

Let it be the beginning

AL-AMIN

As another year in the Gregorian calendar elapses into history and the dawn of a new year just breaks, one might be excused if he or she wakes up with a wistful sense of utopia.

Is it really the dawn of hope in the context of Bangladesh after that historic general election? Will this day be the beginning of fulfilling the promises that have been made by the two unquestionable voices of the nation during the fierce yet fairly contested battle for the December 29 polls?

True that there was no specific promise regarding the state of affairs of country's sport in those election manifestos of the victors and the vanquished, but we, the sport scribes, want to believe that it was unwittingly unaddressed for other pressing real life issues instead of anything else. However, we are not ready to entertain the idea that it was not addressed to uphold the age-old cliché of keeping 'politics out of sport'.

The ground reality anywhere in the world is that if you are in power you will call all the shots in every field because at the end of the term it's only you who will be accountable for success or failure.

Now in the post-election time, we want political acumen and the slogan of 'change' to dictate sport along with other aspects of life. Sport in our country has long been starving for a definitive guideline or a policy that we believe can be discussed and finally passed in the parliament in all probabilities to be headed by a prime minister who is an avid follower of sport.

We want a complete package instead of crying left and right to know whether the presidents of all sports federations will be elected or not, if the National Sports Council will be abolished as the regulatory body and the Bangladesh Olympic Association will take over, or will the district sports association be still headed by the respective deputy commissioners.

It is high time that we gave a long hard look at the 1974 National Sports Council Act. Rules are made for the betterment of the society. But standing in the twenty-first century and facing the challenges of new ideas we are now in a desperate situation to evaluate and decide whether we will stick to it or make adjustments for the improvement of sports in the country.

It is not that efforts have not been made before to formulate a new sports policy but the battle was lost against a vested force that was successful with its foul play by convincing incompetent sports bosses that amendments to the existing law and passing it in the parliament was impossible.

Impossible is a word the nation has proved wrong in an election that defied fear and all imagination. Much has been promised. Now it's time to turn those words into deeds. Let the first dawn of the New Year be the beginning of turning the unfulfilled dreams into realities.

Shakib is loving it

BISHWAJIT ROY



Pacer Dammika Prasad ran as fast as he could while joyous teammates tried to catch up to him for the celebration. It was the moment for Sri Lanka to breathe a sigh of relief because they apparently seemed to have survived from a scare to watch the rewriting of record books from the receiving end.

There was however all quiet in the big bowl as Shakib Al Hasan not only missed his deserved maiden hundred by four runs but also the hope of chasing down the highest-ever total (521 runs) had evaporated.

Shakib would definitely say 'luck is a factor' in a cricket match otherwise how was it possible that he dragged the stumps while trying to drive an outside off-stump delivery from Prasad when he had done it successfully previously.

During his nearly five-hour stay Shakib made a career-best 96 that featured seven well-timed boundaries and shared a 111-run partnership with Mushfiqur Rahim (61) after the departure of century-maker Mohammad Ashraful to test the nerves of the Lankans on the fifth and final day.

His dismissal put an end to a great run chase against a versatile bowling attack, mind it against whom they had always found themselves helpless, but the fans would remember it for years because there was no doubt that a year ended with a good Test match after successful big run chases from India and South Africa.

It could have been also a perfect end of a year for Shakib if the left-hander could com-

plete his maiden ton as the smiling lad from Magura excelled himself as a left-arm spinner to prove his coach's (Jamie Siddons) words right as a 'world-class bowler' but was not as good in his batting.

It may be too early to brand him as a 'performer' after

impressive performance in one calendar year but one can't deny his efforts in the last year especially his emergence as a spinner to fill the vacuum after the departure of ace left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique.

Just for a reminder, the

young all-rounder grabbed 30 wickets including four five-fors in nine Tests in the last year and scalped 22 in 19 one-day internationals but the batting record of 414 runs in Test and 408 in one-day with a hundred against Pakistan hardly reflect his calibre.

"There was dissatisfaction for not reaching the hundred and getting the victory. But still the team comes first to me because at one stage it seemed that it's possible to achieve the target," Shakib, who was adjudged man-of-the-match for his six-wicket haul and 122

runs, expressed his disappointment while talking in a post-match briefing.

One can't expect anything other than a very simple comment 'I enjoy cricket' if someone asked him what was the recipe behind his success.

SEE PAGE 20 COL 6

TURN OVERLEAF FOR YEAR-END SPECIAL

Defeat of national cricketers, a Bolt from the blue, the greatest Olympian of all time -- 2008 was full of stars and highlights. From the Olympics in China to the Euros in Austria & Switzerland, the year just past was full of spectacular efforts, stupendous achievements and most of all, unparalleled drama. Turn overleaf to relive sports in 2008, both local and foreign, with The Daily Star's two-page year-end special. Feedback is appreciated at sport@thedailystar.net



GOING DOWN ALL GUNS BLAZING: A combo photo shows Bangladesh stars Shakib Al Hasan (L) and captain Mohammad Ashraful during their fighting 112-run partnership on the fifth and final day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Shakib scored a career-best 96 while Ashraful notched up a classy 101. Despite their interventions, the Tigers still fell short of achieving what could have been a landmark result.



PHOTOS: STAR



Did U Know?

In discus competition the marked circle from which the competitor throws has a diameter of 2.5m.



Dale Steyn

(South Africa paceman)
"I've never batted for so long before in my life. I've got a blister on my finger. It's my first batting injury."
After his 238-minute innings of 76 in the second Test against Australia.

'Tigers capable of fight'

SPORTS REPORTER



Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene praised the Tigers' attitude during the second innings of the first Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

The visitors won the game by 107 runs on the final day after Bangladesh made a brave attempt at chasing 521 runs.

But when asked of the unthinkable, Jayawardene confidently gestured that his side had absolutely no fear of losing the match. But he recognised the Tigers' effort.

"It was not unusual for Bangladesh to fight as they are capable of it," he said in the post-match press conference before adding, "The wicket played a big role. Even though we scored 521, the bowlers had to give a big effort and they did."

Sri Lanka had a 115-run first innings lead before Jayawardene led a mini-rescue operation in making sure nothing was spoiled for the Lankans on the final day of the year. Bangladesh were given a target of 521 runs to be made in five sessions and although it was enough time for the visitors to take ten wickets, it almost became enough for the home side to chase down the target. At times yesterday, the Lankan skipper had a furrowed brow as the three Tigers batsmen made the runs.

"The wicket was really good and it was grad-

ually improving. You know we had enough time, i.e., five sessions to bowl them out.

"We wanted to score big and attack because it is made easier that way. Bangladesh batted very well but in the end, it is another Test win for us," added the stylish right-hander who made 166 in the second innings.

He specially mentioned his opposite number for his timely century. Mohammad Ashraful ensured that he didn't let the year go without scoring a hundred against the Lankans, making his fourth against the islanders.

"He batted well and took the responsibility. Certainly he is the danger man for us and we always have a plan for him," said Jayawardene.

Ashraful's knock, coupled with brilliant efforts from Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim forced Jayawardene to keep his chief weapon Muttiah Muralidaran on for 48 overs. The skipper however pointed out that Muralidaran ended with another 10-for, something that nobody can question.

He was reminded of the fact that it would be his 100th Test in Chittagong. It would also give him a chance to reach the 8,000-run mark in the purest form of the game. Jayawardene, who needs 74 to reach another milestone, said that he feels no pressure.

"I am proud to have played for the country and I don't feel much pressure to score 8000 runs and play my 100th Test," said Jayawardene.

NCL one-dayers to begin today

SPORTS REPORTER

The limited-over version of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 10th National Cricket League will start today across the country.

Khulna take on Sylhet at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium, Rajshahi face Barisal at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium and Dhaka meet with Chittagong at BKSP in the opening day's matches.

Earlier Rajshahi clinched the four-day title while Barisal became runners-up.

B. League restarts today

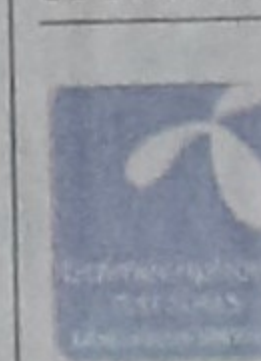
SPORTS REPORTER

The Citycell B. League resumes today after a six-day break with the old-Dhaka derby between Rahmatganj and Farashganj at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Mid-table Rahmatganj, SEE PAGE 20 COL 5

Ashraful gets it right

SPORTS REPORTER



It is always worth watching Mohammad Ashraful bat but he is so inconsistent that one cannot even recall the last time he had a good effort.

The 24-year-old Bangladesh skipper returned among runs in style with a hundred but the problem was that it took too many innings in the middle to see the right-hander blazing again.

The right-hander chose his favourite opponents to put an end to his long run drought as it was the right-hander's fourth hundred, overall fifth, against the Lankans but even another century could not comfort the doubters.

So, he had to face the cruel question despite his 101-run knock: When will we see you bat like this again?

"I have been trying my best and working hard to be consistent. After playing international cricket for last eight years what I realized is that there was a problem in my game plan. Sometimes I try to be over-cautious and sometimes too free with my license to attack," said Ashraful, who expressed his satisfaction over his side's effort in the first Test.

"I was also confused about my batting as I chose an over cautious approach after a good innings but the time has come to play with one game plan and I hope that this time I will be consistent," he added.

There is always a chance for Bangladesh when this little man is batting and the fifth and

final day of the first Test was no exception as he took charge after resuming the day on 70 to put pressure on his opponents.

Ashraful completed his fifth hundred within an hour of the day's play to produce anxious moments for Sri Lanka skipper Mahela Jayawardene who was in dire need of a breakthrough.

An overpitched delivery by Chaminda Vaas was scooped over mid-off to the fence for his century and Ashraful punched the air twice, which gave the evidence of how desperately he was looking to overcome from his poor form.

The job was then just half done but the Bangladesh skipper made the mistake of putting an end to the 112-run partnership with Shakib Al Hasan which brought a big smile on the face of his opponents skipper, as Bangladesh went for lunch on 373-6, still 148-run behind the target.

Ashraful was trapped lbw when he shuffled a touch and tried to work it to the on side while Vaas delivered from over the wicket and landed it on middle and leg. The fans however saw a different approach from the ace batsman during his 193-ball 101 that contained 16 boundaries.

"I think we played a good match. We never thought about the result but there was a chance for us if my partnership with Shakib survived at least one session. But after my dismissal Mushfiqur was there and he proved his worth again," said Ashraful when asked about his dismissal.

"Mushfiq and Shakib batted brilliantly to keep hopes alive but the unfortunate dismissal of Shakib shattered our hope," he added.

SEE PAGE 20 COL 1

Brazilian Dido new national coach

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) ended the year 2008 on a high, announcing on the New Year's Eve the arrival of a Brazilian coach for the national team.

Edson 'Dido' Silva, former footballer of Brazilian giants Flamengo (1979-81) and Santos FC (1983-84), will take over from February as Head Coach, confirmed BFF vice-president and chairman of the National Team Management Committee (NTMC) Badal Roy yesterday.

The 46-year-old Dido was Vietnam national coach in 2001 when his charges played against Bangladesh in the World Cup qualifiers. The Brazilian born, who also holds Dutch nationality, quit in September -- three months before the expiry of his one-year contract -- after receiving death threat over e-mail and phone when he criticised a local club for releasing a Brazilian player. He also

coached the Chinese Taipei national team in 2005. Dido, who ended his playing career at Macabi Holon in Israel and also began his coaching career at the same club in 1995, coached clubs in Holland, Malta, UAE, China and Brazil before taking over



EDSON 'DIDO' SILVA

six-time Faroe Island champions GI Gota in January 2008.

Currently free, Dido is interested to arrive from Brazil in the third week of this month to see the last part of the B. League to have an idea about the players.

"We hope he would take

over from February and prepare the team for the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers in April," told Badal Roy.

"We had been negotiating with a number of coaches and he is our final choice. We want to deal the entire matters of the national team professionally and hope the arrival of a full professional will be helpful.

"We are interested to get back Argentine trainer Ariel Coleman but we will wait for the coach's decision on these things," said Badal adding that the BFF has also decided to renew the contract of Shafiqul Islam Manik as national coach.

"It will be finalised within a week and he will be under the head coach. We will try to provide more staff if the coach wants."

Dido -- who would be the 12th foreign coach for the national team, succeeding India's Syed Nayeemuddin -- will get 4,000 US dollars per month plus local facilities although he had initially asked for 6,000 euros.

"We have agreed on a term but the deal has yet to be

SEE PAGE 20 COL 6



The Sri Lanka players are exultant after notching up victory against Bangladesh during the fifth and final day of the first Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Wednesday. The islanders were made to sweat for what should have been a routine win, and their relief was evident after bowling out the Tigers.

PHOTO: STAR

NOTICE

Dear readers,
For space constraint we could not accommodate today's CROSSWORD. We regret the inconvenience.
--Sport Editor