



In a cricket loving country like Bangladesh, it is always a great sight to see people playing the game they love even with the little resources they have got available. While sports provide everyone with much needed relief but in such perilous times when the whole world is fighting against the coronavirus, going out and playing games could be a dangerous thing as it defies the single most important directive -- maintaining social distance -- that would help curb the spread of the deadly virus. Unfortunately enough, just like a number of sports fanatics who were seen playing cricket at a brick field in Hemayetpur, people around the country could still be pictured playing games even during a nationwide shutdown.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Want to see my name at the top of the list'

All-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin has seen both sides of the coin in a short time in his young career in international cricket for Bangladesh. From being struck for 31 runs by South Africa's David Miller in just his 12th T20I he has emerged as a genuine pace-bowling all-rounder -- a role the team management has long been looking to fill. The 23-year-old however had to battle with a complex back injury, which had taken a lot of time off the field but the cricketer managed to return strong. The Feni lad spoke with The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin during an exclusive interview about his injury, his game and a few other topics. The excerpts of the interview are given below:

The Daily Star [TDS]: How's life in the midst of this coronavirus pandemic?

Mohammad Saifuddin [MS]: Obviously very boring. You have nothing much to do and accept the reality and look to remain safe in these testing times. I am working on my fitness at home and doing light running, free-hand exercises.

TDS: You must be satisfied with the way you made a comeback from back injury against Zimbabwe last month since last playing an ODI in the ICC World Cup in July 2019.

MS: Although I have played T20s in between this period, yes it was my comeback in ODIs after the World Cup in July last year. My main focus was to gain the rhythm in the fifty-over format, which I enjoy a lot. My role in the team as a third seamer is pretty challenging as we have a few experienced pacers like Shafiqul Islam bhai and Al-Amin Hossain bhai who are also bowling well. I tried to focus on my bowling and also with the bat whenever I got the opportunity and it was a decent series against Zimbabwe for me. I was looking forward to the Dhaka Premier League as I was playing for my favourite club Abahani Limited this time before it stopped due to the coronavirus outbreak.

TDS: Did you accept the fact that you have a complicated back injury that forces you to rest your body and so you may not be able to play regularly?

MS: Honestly, the team management haven't said something like that to me. Obviously, I want to play on a regular basis continuously, but it will also depend on my fitness. The physio and trainer can say better. It's tough to say at the moment as I have just played a couple of matches, lets see. The negative thing is that I would have played a lot of cricket if the current situation had not occurred but at the same time there is a positive side of it as I am getting some time to recover and prepare myself.

TDS: What are your thoughts about playing Test cricket?

MS: At the moment I am focusing on white-ball cricket and trying to fulfil my role according to the demands of the team management. Obviously, I would love to play in all the three formats as everyone dreams of playing Test cricket.

TDS: Do you think your ability with the bat exceeds that of a hard-hitting batsman down the order?

MS: I used to be a batting all-rounder in my early days during age-level. But the

thing is you get more opportunity as a bowler than a batsman. After failing in two-three games with the bat my batting order dropped from number four to seven or eight. You know I was the highest run getter during an age-level tournament. So, naturally I started to give more time with the ball later on. Obviously, I also believe that I can improve my batting more as now I have all the resources and support to work on my skills as I can spend more time in the nets if I want. But at the moment, it's also important for me to fulfil the demand of my team wherever I get the opportunity. I would love to play big knocks but maybe after three-four years, as it's tough for me to get a chance to bat up the order.

TDS: Do you truly believe that you can



become a world class all-rounder?

MS: Why not? You always have to dream big and chase that dream. Whenever I see the names Ben Stokes and Shakib Al Hasan at the top of the ICC all-rounders' rankings on TV I also wonder one day that my name and picture will appear as the top all-rounder. I know it's not going to be easy as I have to improve my game every day.

TDS: Who is your favourite all-rounder?

MS: During my early days I used to like Sourav Ganguly a lot, who bowls right arm medium pace and used to bat lefty. Later on it was Corey Anderson during my age-level days and now it's Ben Stokes and Shakib bhai. I like Stokes a lot as we have some similarities in our game.

BFF polls uncertain, but process still on

ANISUR RAHMAN



Despite postponing its elections for indefinite period on March 27 due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is still continuing the process of preparing voters' list by extending the deadline of submission of the delegates' names.

The game's local governing body on Monday extended the deadline of name submission for the third time to April 30, with the initial deadline for submission passing on March 31, 19 days prior to the original schedule of April 20 polls.

The process of preparing voters' list has apparently raised question of BFF's intention among the stakeholders as there is still uncertainty over staging the elections in near future due to the deteriorating situation of the coronavirus.

The BFF office bearers have themselves avoided sitting together

at the executive meeting on March 27 before making the decision of elections postponement after taking opinions online. However, the meeting kept the process of preparing voters' list on by extending the deadline of names' submission at a time all offices in the country, except for the emergency services, are closed.

So far the BFF secretariat has received 70 percent names out of its 141 voting delegates and only 50 percent of those names have been sent through hard documents, which are mandatory to get listed in the voters' list.

"We have not selected the name of our representative yet as we could not hold our executive meeting following the shutdown. We will send it after holding the meeting but we don't know whether all members will be present," Faridpur DFA president Moslem Uddin told The Daily Star yesterday.

Wari Club's general secretary Shamsul Alam Anu also urged to stop all activities regarding the

elections for indefinite period.

"Preparing voters' list is part of elections which have been postponed. So we don't understand why the BFF is still asking us to send names of councillors," said Anu.

"We are unable to hold the executive committee meeting to select councillors in such a vulnerable period of the country as the government's directive is to avoid gatherings/meetings. We, therefore, request you to cancel the present submission date of councillors' names and reschedule the same with the declaration of new date of AGM and EC elections after improvement of the coronavirus situation," Anu wrote to BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, who is believed to have taken those appeals into consideration.

The game's local governing body has also formed a three-member committee featuring senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy, members Harun Ur Rashid and Abdur Rahim who will look into

the matter of nomination of the delegates.

"This committee has not been approved by the BFF executive committee and the persons, who were given the responsibility to mitigate the problem, are part of elections as they are expected to contest in the polls. So I'm doubtful whether this committee can deliver the right decision," Mohiuddin Ahmed Mohi, one of the vice-presidents of BFF, told The Daily Star a few days earlier. He suggested that the BFF should form a committee with independent people like the BFF disciplinary committee.

"According to the BFF constitution under article 32, no executive member of BFF can be a judge of any judiciary committee. The committee that Kazi Salahuddin formed to mitigate the problem of delegates is also a judiciary committee, which is a clear violation of constitution and BFF cannot do that," said a member seeking anonymity.

Samiul thankful to Tamim

SPORTS REPORTER

Tamim Iqbal, captain of the Bangladesh one-day cricket team, has taken the responsibility of providing expenditure to the family members of the fastest teenage sprinter Samiul Islam amid the coronavirus pandemic, which has left many people in the country struggling for food and other basic necessities.

On the first day of the Bengali New Year, Tamim called up the 20-year-old sprinter-cum-footballer after The Daily Star on Tuesday carried a story on Samiul, who, along with his parents and three siblings, have been going through a hard time due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has kept him away from earning his livelihood by playing football.

Samiul is also a temporary employee of BJMC from where he used to earn Tk1850 per week, but the BJMC also terminated its temporary employees, putting Samiul's family into hardship. Samiul's family is in such a desperate situation that they have been taking meals on alternative days.

"It is hard to find a friend in trouble but I have found Tamim bhai as a friend in my trouble. He has provided us the money we need to run our six-member family for the next one month," Samiul said over phone from Khulna yesterday.

"We are a bit relieved after the financial support. This help is heartwarming. I really feel proud that the captain of Bangladesh cricket team came forward to help another athlete. I can't really express the emotions inside me," Samiul said, adding that Tamim also asked him to keep in touch in case he needs any other help.



The Australian players were among the most excited ones regarding the upcoming Indian Premier League with pacer Pat Cummins mentioning he would also consider playing the tournament behind closed doors. And it seems like Cummins's team mate David Warner, who posted a picture of him taking care of his three kids on social media, may just have to get cosy on his new role as the IPL was postponed indefinitely yesterday.

Have to prepare ourselves for the worst: Mani

AGENCIES



The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is quite puzzled about how to continue with the planned schedule of tours and what measures can be taken to check the financial losses and how to adjust the suspended schedule into the next year if the pandemic crisis gets extended.

PCB chairman Ehsan Mani, speaking in a podcast session on Tuesday, sounded concerned about many issues. "Under the current situation, we have to prepare ourselves for the worst and hope for the best. If the cricket does not resume in near future all the cricket boards will face financial problems and it will not be easy to adjust suspended schedule in next year's schedule," said Mani.

"As per the discussion at ICC level, the future of the remaining schedule of the ICC Test Championship is also in doldrums as very little time is remaining. Many series have already been cancelled," he added.

To a question, Mani said if the ICC tournaments will be hit, that would bring a far reaching negative impact on the financial position of many cricket boards.

Mani has asserted that the PCB will not agree to cancelling the Asia Cup, scheduled in the UAE in September, to make room for the Indian Premier League, which has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "I have read and heard about these speculations but right now just remember that having or not having the Asia Cup is not a decision between Pakistan and India it involves other countries as well," asserted Mani.

PHOTO: COLLECTED