

The Daily Star ROUNDTABLE ON CRICKET

Focus on grassroots, better attitude, competent people on board needed

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Unanimously agreeing that more concentration must go to the grassroots, speakers at a roundtable organised by The Daily Star discussed several issues including the need for an efficient and professional management, better pitches, quality umpiring, exemplary leadership and contribution towards a positive attitude.

Former national captains, incumbent and former Bangladesh Cricket Board (CB) officials and current and former selectors expressed these views yesterday at the roundtable titled 'Bangladesh Cricket: Steps Forward'.

Sports Editor Mohammed Al-Amin, who moderated the lively five-hour session, opened the only second Daily Star discussion on the country's leading sport at the office's Seminar Room in presence of fourteen top cricket minds.

Although the burning issue of the time remains the players' revolt and joining the rebel Indian Cricket League, the discussion began by focussing on the very basic of our

country's game, the infrastructure and planning.

As the first speaker of the roundtable, BCB's game development chairman Shakil Kasem opened by recognising the need for better cricket at the grassroots level.

"It will be difficult for BCB to run the entire schools cricket system. Actually, the schools and the education boards must come in and take over," said the former national player, adding, "This should be the new policy and from here the talent hunts should be run."

"There's also a problem with the current format where a team only plays a match or two in a knockout tournament. There has to be more matches and that too in the longer version."

"We must also find particular schools who are good in cricket and encourage them. There should be separate tiers ascending to standard of the schools, culminating in a top-level school competition, where the BCB will take over," opined Shakil.

He also disclosed that regional cricket academies are already in motion but also said that more

facilities for the GP-BCB National Cricket Academy is needed, including the urgent need of a permanent building in Mirpur, which was only laid last May, as the shuttle between the Mirpur practice facilities and Dhanmondi hostels puts too much stress on the Academy players.

Venerable coach Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury, now a member of BCB cricket operations committee, however warned that age-group cricket tournaments could destroy school cricket.

"School cricket is fast losing gloss because of BCB age-group tournaments that is given more importance. The same boy plays both competitions and does very well in one but not in the other," said Jalal.

Jalal, who heads one of Dhaka's best cricket schools in Dhanmondi, admitted that private academies have a severe lack of logistical support (rollers, mowers, experts, etc) from the board.

"We must reduce our dependence on BKSP. Here in Dhaka, we don't even have good indoor facili-

ties let alone in the smaller towns," said Jalal.

Jalal pointed out the need for a coaching director, better talent hunting and scouting process and spread the concept of National Academy, rather than keeping it too team-oriented.

Former BCB general secretary Mahbul Anam informed that a huge budget is allotted to the education board's financial plan. But it has never been properly used due to lack of planning.

"We must tap this source," said Mahbul adding, "University Grants Commission has a lot of funds but it remains unutilised. That's something the BCB should get to that with a coordinated effort with the respective authorities."

Mahbul also wanted the board to use a database of a 2001 survey on BCB-certified academies and school cricket and 'rewrite' the development plan in which the strategic and operational policies must be stressed upon.

"You just cannot have it hand-written and talk about it. There

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Participants of The Daily Star organised roundtable titled 'Bangladesh Cricket: Steps Forward' at its office in Karwan Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Did U Know?

The youngest player to play in the Champions League is RSC Anderlecht's Celestine Babayaro, against FC Steaua Bucharest on November 23 in 1994, aged 16 years and 87 days.



ESPN
English Premier League
Chelsea v Man United
Live from 6:55pm

STAR Sports
English Premier League
West Bromwich v Aston Villa
Live from 4:55pm
Man City v Portsmouth
Live from 7:55pm
Primera Liga
Sporting v Barcelona
Live from 1:55am (Monday)

DAY'S EVENT

Citycell B. League
Dg Mohammadan v Sheikh Russel (3:30pm)
Venue: M A Aziz Stadium, Chittagong



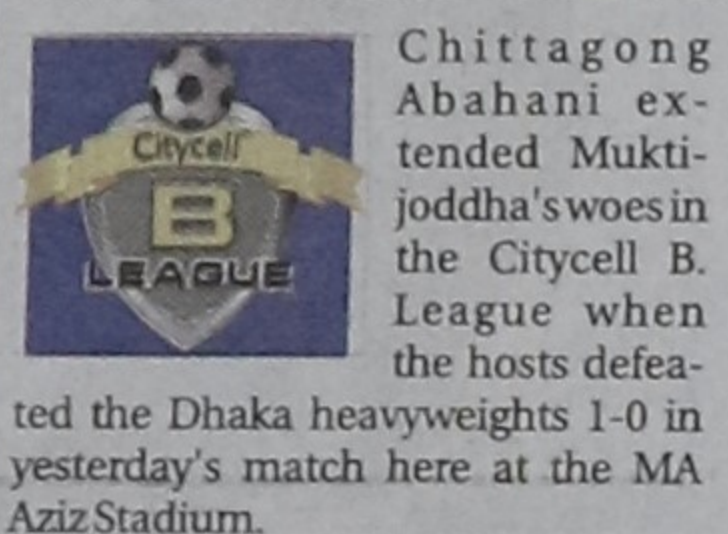
Rupert Mann

(Mayor of Stuttgart)
"A number of people have complained. I truly hope that Mr Lehmann won't land in this area (near the stadium) again - if he does I'll go and speak to him myself."

After VfB Stuttgart goalkeeper Jens Lehmann used a helicopter to travel to and from training.

Ctg Abahani dump Reds

CU CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong



Chittagong Abahani extended Mukti-joddha's woes in the Citycell B. League when the hosts defeated the Dhaka heavyweights 1-0 in yesterday's match here at the MA Aziz Stadium.

Sakhawat Hossain Rony's 77th minute strike ensured the second successive loss for struggling giants Mukti-joddha, who had won 4-0 at home and drew 1-1 away against the same opposition last year. The Reds got off to a poor start in this year's competition after going 3-1 down to Khulna Abahani at home in the first week.

The Chittagong Sky-Blues, who held mighty Dhaka Mohammedan to a 1-1 draw in the opening round, reached top of the table with four

points.

Youngster Mithun Chowdhury, who took centre-stage in their match against Mohammedan, once again appeared as the key playmaker for the winners, setting Rony after dodging past rival defenders inside the Mukti-joddha penalty area. Rony made no mistake to cleverly send the ball home.

The home side dominated throughout the first half and got some openings to go ahead but Nizam Majumder was in fine form under the Reds' bar.

In the 10th minute, Mithun took a shot outside from the area but Nizam palmed away the effort for a corner.

Ismael then beat Nizam in the 25th minute from 35 yards but the ball came off the post.

In a rare first half attack, Sentu provided Milon a great opportunity in the 42nd minute but the unmarked Mukti-joddha striker's

weak shot gave no trouble to Abahani's Nepalese custodian Kiran.

The second half, however, belonged to the visitors, who had certain plans. But Asgar Ali Nasir's boys failed to materialise the superior ball possession into goals.

Nepalese striker Santosh came close with a pass from Jahangir but he shot the 58th minute chance over Nizam's crosspiece.

Two minutes later, Kanchan picked up Mithun but his feeble effort was comfortably gripped by Kiran.

Abahani coach Mohammad Kashem expressed his satisfaction and said his boys played well.

"Our target is to finish among the top eight this year as we are now much stronger than the previous season," Kashem said.

"Mithun and Nepalese defender Lok Bandhu played superb today

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Mukti-joddha goalkeeper Nizam Majumder (R) makes a diving save during their B. League match against Chittagong Abahani at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Akhtar eyes long career

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Pakistan pace bowler Shoaib Akhtar believes he can extend his controversial international career for another four years.

The 33-year-old has not played for his country in 2008 after spending most of the year embroiled in a legal dispute with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

The governing body banned him for five years in April for criticising their selection policy, only to later reduce the ban to 18 months and then suspend it pending a verdict from an appeal court.

While that ban still hangs over his head, Shoaib believes he can put those concerns behind him and make a long-term return to the Pakistan setup.

Speaking to Sky Sports News, he

said: "Trouble comes and goes over your career. You are put through certain situations in your life that you have to get through to make you a better person."

"I have been put through those situations and I have learned a lot. I'm going to bowl again and I'm going to play again for another four years and show everyone how good I am."

Shoaib believes a change in management at the PCB will also aid his comeback.

Last month chairman Nasim Ashraf relinquished his post in accordance with the PCB constitution after Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, who was facing impeachment by parliament, announced his decision to step down on national television.

Under Ashraf the PCB's lawyers had argued in favour of Shoaib's ban, with an ad-hoc committee currently in place.

"We will have better cricket brains running cricket in Pakistan that will look after the cricketers," Shoaib said.

"We have been given that assurance we can just go out and play and they will look after matters off the field."

"That is important for the Pakistan cricket side so that they can play the best they can."

Pakistan's next scheduled series will not arrive until next February when India are due to tour.

And Shoaib, who has managed just 46 Test matches since making his debut in 1997, believes he will be fit to play in the series after beginning his comeback with a short-term stint at Surrey.

"I will be ready to go, but there are a few months before our next series against India," he said.

"Until then I will look to play cricket wherever I can."

Tigers' camp for NZ series tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

The national selectors are likely to announce the preliminary squad today as the camp for the home series against New Zealand starts tomorrow.

The Rafiqul Alam-led selection panel had to change their plans after the mass resignations of national cricketers, who had signed for Indian Cricket League (ICL) to receive ten-year ban by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

"It's obvious we had to keep away from our initial planning after the latest happenings. We will take the final decision after talking with our national team physio (Darryl Lifson) and coach (Jamie Siddons), who is expected to arrive in the early morning of Sunday," said Rafiqul yesterday.

"We are considering all options. After the departure of few players, we need to recover and that's why

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Academy's first one-dayer today

SPORTS REPORTER

The GP-BCB National Cricket Academy team will take on Sri Lanka Academy in the first limited-overs game of a three-match series at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today.

The second one-day is scheduled for September 23 at the SSC ground and the final match on September 25 at the NCC ground.

The visitors lost the four-day series as the first four-dayer was ended in draw but they lost the second four-dayer by 65 runs.

Sachin pulls out of Irani Trophy

CRICINFO, undated

Sachin Tendulkar has pulled out of the Irani Trophy to recover from his elbow injury ahead of the Test series against Australia starting October 9.

"Tendulkar is not playing the Irani Trophy because he has been advised a week of rehabilitation," Ratnakar Shetty, the BCCI's chief administrative officer, told Cricinfo. "Paul Close [the National Cricket Academy's physio] has suggested he [Tendulkar] needs a break from the Irani Trophy to recover from the stiff elbow."

Tendulkar will work with Close in Mumbai from September 20 to get fit in time in order to join the national camp in Bangalore. He had twisted his elbow while fielding during the third Test in Sri Lanka last month and was forced out of the one-dayers that followed.

The Irani Trophy match will take place between Ranji Trophy champions Delhi and Rest of India side that will feature probables for the Test series. Tendulkar had earlier declared himself fit for the match, which starts on Wednesday in Baroda. Shetty said there would be no replacement for Tendulkar in the 14-member Rest of India squad.

Ponting backs Watson

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Ricky Ponting has backed Shane Watson to make his Test comeback during the upcoming series against India, and will be "surprised" if the allrounder doesn't play the opening Test in Bangalore, beginning on October 9.

Australia's 15-man squad will leave for India on Sunday and Andrew Symonds' omission from the touring party presents Watson the opportunity to play his first Test since November 2005. Ponting, however, said Watson, with his technically correct batting and fast-bowling skills, might have secured a spot even if Symonds was in the squad.

"I think he might have played anyway, if Symonds was around, just for that flexibility and what his bowling can offer," Ponting told the Australian. "I would be surprised if he didn't play in the opening game. Him for Symonds is probably the absolutely likely swap at the moment."

Frequent injuries have cur-

tailed Watson's career to three Tests so far and while he was recovering from a partially dislocated shoulder, sustained during his third Test -- against West Indies -- in 2005, Symonds established himself as the allrounder in the Australian set-up.

"He's [Watson] been pretty harshly viewed in recent years but you don't average almost 50 in first-class cricket, particularly batting at the Gabba, if you haven't got the right game," Ponting said. "He could get himself picked in the side as a batter alone, but what he can give us with the ball is a bonus."

Watson, along with Brett Lee, Stuart Clark and Mitchell Johnson, will form Australia's fast-bowling attack and, while none of them have played a Test in India, Australia are likely to rely on pace to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Glenn McGrath, Jason Gillespie and Michael Kasprovicz took 43 wickets among them during the 2004 tour, which was Australia's first series win in India for 35 years.

"The tactics last time [in 2004] worked very well for us," Ponting said. "We were able to strangle them.

We were able to take their boundaries away and make it difficult for them. A lot of the time we bowled at their strengths with strong fields in those areas. We did things differently last time and we'll look at doing that again if conditions suit."

Australia had Shane Warne to rely on last time but their spin department on this tour comprises two uncapped players -- leg-spinner Bryce McGain and Jason Krejza, an offspinner who moved from New South Wales to Tasmania two seasons ago.

"He's [Krejza] always impressed me from the time I first saw him at the academy five or six years ago," Ponting said. "I've been talking about him quietly for a long time because, what I see with him is what a lot of other offspinners don't have: the ability to turn the ball really big. He puts more work on the ball than probably any offspinner I've seen."

"They [McGain and Krejza] are very different spinners but at the same time they could complement each other really well if we happen to play both in the same side."

All-Russian final

Tennis

AFP, Tokyo

Dinara Safina and Svetlana Kuznetsova set up an all-Russian final with crushing wins at the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament on Saturday.

Safina enjoyed her first victory over compatriot Nadia Petrova 6-1, 6-0, while Kuznetsova brushed aside Slovenian qualifier Katarina Srebotnik 7-6, 6-2.

Kuznetsova, who beat Serbian top seed Jelena Jankovic in the quarterfinals, got off to a sluggish start by losing her service in the opening game.

But the 2004 US Open champion forced the tie-breaker and cashed in on her second set point with a forehand volley.

Srebotnik, who upset Beijing Olympic gold medalist Elena Dementieva of Russia on Friday, recovered from a break down in the second set to make it 2-2.

But Kuznetsova reeled off four

games in a row and sealed the win on serve on her fourth match point.

"I'm very happy to be in the final. Obviously I was not expecting to do so well as I was very tired coming from the Fed Cup," said Kuznetsova, who helped Russia beat Spain in the women's team final a week ago.

However, she said she would need to improve her serving in Sunday's final after matching her six aces with six double faults.

"My serve has never been very good, so I don't have expectation on my serve like too many aces," said Kuznetsova.

"If it doesn't work (tomorrow), I have another way to play, fight for points. It's going to be very important to serve better."

Safina, 22, meanwhile savoured her first success in six attempts against Petrova.

"There is always first time for everything in your life, so it was my first time to beat her," said Safina.

"I'm actually feeling very good. Today everything went my way. I was serving really good and I think everything was perfect today."

When asked about the final against Kuznetsova, she said: "It's great. We are good friends, so I just hope that we can go out there and play a good match. Let's see who is going to be stronger tomorrow and win."



PHOTO: AFP

Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova celebrates her victory against Katarina Srebotnik of Slovenia in the semifinals of the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo yesterday.

Progotti, Friends bag full points

SPORTS REPORTER

Karwan Bazar Progotti Sangha blanked Dhanmondi Club 2-0 in the Second Division Football League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Shipon put the winners ahead after 40 minutes and Ahad doubled the lead ten minutes later.

In the day's other match, Friends Social Welfare Organisation notched a solitary goal victory over Little Friends Club with Sohail netting the all-important goal in the 18th minute.