



Nazmul looking within during downtime

RAMIN TALUKDER

In an interview with The Daily Star last month, Bangladesh batting consultant Neil McKenzie stressed the importance of players using this coronavirus-induced break to reflect on their careers. Cricket in Bangladesh has been halted since March and while cricketers have been doing their bit to stay fit with indoor workouts following BCB-provided guidelines, the best thing for them now would be to reflect on their careers so far and analyse their flaws.

It seems like Bangladesh batsman Nazmul Hossain Shanto has taken McKenzie's words seriously, just as any student should, as the left-hander has been reflecting on his fledgling career during the enforced cricketing hiatus.

"I have watched the two innings that I played against Pakistan [in the Rawalpindi Test in February]. Also, I watched the T20 century I scored [For Khulna Tigers against Dhaka Platoon in the last BPL]," said Nazmul.

Re-watching the highlights reel was not just a way of relieving sweet memories as Nazmul also analysed his mistakes from his previous matches.

"I have not made many big scores. So, I was just trying to see how I played shots and what I did during my maiden T20 century. But I watched the highlights of the Pakistan game more. Everyone knows how formidable Pakistan's bowling line-up is. So, I watch how I survived during that game. I realised that I should have scored at least a century in that game. I was actually wondering what I could



have done to handle the deliveries better and was just trying to understand what I should do when I get similar chances in the future," explained Nazmul, who got starts in Rawalpindi but failed to convert.

Having played only four Tests, five ODIs and two T20s since his international debut in January, 2017, Nazmul was enjoying seemingly the best time of his career so far after a successful BPL and domestic career that was followed by some promising sparks in the international arena. However, instead of fearing a loss in momentum, the 21-year-old has held on to a more mature and optimistic view.

"I am actually not interested in

worrying how things will go once cricket resumes. I think it is better not to think about cricket during this crisis. I will think about cricket once everything is normal and hopefully we will get time for that. It will be great if I could start the way I left off. And even if I can't do well right away in the first or second game, maybe I will pick it up in the third game," explained Nazmul.

Nazmul's penchant for the longer version of cricket was also evident as the left-hander talked about taking lessons from some historical Test innings.

"During this break, I watched highlights of Bangladesh's maiden Test and also a few Ashes games. I have watched Brian Lara's Test

400 a number of times. It is not easy to score 400 in a game. I was looking at the types of shots he played. Aside from this, I also watched Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kaye's record opening Test stand for the country when they put on 312 against Pakistan in the second innings [in 2015]. Actually, I have been trying to watch the matches that had some incredible knocks. A lot can be learned from these types of games," said Nazmul.

From Nazmul's demeanour during this break, it can be hoped that the left-hander, having thus far taken McKenzie's advice to heart, may also live up to the expectation of the South African coach by returning to cricket 'hungrier than ever'.

Italian season resumes today

REUTERS, Milan

The Italian season resumes after a three-month break due to the coronavirus pandemic on Friday when Juventus, still chasing a possible league, cup and Champions League treble, host AC Milan in the return leg of their Coppa Italia semifinal.

Juventus are favourites to reach next Wednesday's final after a 1-1 draw in the first leg but coach Maurizio Sarri said that his side were venturing into the unknown after such a long layoff.

"None of the staff at this moment knows where the preparation is because we come off an abnormal interruption," he said, adding that the stoppage was completely different to the usual close season.

"This is a unique situation, which does not give us certainty, also because we have not played friendlies. I am satisfied with what I have seen during these days in training, but the response during a game will be different."

For AC Milan, the past three months have been a turbulent time with incessant speculation that the club wants to dismiss coach Stefano Pioli at the end of the season and replace him with German Ralf Rangnick.

The team will also be missing 38-year-old Zlatan Ibrahimovic with a calf injury he suffered in training last month.

Gazzetta dello Sport and other media said there was a tense meeting between chief executive Ivan Gazidis and the players on Wednesday to discuss a wage reduction related to the stoppage.

T20 changed Test batting

AFP, New Delhi



Asian cricket greats including Rahul Dravid believe modern Test batting has become a thrilling spectacle thanks to T20 smash-and-wallop fests such as the Indian Premier League.

"I actually believe Test batsmanship is a lot more exciting, lot more positive now than ever," Dravid said in chat with Sanjay Manjrekar on ESPNcricinfo. "People are playing more shots even in Test cricket which is great," he said.

The 47-year-old Dravid was renowned as one of the most technically correct batsman of his era and was nicknamed the "The Wall" because of his robust defence.

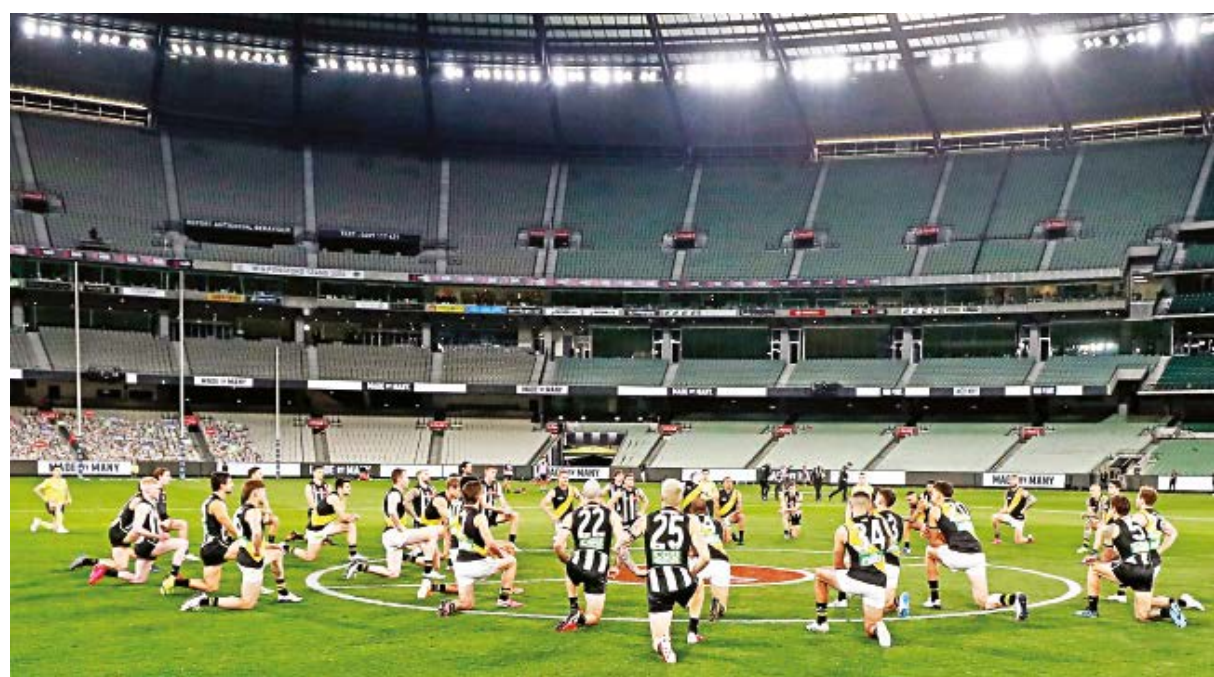
"Of course I wouldn't have survived today if I batted the way I did in my days," Dravid, who had a strike rate of 71.23 in ODIs, said. "Look at the strike rates today. One of the great things for India is that Virat Kohli values Test cricket so much. Players like Virat have shown how one can excel in all three formats. Obviously I can't compare myself to Kohli or Rohit Sharma because they have blown the ODI paradigm to an all new level."

Sri Lanka's World Cup winning captain Arjuna Ranatunga credits T20s for adding aggression to Test batting.

"Let's say 10 or more years ago, batsmen in Test matches waited for the perfect loose ball to hit, but today when they see a half-good delivery they go for a shot," the 56-year-old said, adding that he will always find five-day cricket more satisfying. "Test cricket is like a meal made by mother, prepared with a lot of love, care and patience -- wholesome food. T20 is like instant noodles," he said.

Former Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar said T20-style batting and flat wickets have contributed to a glut of runs in the longer format.

"In the past team were satisfied with [scoring] 150 to 200 runs per day, now teams want at least 300. This is why we were seeing more results in Tests," Bashar told AFP. "Another reason is flat wickets, rarely do we see green-top wickets. The biggest reason is of course more limited-over matches."



After a long shutdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, Australia's biggest spectator sport, Aussie Rules, returned to action yesterday. But instead of the regular 100,000 packing the stands at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the stadium was empty. Players of Collingwood and reigning champions Richmond took a knee around the centre in a gesture of solidarity against racism. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Fans welcome at Djokovic's event

AFP, Belgrade

After being suspended for three months due to the coronavirus pandemic, top-level international tennis returns this weekend in Belgrade with a charity tournament hosted by World No. 1 Novak Djokovic and where fans will be welcome.

Tickets sold out in seven minutes after they were put on sale online last Wednesday. The event will be broadcast live in more than 100 countries.

The matches will be played at Novak Tennis Centre, financed by Djokovic's family, with a view of the Danube river.

Dominic Thiem, Alexander Zverev and Grigor Dimitrov will play but giants Roger Federer, who for the year following knee surgery, and Rafael Nadal, who recently resumed training, will be absent.

"Taking the situation into account, I didn't have the nerve to call and invite them," said Djokovic.

Injury fears loom over restart

AFP, London

The Premier League will return after a 100-day stoppage on June 17, cramming the remaining 92 games of the season into just five-and-a-half weeks.

A deluge of football may be welcomed by fans starved of live action for three months. But it is expected to take a heavy toll on players hit by the combination of a long layoff, little training and fixture congestion.

"We are expecting more injuries at this time," Newcastle doctor Paul Catterton told BBC. "We have had players asking if they can have ice baths after training and they can't -- all we can do is give them ice to take home. It's like going back 15 years."

The injury risk is of particular concern for players who are out of contract at the end of the season.

Championship side Charlton will be without top scorer Lyle Taylor as the 30-year-old has decided not to play and put a lucrative move at risk.

"It makes me think what would happen if I had an injury now that threatened the rest of my career," Taylor told Sky. "I'll be honest with you, it scared the life out of me."

However, the lesson from Germany's Bundesliga, which returned on May 16, is that an increase in injuries is inevitable.



Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero is only four goals away from matching Wayne Rooney as the player with the most goals for a single club in the Premier League era, but his wait may go on longer due to his spotty injury record as he may not be rushed back. PHOTO: COLLECTED

According to sports science specialist Joel Mason, Bundesliga injuries went from a pre-lockdown average of 0.27 per game to 0.88 in the first round of fixtures after the competition resumed.

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