



TAEKWONDO RETURNS FIRST AFTER LONG HIATUS

Following a five-month halt to the country's sports due to the coronavirus pandemic, Taekwondo became the first discipline to make an official comeback with its poomse competition, a kind of physical demonstration, at the National Sports Council auditorium yesterday. Some 200 participants from 20 clubs and districts are competing for 36 gold medals. The youth and sports ministry last month allowed sports federations to start their activities on a limited scale while maintaining health guidelines. Other disciplines like cricket, hockey, archery and football have gradually resumed activities through training programmes.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Djokovic disagrees with Federer and Nadal

REUTERS, New York

Novak Djokovic is finding it tough to deal with issues related to his breakaway players' body in the middle of the US Open but says he is moving forward with it as more professionals join the cause daily. Djokovic resigned as head of the ATP player council last week, along with some members to form the Professional Tennis Players Association. Despite his off-court distractions, the top seed defeated Briton Kyle Edmund on Wednesday to improve his 2020 match record to 25-0.

The Serbian has described the PTPA as a platform for players to be better heard on decisions that affect their livelihoods, but the move has faced resistance from player council members Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal. Djokovic said he spoke to the duo before launching the PTPA on Saturday and disagrees that the timing was wrong.

"For a players association, it's always the right time, and it has been the right time for the last 20 years. Somehow it was never really accomplished, never really realized," he said. "Right now it is. We are moving forward."



Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam was ecstatic after dismissing Tamim Iqbal during practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday ahead of next month's Sri Lanka tour.

PHOTO: STAR

TIGERS' TEST TRIALS

The intangible importance of fielding

The Bangladesh national team is gearing up to return to international cricket with their three-Test tour of Sri Lanka in October, which will end around six months of down time in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Before the Tigers return to cricket in their weakest format, followed by the batting and bowling, The Daily Star attempts to analyse the third and arguably the most important aspect of their Test cricket -- fielding.

MAZHAR UDDIN



There is a saying about Test cricket -- when nothing's going your way while bowling, tighten up the field and put pressure on the batters and something will happen. That, however, is an area where the Tigers have been generally lacking in their 20 years of Test cricket.

With the inevitable rust that sets in because of the long gap from the game, the challenge of correcting previous mistakes on the upcoming Sri Lanka tour will be steeper than usual.

The Tigers fielding department will play a vital role that is often overlooked, but it has been an almost silent cause for worry in many occasions. Considering fitness, almost all Bangladesh cricketers can be termed fit and agile, but there have been many instances when dropped catches exacted a heavy price, changing the course of games that could have been won.

In Tests, the slip cordon arguably plays the most important role, but Bangladesh is yet to find a true specialist in those positions.

Whether it's with the new ball or with an old cherry, bowlers have to peg away at batsman for long stretches and it is imperative that slip fielders gobble up any chances that suddenly come their way due to batsman error or a great ball.

After those periods when nothing seems to happen for hours, the thick edge against the run of play is gleefully accepted by top teams like Australia, England, India or South Africa. That shifts the momentum and more importantly, lifts the morale of the bowlers.



The picture is quite the opposite for Bangladesh, who have endured more than their fair share of wicket-less periods in Test cricket. Invariably, the edge that promises to end the hardship is dropped at slip, further deflating bowlers. The likes of Soumya Sarkar, Mohammad Mithun, Nazmul Hossain Shanto and Imrul Kayes were seen in the slip cordon in recent times, but unfortunately none have gained the reputation of a solid slip fielder yet.

In New Zealand last year, dropped chances in both the ODI and Test series cost the visitors heavily on a tour where an inexperienced fast bowling department were made to look more helpless.

Apart from the lack of specialist slip

fielders, the poor approach and attitude from the fast bowlers towards fielding -- both catching and ground fielding -- has also been a big concern.

Although the Bangladesh team do have a couple of specialist close-in fielders in short leg and silly mid-off with Test skipper Mominul Haque and, more recently, rookie opener Shadman Islam doing a decent job.

Following a rather disappointing end to the 2019 ICC World Cup, Bangladesh fielding coach Ryan Cook gave a report where he focused on the areas of strength for each individual.

"One of the things we focused a lot on was the positions of the players in the areas

of strength. We did that quite well in Sri Lanka. So those were the things in those reports," Cook told reporters last year.

However, he did mention that the Tigers' catching has remained inconsistent and required a lot of work. "I think it [catching] has been inconsistent. We had some really good catches in the World Cup and during the Sri Lanka series. But catching has to be consistent. And that's where we will be focusing on in the next couple of days. From the slip fielding perspective, we want to transform players in the squad, then we decide who needs to go. The guys who are best suited to the position, will go to that position," he added.

Fielding and wicketkeeping -- another indispensable aspect in Tests -- at times have disappointed in crunch moments.

The experienced Mushfiqur Rahim, in his last Test against Zimbabwe where he scored his second double-ton, played mainly as a batsman as the team management decided to hand over the gloves to Liton Das.

Many had opined that Mushfiqur should focus on his batting more in the longest format and sacrifice his wicketkeeping for the betterment of the team, and that to some extent worked well for the Tigers.

Liton has already showed some promise behind the stumps with his swift technique and his presence in the Test side. However, keeping the long Sri Lanka tour in mind, the selectors are likely to pick three wicketkeepers. Anamul Haque, Mithun and Nurul Hasan are among the frontrunners for the third spot.



MESSI AND BARCA DEADLOCKED

A meeting between Barcelona Club president Josep Maria Bartomeu and Jorge Messi, Lionel's agent and father, ended in stalemate on Wednesday. According to reports, Jorge reiterated to Barcelona that his son would not stay at the Nou Camp. Negotiations are expected to continue so that the conflict can be resolved and Barcelona icon Lionel Messi can leave in a way that is agreeable to both parties. Another reports however suggested that Messi could now stay at Barcelona until 2021 and fulfill his current contract.

REACTIONS FROM TWO PLAYERS OF BARCA'S BITTER RIVALS

It does not concern us. He has earned the respect to decide his own future. I don't know if he is doing it in the best way. For Spanish football, for Barca and for those of us who like to beat the best... we would like him to remain. Leo makes La Liga and his team better, he makes Clasicos more beautiful because you like to win while being the best and he is one of the best in the world.

REAL MADRID CAPTAIN SERGIO RAMOS

It would be a huge loss. Like when Cristiano left. But you can't think about the past. It's football and that's it. If it happens it will be a huge loss for the prestige of the league. But we need to go forward. Other players will become stars. When Ronaldo left, the same thing happened, the life of Real Madrid went on without him and it will be the same for Barcelona and La Liga without Messi.

REAL MADRID MIDFIELDER LUKA MODRIC