

It is a privilege, remember that

Cricket

NADER RAHMAN

December is a month that holds a special place in the hearts of all Bangladeshis, it is a month in which we remember all those who fought and gave their lives for this country. It is a month that stirs nationalistic feelings even amongst those who tends to forget. It is also a month where one must remember that the privilege to represent ones country should be cherished and treasured, it is a gift whose true worth few people understand. This month a host of players who turned their backs on the country for the lure of money were reintegrated into our national cricket team and many patriotic Bangladeshis have been overheard saying, "We're better off without them."

Whether that is the truth or not is debatable, but the sentiment is one that is understood and has been echoed around the country. But where does one go from here? At any given time the best 11 players must represent Bangladesh on the playing field, but what qualities are we measuring them by? The players returning from the ICL have opened up a completely new debate about the basis of selection that no one can look away from. Before they came back with their tails between their legs the

only criteria for selection was a player's performance on the field.

But since their return that selection criteria has been questioned, can runs, wickets and catches alone be the yardstick to select a player? What about dedication, commitment and love for ones country, shouldn't those be thought of before a player is selected? If that is the case then reintegration for the ICL players will be a lot more difficult than they think.

To select them a few months after they infamously left their country in the lurch would be an abomination. It would be a slap in the face of every cricketer who toils away day after day in the hope that one day he might represent his nation on the field of play. Those who left for the ICL took that feeling for granted, they took their nation for granted and now they want to continue as if nothing ever happened. In international cricket there have been numerous difficult cricketers, they have been drunks, womanisers and liars but selectors continued to stick with them because after everything was said and done they would have died on the field for their respective countries.

When the selectors look at the ICL players can they honestly say the same thing? Do they think that the players that defected (we are calling them defected cricketers because they have resigned en masse from the national team which has

not been the case with any other country) not so long ago have all of a sudden turned over a new leaf and are now willing to give everything for their country? It would take a brave man to say yes.

Runs, wickets and catches should of course be the primary criteria for selection, but without commitment and a love for ones country, there is no way a player will be able to represent it properly.

A few weeks ago when Bangladesh took on Zimbabwe at home, Shahriar Nafees was spotted at an ice cream parlour in Banani. He walked in, pony tail, beard and all looking like a desi version of Robin Hood. As he entered a tall strapping man well known to cricketing community in Bangladesh greeted him with a pat on the back, he asked him what he'd like to eat, but Nafees politely declined, instead paying for his ice cream himself. They stood and chatted idly and as it so happened that day Bangladesh beat Zimbabwe in Mirpur, with Shakib blitzing a century of 70 odd balls. The tall man asked him if he saw the game and the match-winning century, to which Nafees replied nonchalantly, "I didn't even know there was a game on." With that dismissive reply he bid his adieu and left. If that is how he feels about the national team he was once part of and now seems set to join again then all one can say is, "we're better off without them."

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SAFF earns Tk 30 lakh

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation have earned a revenue of Tk 30 lakh from the just-concluded Bangabandhu Sixth SAFF Championship, informed BFF finance committee head Anwarul Haq Hejal.

A huge number of spectators turned up to watch the semifinal match between hosts Bangladesh and India, which was followed by the first semifinal between Maldives and Sri Lanka. BFF earned Tk 14 lakh, almost half of the total revenue, from the sale of 35 thousand raffle tickets for that day.

Revenues could have been higher if Bangladesh had moved into the final of the regional football extravaganza. The turnout for the final match between India and Maldives was hardly 15 thousand.

Victory Day hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

Victory Day Hockey tournament gets underway today at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium with two matches on the opening day.

Six teams -- Sonali Bank, Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan, Bangladesh Police XI and Bangladesh Police -- will first play the round-robin league and then top two teams will play in the final on December 25.

On the opening day, BKSP will take on Biman Bangladesh at 1.30pm while Sonali Bank face Bangladesh Police in the second match at 3:30.

FRIENDLY VOLLEYBALL BDR down BSF

UNB, Sherpur

Bangladesh Rifles beat Indian Border Security Force (BSF) by 2-1 set in a friendly volleyball match at Dhalu Stadium in Indian state of Meghalaya on Monday.

A 50-member team led by Mymensingh BDR sector commander Col Mahbub visited Meghalaya at the invitation of its BSF counterpart of Tura Sector to play the friendly match. DIG of BSF G.S. Chowdhury greeted the BDR team.

BDR team won the match 16-25, 25-16 and 25-19 at Dhalu Stadium across the Sherpur border. The match was followed by a cultural function. BDR team returned home last night.

The match will now take place on Friday in Nagpur, which had hosted a Twenty20 international between India and Sri Lanka last week.

Visakhapatnam, in the south-eastern state of Andhra Pradesh, has been gripped by demonstrations over the federal government's decision to create a separate state of Telangana. The match on Friday at the Vidarbha Cricket Association ground in Nagpur will be a day-night game, the Indian cricket board said in a statement.

The remaining matches will be played in Nagpur (December 18), Cuttack (December 21), Kolkata (December 24) and New Delhi (December 27).

Sri Lanka lost the preceding Test series 2-0 and both teams won a Twenty20 match each.

Ashfaq a la Baggio

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Much like their Bangladeshi counterparts the Maldives footballers also passed a sleepless night after going down 3-1 in a tiebreaker against India in the final of SAFF Championship on Sunday.

Their only consolation for the ex-champions, at this point, is the fact that they have been unbeaten throughout the entire tournament.

And the man suffering more than others is undoubtedly star Ashfaq Ali. With India 3-1 up in the shootout, Maldives captain Ashfaq came in to take the fourth shot and the 23-year old striker drove his left-footer wide of the post from the 12-yard spot to relinquish the title to India.

"After having seen that the Indian goalkeeper (Arindam Bhattacharya) save the previous two shots at full-stretch, I wanted to send the ball just next to the sidepost, but it went wide," Ashfaq Ali told reporters after he was awarded the best player of the tournament by the Bangladesh Sports Writers Association yesterday.

Ashfaq informed that it was his second miss from the spot kick in his football career after he squandered a 12-yard spot kick in domestic football in 2006.

Talking about the final, Ashfaq said, "Actually we were unlucky in the final though we had a better chance to win the trophy. See we struck 11 goals

in the previous four matches while India netted only three and we also came close to taking lead in the final. But we could not and it should not be an excuse and the truth was that we lost the match in the tiebreaker."

"At the same time, it is also

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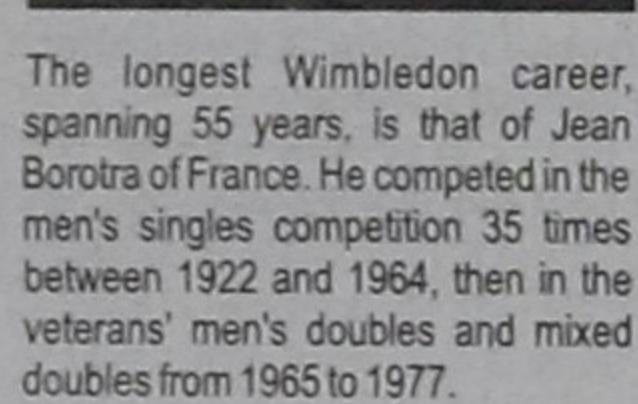
PHOTO: COURTESY OF BSWA

Maldives star playmaker Ashfaq Ali (L), adjudged best player of the Bangabandhu SAFF Championship by the Bangladesh Sports Writers Association (BSWA), receives his memento from the association's general secretary Rafiqul Islam at a city hotel yesterday.

Pakistan forge ahead

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated



Did U Know?

The longest Wimbledon career, spanning 55 years, is that of Jean Borotra of France. He competed in the men's singles competition 35 times between 1922 and 1964, then in the veterans' men's doubles and mixed doubles from 1965 to 1977.



Neo Cricket & SuperSport

India v Sri Lanka

First ODI

Live from 10:30am

TEN Sports

New Zealand v Pakistan

Third Test, Day 5

Live from 6:00am

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 9:30pm

English Premier League

Man United v Wolves

Live from 3:00am (Wednesday)



Premier Super League

Mohammedan v Biman

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium

Ahshan v Kalabagan

Venue: Fatulah Cricket Stadium

Victoria v CCS

Venue: BKSP-2

all showcased against the seamers but it was his battle with Vettori that stood out.

There was one piece of action which perfectly caught the spirit of the contest between the two: Younis came down the track but Vettori cleverly slowed the pace and shortened the length. However, Younis waited to adjust to the lack of pace, and though he couldn't reach the pitch of the ball, he didn't panic or lunge out; instead he almost nonchalantly wafted through the line and found

enough power and timing to lift it over long-on. Vettori used the crease well, varied his pace and utilised the arm-ball intelligently but Younis handled him with aplomb. He moved forward or back as the length demanded and picked the arm ball on most occasions.

Faisel was nowhere near as solid as Younis but he fought on to score a valuable fifty. His iffy footwork meant he was caught on the crease a few times and was forward when

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PHOTO: INTERNET

Pakistan skipper Mohammad Younis hoists one over long-on on the fourth day of the third Test against New Zealand at McLean Park in Napier yesterday.

Roach doesn't scare Aus

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CRICINFO, undated

too quick and too short. The next thing you look up on the board and they have gone for six or seven an over. It can sometimes be a pretty ruthless place to bowl for a fast bowler."

Australia's captain Ricky Ponting said after the Adelaide Test that Roach, who is easily the fastest of the West Indies attack, would be a handful in Perth. But this is the same Ponting who a year ago was bemoaning the fact that the WACA no longer possessed its trademark speed and carry, and who would no doubt love to see Roach over-attack and leak runs.

The West Indies manager Joel Garner remembers the WACA as a venue where he and his fastbowling colleagues rattled the Australians regularly. From 1975 to 1993, West Indies played four Tests in Perth and won them all, including three consecutive victories. Australia have lost their past two encounters at the WACA but Garner said his players would be cautious of the hosts despite their indifferent history at the venue.

"I don't really look at the records too much because you tend to get carried away," Garner said. "You have to play in the framework of what you've got going. I know Australia will also want to play to the best of their ability because they want to continue in the winning mode. We'll be very wary of them."

Garner said the key for Roach and the rest of the West Indies attack was not to get carried away on this ground with some of the fast bowlers it's been their downfall with trying to bowl

Ind-SL venue shifted

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket chiefs on Monday changed the venue of the second one-day international against Sri Lanka due to political tension in the coastal city of Visakhapatnam.

The match will now take place on Friday in Nagpur, which had hosted a Twenty20 international between India and Sri Lanka last week.

Visakhapatnam, in the south-eastern state of Andhra Pradesh, has been gripped by demonstrations over the federal government's decision to create a separate state of Telangana.

The match on Friday at the Vidarbha Cricket Association ground in Nagpur will be a day-night game, the Indian cricket board said in a statement.

Sri Lanka begin a five-match one-day series against India on Tuesday in the western city of Rajkot.

The remaining matches will be played in Nagpur (December 18), Cuttack (December 21), Kolkata (December 24) and New Delhi (December 27).

Sri Lanka lost the preceding Test series 2-0 and both teams won a Twenty20 match each.

India-SL 1st ODI today

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CRICINFO, undated

we need to do, including fielding and death bowling. We have quite a few areas we need to improve and are focusing on that. At the same time whatever our strong point is we need to be up there throughout."

Mike Young, formerly with the Australian team, has been appointed India's fielding consultant for the limited-overs series but the team's catching was abysmal in the two Twenty20 fixtures. "Since Mike has joined us we are laying emphasis on fielding... he also needs a few specific sessions as coach," said Dhoni. "It's a very important aspect of any format of the game. If you can see the impact (of Young joining) in three days that will be great."

According to Dhoni, the results would be

seen over a period of time. "We need to get our basics right and fielding is an area where if you

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India cricketers (L-R) Sachin Tendulkar, Praveen Kumar, Harbhajan Singh, Virender Sehwag and Gautam Gambhir warm-up during a practice session in Rajkot yesterday. India play first ODI against Sri Lanka today.