knock from another modern-day great in order to encourage people and remind them of the need to maintain discipline in the fight against Covid-19.

The bespectacled grandfather, with a furrowed yet beaming face, took some time to respond.

Cricket rarely dominates conversations between the two, although one is a lifelong fan and another has no shortage of excitement for the game. It's now however time for a breather and a chat following the suspension of all outdoor activity to stop the spread of coronavirus.

The grandson sat on the middle couch beside by his oldest friend and that particular question came to his mind as Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar had offered an unusual take on the coronavirus fight by comparing it to Test cricket, urging for patience and teamwork, and warning "we have to defend well". "While the world battles the Covid-19 pandemic, this is probably the time for us to draw lessons from the grand old format of the game," Tendulkar wrote in a commentary.

Meanwhile, another legend and the other genius of their era, Brian Lara recalled Tendulkar's unbeaten

241-run knock against Australia as the world battles Covid-19. Having gotten out playing cover drives all series, Tendulkar did not play a single cover drive during the mammoth knock.

Then is there no place for one-day and T20 cricket? The junior had grown up at a time when all the hype surrounded the shortest format of the game, but is still a big fan of the two legendary cricketers, which is why their take on Test cricket in a crisis gave him food for thought.

On the other hand, the grandfather is a lifelong cricket fan who has watched so many Test matches, read all the great stories of the game and, now spends his retired life watching cricket, mostly on TV. Upon his grandson's instigation, he went down memory lane and it seemed all stories were alive and well in his mind.

"You know all sorts of stories of Test matches, almost like you are telling me stories of your own life," said grandfather.

"A fine left-handed bowler, who possessed marvellous stamina. Breaks from both sides. Has the easiest of deliveries. Seldom tires. Can bowl all day long. Keeps an excellent length. Never sends down a loose delivery. Understands the game thoroughly. Places the field to a nicety, catches come [to the fielders], they do not have to go in for them. Decidedly a 'head' bowler," he reminisced the lines about a great pre-modern era subcontinent bowler he read in a famous book.

Yes, here is also the story of patience and discipline, the grandson thought. "These sorts of stories about Test

cricket are abundant in my mind. I believe you also have such stories," said grandfather.

The grandson also could remember a few memorable matches but it seemed that lacked the stories his grandpa had been telling one after another. "We watch too many matches, especially T20 matches these days, so it's hard to track all the details," replied the grandson. The grandfather only responded with a smile.

Are we going back to old ways of life when everyone has been talking about the new world in every sector in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic?

"We don't know what exactly will happen after this current coronavirus shock. But see, the cricket didn't go back in time after World War II when the longest Test match was played between South Africa and England in Durban, that continued for nine days before the English players had to leave to catch their boat back to England.

"The question was raised after the World War, a kind of cricket which is predominately defensive, both batting and, more to the point, bowling... it is not pleasant to watch, and it is not pleasant for adventurous young men to play," the grandfather continued.

The grandson breathed a sigh of relief. "So, there is no conflict between Tests and the other formats."

There was a curious smile on the grandfather's face. "Change is inevitable in life but you have to have some tale to tell, whether it is in life or sport."

Note: It's an imaginary conversation.



In scoring 241 without a cover drive and hitting a sublime 153 not out to single-handedly turn around a Test series against Australia, the stories of Sachin Tendulkar and Brian Lara provide examples of the discipline the world now needs.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Reminiscence: My first match

In these times of social distancing, we must be safe while remembering that we do not get too used to the world being at a standstill.

We were meant to go watch matches together, agree with a few of our neighbours and disagree with the rest. So, we are taking turns at The Daily Star Sport talking about our first live experience at a sports venue.

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Mirpur, 2008



Having preferred the couch at home to the stadium seats for a large part of a decade as a cricket fan, I was first introduced to a live experience by a group of friends who had gotten me a ticket for an international fixture between Bangladesh and touring Zimbabwe back in 2008. With some of my favourite international players taking their bow from cricket, my curiosity for the modern game was yet to be reinstated and my interest was perhaps waning, developing a mildly condescending amusement towards how cricket at large was changing.

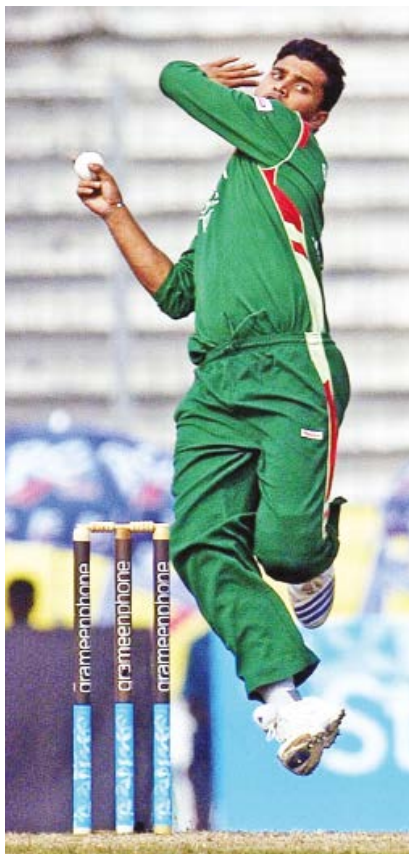
Living in Mirpur had its perks, however, as the local aura would change significantly whenever cricket was home. Any achievement by the national cricket team was rejoiced with gusto in the vicinity of the stadium and even in those slightly less exhilarating times of international cricket which nonetheless were galvanizing years of the country's cricket culture, a win for the Tigers -- no matter in what part of the world -- would explode into thumping fists and loud roars at Mirpur and be reverberated around the rest of Bangladesh.

I got a taste of the growing culture too that day at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium during my first-ever foray into a cricket stadium. It was a largely transformative phase for the national team but us fans were fully expecting a Bangladesh victory in the first ODI of a three-match series against a Zimbabwe side that were looking back at their past years with a sense of longing and trying to get a foothold.

We arrived at the stadium draped in red and green colours of Bangladesh and from the onset I could tell that a Bangladesh match had its own unique environment. I was mesmerised by the look of the lush green outfield of the ground as the players warmed up; the excitement coursed through me as well while enjoying some tea and snacks awaiting the start of the match.

Unlike the witty and cerebral conversations with a parent or a friend while watching a match at home, the environment at the ground was blazed with a party atmosphere with cause for both hope and frustration. That was certainly evident to me as things unfolded.

Having won the toss, Bangladesh had elected to bat first but excitement soon turned to despair and loud cheers replaced by boos as the Tigers stuttered to an early slump. In the stands we looked at the coming of each Bangladesh batsman, filled with new cause for optimism. But local heroes Tamim Iqbal, Mohammad Ashraful, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad failed



to fire with the bat as the Tigers were bowled out for a meagre 124.

Having always admired the faster bowlers for the excitement they introduced, it was a sight to behold Mashrafe Bin Mortaza in action. The journeyman was cause for excitement and the only action and enduring memory from that game was his run-up to the crease. I have simply forgotten in what way the Bangladesh batting was dismantled even as I looked up the scorecard while sitting to write this piece.

The Tigers had made a contest of it after we had fully expected Zimbabwe to run away with the match that would lead us to exiting the stadium way before the expected duration. Mashrafe had given early breakthroughs and as the scorecard now tells me, both he and Shakib bagged three wickets each.

While re-visiting the memory, I certainly remember the re-ignition of hope after a poor batting performance and also the relief at the chance to cheer to our hearts content, enjoying the fact that the game was not just going to end fast, bringing an end to our adrenaline jump.

Alas that the Zimbabwe batting line-up produced a late game-saving performance as the Tigers lost by just two wickets. However, it was also one of those times that the team and the Big Five of Bangladesh cricket would show that they were not bowing down easy in the face of a rout. The Tigers would turn things around in the remaining two ODIs but my disappointment that Bangladesh lost the first-ever match that I attended, will remain with me.

Watkiss lends a helping hand

SPORTS REPORTER

Following head coach Jamie Day's footsteps, Bangladesh national football team's assistant coach and technical director of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), Stuart Watkiss, came forward to join the federation's effort of help feed the needy people during coronavirus pandemic.

"We all are experiencing difficult and strange times. I would like to send my wishes and help you. I'm aware of the BFF-taken responsibility and also the initiatives to feed needy people.

"I would like to bear tomorrow's [Sunday] lunch," Watkiss said in a video message sent by BFF.

Pressures grows for shortened IPL

AFP, New Delhi



Players are putting pressure on cricket authorities to plan a shortened Twenty20 Indian Premier League later in the year to "kickstart" the sports economy after the coronavirus lockdown.

The world's richest cricket tournament has been postponed until April 15, which coincides with the end of India's 21 day nationwide shutdown to halt the spread of the pandemic.

But with the number of cases and deaths rising and India isolated from international travel, few believe any sport will be possible in the sub-continent for at least three months.

"Let's say July-August is the earliest," said Kevin Pietersen, the former England batsman. "I do truly believe the IPL should happen. I think every single player around the world is desperate to play the IPL."

Pietersen suggested the eight-team tournament be shortened from its eight-week duration and played behind closed doors.

The league is a huge revenue earner for the BCCI and is estimated to generate more than \$11 billion for the Indian economy.



Cristiano Ronaldo got a haircut from partner Georgina Rodriguez while in quarantine. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner couldn't resist doing his infamous celebratory cry during the short clip, which was accompanied by the words "stay home and keep stylish."

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

PL handling of pay row 'a disgrace'

AFP, London



Wayne Rooney has criticised the government and the Premier League for placing footballers in a

"no-win situation" over proposed pay cuts after a warning from players' representatives that National Health Service coffers could suffer.

The former England captain, now playing with Championship side Derby, penned an impassioned column in the Sunday Times saying his fellow professionals were "easy targets" in the wider response to the coronavirus crisis.

Rooney made it clear he had both the means and the will to make financial contributions, either in the form of salary reductions or direct donations to the NHS, but felt the public pressure being exerted on players was unhelpful.

The Premier League's suggested strategy involving a combination of pay cuts and deferrals amounting to 30 percent of wages, was discussed in a conference call with players' and managers' representatives on Saturday.

Initial talks were already ongoing before key political figures, including Health Secretary Matt Hancock, called for action.

"If the government approached me to help support nurses financially or buy ventilators I'd be proud to do so -- as long as I knew where the money was going," wrote Rooney.

He added: "I'm in a place where I could give something up. Not every footballer is in the same position. Yet suddenly the whole profession has been put on the spot with a demand for 30 percent pay cuts across the board. Why are footballers suddenly the scapegoats?"

"How the past few days have played out is a disgrace."

The Premier League has been seen as lagging behind other European leagues in its response to coronavirus and was accused by one British lawmaker of operating in a "moral vacuum".

But Rooney questioned the wisdom of the Premier League in preempting behind-the-scenes talks involving players with its own proposals for sweeping reductions.

"In my opinion it is now a no-win situation," he said. "Whatever way you look at it, we're easy targets."

England defender Danny Rose, on loan

at Newcastle from Tottenham, told the BBC players were "keen to make something happen".

The Professional Footballers' Association said its members wanted to play their part but warned that a projected 30 percent salary reduction would cost the country 200 million pounds (\$245 million) in lost tax receipts.

A PFA statement released on Saturday following the conference call said the combined tax on player salaries was a significant contribution to funding essential services.

"Taking a 30 percent salary deduction will cost the Exchequer a substantial sum," it said. "This would be detrimental to our NHS and other government-funded services." - Furlough row -

A handful of top-flight clubs, including last year's Champions League finalists Liverpool and Tottenham, have opted to furlough non-playing staff using the safety net of the government's job retention scheme.

But former Liverpool players Jamie Carragher and Stan Collymore strongly criticised the move by the European champions, who in February announced pre-tax profits of 42 million pounds (\$51 million) for 2018/19.

Rooney's former England and Manchester United teammate Gary Neville, now a leading broadcaster, was highly critical of the Premier League.

"The PL are handling the CV (coronavirus) crisis terribly," he wrote on Twitter, before outlining a checklist of perceived mis-steps including their slowness in imposing a lockdown and the "PR disaster" of furloughing.

Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport said he was concerned about the way the talks had progressed.

He tweeted: "Concerned about the turn football talks have taken tonight. People do not want to see fighting in our national sport at a time of crisis."

"Football must play its part to show that the sport understands the pressures its lower-paid staff, communities and fans face."

The Premier League said on Friday that the 2019/20 season would only return when it was "safe and appropriate to do so".