

A tough call and an uncertain future

BISHWAJIT ROY



The postponement of the tour of Sri Lanka is a big blow for Bangladesh cricket in terms of returning to international cricket, if not a return to any sort of competitive cricket amid the prolonged coronavirus-induced suspension.

This series was considered a great opportunity for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to bring cricketers back to the field but ultimately it was postponed following disagreement over a stipulated 14-day isolation protocol to start the tour.

After the postponement, there is much curiosity about whether either or both parties could have been more lenient in their stances. Was it really not possible for Bangladesh to bite the bullet and abide by the 14-day isolation in their hotel rooms, given the scarcity of international cricket on offer? Was it not possible for the Sri

Lankan authority to relax their rules while ensuring all other safety measures?

Players and officials think that it would take a long time to recover mentally and physically if the BCB had agreed to the protocol. On the other hand, it is also a concern that this ongoing lengthy break from international cricket will put huge mental pressure on professional cricketers because everything is still in limbo. There is still no certainty about the exact plan for starting domestic cricket, which appears to be the most difficult task for the game's governing body considering the country's coronavirus situation.

Finally, even if BCB is able to bring back domestic cricket, it will take still more time to host international cricket in the country and in that case, Bangladesh would have to wait for the New Zealand trip in March next year.

New Zealand Cricket said in a statement yesterday that Bangladesh are among four international teams confirmed to play in New Zealand over the coming months.

NZC Chief Executive David White however said the series against Bangladesh -- during which the Tigers are scheduled to play three ODIs and as many T20Is -- and Australia were yet to receive government approval but he was "confident" they would.

When the teams arrive in New Zealand, they will spend their required 14-days quarantine in Christchurch, where they will be able to train at NZC's high-performance centre in Lincoln University, unlike Sri Lanka's strict restriction of confining players in hotel rooms.

New Zealand has been one of the success stories in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Sri Lanka too has seen similar success with only 13 Covid-19 deaths reported in the country so far, as opposed to 5,219 in Bangladesh. So, according to a BCB official, "Sri Lanka is very rigid with their health protocol", which is the reason they were not even ready to split the two-week quarantine between the two countries.

Apparently, BCB President Nazmul Hassan softened his tone while announcing

the postponement of the tour on Monday after a stern response to the Sri Lankans' protocols a few days earlier. The change could have happened because he knows better than anyone how hard it will be to get the Tigers playing international cricket again. If, as now looks likely, Bangladesh do not play international cricket before March next year, the team will have been out of action for more than a year.

These are the times of the "new normal", when health considerations will dictate the new challenges in the coming days, especially when visiting any other countries, so the BCB's response should be prudent in keeping with the times.

While it goes without saying that health is the top priority, the reality is that sports have started to come back to life all over the world with extensive measures. For Bangladesh, it is crucial to be extra cautious in decision-making, perhaps more than other countries, as opportunities to battle on the international stage do not come by as often as it does for other countries.



Certainly unique

While European football leagues have had to place stringent regulations in place for matchdays and given clubs and players guidelines on how to curb the spread of coronavirus, cricket has found solace in a model nearly-perfected by the USA's National Basketball Association: the bio-secure bubble. We look at the terms under which most teams have toured, and compare them to the protocols suggested by Sri Lanka Cricket, who suffered due to not having any venues with on-site hotels.

Protocols for Bangladesh's tour of Sri Lanka

14-day isolation period, during which time players will be confined mostly to hotel rooms.

Initial training camp in Dambulla after quarantine, which would leave one week to train and conclude preparations ahead of the first Test

Expected protocols for tour of New Zealand

Managed isolation and quarantine for 14 days at an assigned venue, with access to training facilities.

Protocols for Indian Premier League

Franchises advised to use chartered planes to travel to UAE, where tournament was shifted

Teams will be based in three venues in Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi with varying lengths of quarantine

The venues are bio-secure, with the hotel also having bio-secure zones that can be accessed once the quarantine period, averaging around 5-6 days, is completed or until three negative tests are returned.

Protocols for West Indies tour of England

36-member contingent, including 25 players, arrives on June 8

Two-week quarantine period upon arrival at bio-secure bubble in Manchester, with access to Old Trafford's facilities for training.

England arrived at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton, another bio-secure facility, on June 23, and West Indies moved to Southampton on July 3.

First Test begins on July 8

Protocols for Pakistan's tour of England

31-member contingent, including 20 players, arrives on June 29. Nine players arrived later.

14-day quarantine period in Worcester, with access to training facilities, after which they played one practice match at New Road from July 11-12.

Visitors moved to Derbyshire's Incora County Ground afterwards, where they played two practice matches from 17-20 July and 24-27 July.

First Test begins on August 5 at Manchester

Bubble at Southampton's Ageas Bowl, the venue for the following two Tests, included an adjacent golf course

Mixed feelings for Tigers

MAZHAR UDDIN



There have been mixed feelings from cricketers over the cancellation of the Tigers' tour of Sri Lanka after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) failed to agree with the revised health protocol from Sri Lanka Cricket.

There were lot of speculations over the tour right from the off and a strict 14-day mandatory quarantine protocol set by the Sri Lankan government seemed like a big hurdle for the visitors to overcome to take part in the three-match Test series under the ICC Test Championship.

Considering the current coronavirus situation in Bangladesh, BCB had planned to prepare the cricketers in Sri Lanka for the series since the national players were out of competitive cricket for more than seven months.

BCB had arranged a residential camp for the 27-member preliminary squad by creating a bio-secure bubble with the Sri Lanka tour in mind. A series of Covid-19 tests were also conducted on every member of the squad with the series in mind.

However, despite those initiatives, there was a sense of uncertainty and concern for the cricketers as a strict quarantine would force them stay confined in their hotel rooms for 14 days without any scope of venturing out, not even to have a meal.

This kept the cricketers thinking



about their performance and whether they would be able to cope up in a short time for the series after the completion of the quarantine.

"Obviously it felt bad to hear that the tour is postponed as we were waiting to make a comeback to international cricket with this series," Test captain Mominul Haque told The Daily Star in his reaction to cancellation of the series.

"We have already started training maintaining all the safety measures. But we will also have to accept the reality and such things are not in your control. However, I am

looking forward to the coming days and hopefully we will be able to play international cricket soon," Mominul added.

The sentiment was pretty much similar for pacer Taskin Ahmed, who played his last Test back in 2017 and was eager to return to the Test side.

"I was desperately looking forward to this series as I was working hard to make a comeback to the Test side. But I am still positive and whenever I get an opportunity, I will try to grab it," said Taskin.

On the other hand, wicket-keeper

batsman Mohammad Mithun was of the opinion that it would not have been possible for the players to play a series after completing a 14-day strict quarantine.

"We were confused during the entire training camp whether the tour will eventually happen or not. We were not getting a clear picture and without any specific target you cannot prepare yourself. In my opinion, it is good that the series eventually got cancelled as it wouldn't have been possible for any cricketer to quarantine for 14 days and play on a tour," said Mithun.

Sri Lanka has tackled the coronavirus situation very well. They formed an independent task force and I felt that the Sri Lankan board had very little to do about this issue. But if SLC had informed their limitations to the BCB a bit earlier then things may have been different. The BCB could have changed their plans .It was very important for the players ahead of next year's tour of New Zealand.

RAQIBUL HASAN
FORMER BANGLADESH CAPTAIN

Even if we had to ease up on some things, the tour was necessary. It would have been extremely beneficial for Bangladesh cricket. Staying without international cricket for so long is not going to be pleasant for Bangladesh. Besides that, no matter which country we go to, we will have to face similar protocols. Another reason we should have toured is because Sri Lanka is a country where we had a good chance to get some points on the board for the World Test Championship.

AMINUL ISLAM
FORMER BANGLADESH CAPTAIN



Despite capitalising on an early mistake to sneak ahead, Arsenal were blown away by reigning champions Liverpool in their Premier League match on Monday. Diogo Jota made the perfect start to life by hitting the third in a display that even left Mikel Arteta impressed. "When you get past the Liverpool press, you hit [Virgil] Van Dijk. He then hits a 60-yard pass to Mohamed Salah, and they are out of the press. That is quality," the Arsenal manager said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Manik's focus on the next generation

SPORTS REPORTER



each District Football Association (DFA) once a year and meet the presidents of all professional league clubs once every six months if elected during the October 3 polls.

The former national footballer-cum-coach, who is one of three candidates for the hotseat of the country's second-most affluent sports body, also included routine work in his manifesto, similar to what incumbent president Kazi Salahuddin did in his 36-point manifesto.

The former DUCSU sports secretary also promised to regularise district football leagues and the Dhaka leagues and revive some tournament like the national football, youth and inter-university championships. Another aim is to introduce two tournaments, Bangabandhu U-17 and Sheikh Jamal U-21, alongside the Suhrawardi Cup U-19 tournament.

The manifesto also mentions disclosing implementable yearly calendars, formulating a policy to curb financial irregularities and fixed matches, bringing the national men's and women's teams under a salary and insurance structure, emphasising on workplaces of educated coaches and taking proper development measures for referees.

Apart from the BFF Academy, Manik ensured there would be at least two age-group teams set up by each capable professional league club. Those players, along with some scouted from the Bangabandhu and Bangamata Primary School Football tournaments will be trained under a programme designed to

give Bangladesh a U-23 team that can compete for a place in the 2033 Olympics.

"I want to address the rumours that I have come into the polls to support someone. That is not right. I am contesting of my own accord," Manik said. "I have learnt honesty, morality and commitment. I believe these virtues can help me take football forward."

Replying to a query, Manik said: "I included routine work because they have not been done in the past 12 years and I think the BFF president needs to monitor those things."

"I know none of us believe Bangladesh



can qualify for the World Cup. But all of us want to see Bangladesh in a good position in Asian football and I believe I have given a realistic manifesto. Now it is the decision of the delegates and whether they want to give life to football or kill it," said Manik.

The presidential race gathered pace elsewhere on Monday when the third candidate Badal Roy -- who failed to timely submit his letter of withdrawal after announcing his intention to quit the race -- urged councilors to bring the change in the BFF leadership by casting the votes to the right persons on Facebook.

We don't need more players, says Zizou

REUTERS, MADRID

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane has no interest in bringing in any more players before the transfer window closes next week, he said on Tuesday.

Madrid still looked like a work in progress in Saturday's scrappy 3-2 win over Real Betis after drawing their first game of the season 0-0 at Real Sociedad, but the Frenchman does not believe adding to his squad is the answer. "We already have a lot of players, why would we want to add any more?," Zidane told a news conference ahead of Wednesday's home game against Real Valladolid.

"It is already very difficult to pick a team, because all the players are very good, so why add more. The market is open until Oct. 5 but I'm very happy with what I have. This squad is mine and for me they are the best."

Zidane will be without Germany midfielder Toni Kroos against Valladolid and Sunday's trip to Levante, but he said Eden Hazard was getting closer to returning to action.

There have been questions about Hazard's weight, but Zidane dismissed any suggestions the Belgian forward had an unprofessional attitude, putting his lack of impact at Real.

Messi world's most marketable athlete

AGENCIES



Messi, 33, comes in ahead of Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo, with Neymar, Mohamed Salah and Paolo Dybala the other footballers to make the top 10. American basketball great LeBron James, Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli and Canadian tennis player Bianca Andreescu round out this year's top five, with the latter named as the top-ranked female athlete.

This year's 50 Most Marketable (50MM) Athletes list is powered by Nielsen's proprietary athlete marketability assessment methodology. Called the Influencer Selection and Measurement Framework, the methodology draws on vast amounts of social media data to generate an Athlete Influencer Score comprising four key data points: relevance, reach, return, and resonance.

TOP TEN

1. Lionel Messi - Argentinian, 33, Football
2. Cristiano Ronaldo - Portuguese, 35, Football
3. LeBron James - American, 35, Basketball
4. Virat Kohli - Indian, 31, Cricket
5. Bianca Andreescu - Canadian, 20, Tennis
6. Neymar Jr - Brazilian, 28, Football
7. Khabib Nurmagomedov - Russian, 32, MMA
8. Rohit Sharma - Indian, 33, Cricket
9. Mohamed Salah - Egyptian, 28, Football
10. Paulo Dybala - Argentinian, 26, Football

Kerber out early again

REUTERS, PARIS

Slovenian teenager Kaja Juvan completed one of the day's biggest upsets as she stunned former World No.1 Angelique Kerber in straight sets to claim her first main draw victory at the French Open.

The 19-year-old made her Grand Slam debut in Paris last year as a lucky loser, falling to Sorana Cirstea in her first-round match and pushed Serena Williams to three sets in her Wimbledon debut.

Now, over a year later, Juvan showed no signs of nerves as she outlasted No.18 seed Kerber in two sets, needing just over an hour to complete the 6-3, 6-3 upset.