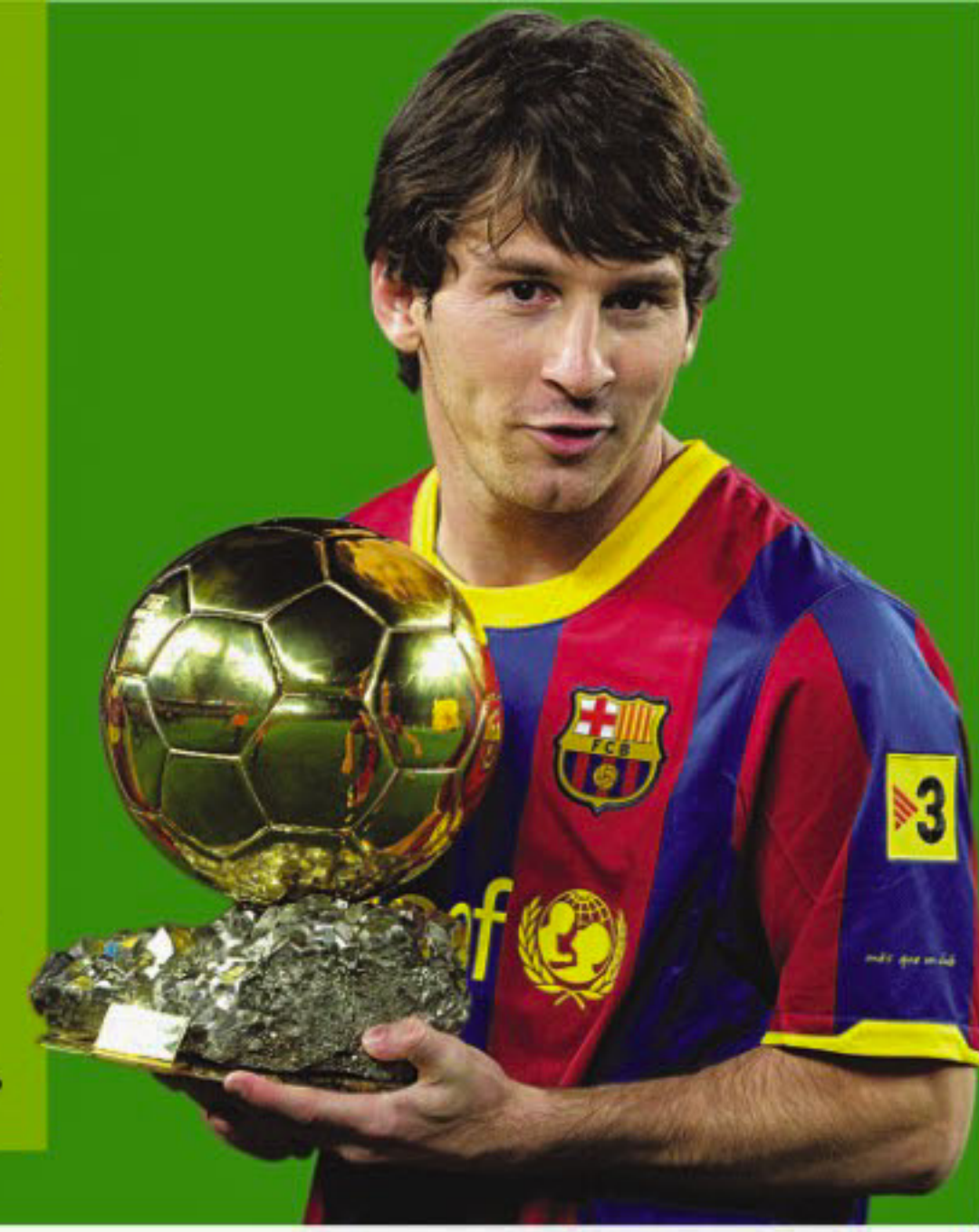


Barcelona striker Lionel Messi dismissed media criticism of his second successive World Player of the Year award, in an interview published Wednesday. "The truth is I don't care what the media say. What matters to me is what my teammates say, the people who are with me. I thank them for their support," the Argentine said in an interview with sports news site goal.com. Two days after winning the Ballon d'Or, Messi hit a hat-trick in Barcelona's 5-0 rout of Real Betis.



SPORT

DHAKA THURSDAY JANUARY 20 2011 sports@thedailystar.net



SQUAD of expectation

BISHWAJIT ROY

Everybody was waiting for the explosion that never happened. All the journalists present at the press conference at Mirpur were expecting a last moment drama, but all the fuss kicked the bucket once chief selector Rafiqul Alam announced the 15-member squad yesterday.

Almost everyone preferred silence because the Rafiqul-led three-member selection committee stuck to their squad without injured paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, despite the pressure they had been facing from Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) technical committee, which ignited a lot of controversy over the team selection for the last couple of days.

The question was not only about whether injured paceman Mashrafe would be included in the team or not, but also about who between Mohammad Ashraful and Alok Kapali would be included. There was also a question about the inclusion of middle-order batsman Rokibul Hasan.

With these circumstances, everybody's focus was on the

selection committee because the question was whether they could show their guts or whether they were going to swallow the bitter pill.

In the end Rafiqul came up with flying colours even though he looked nervous during the press conference as he announced a team made up of players who were part of the squad for the last two years, with no surprise inclusions.

When Rafiqul faced a volley of questions, BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal was beside him. Kamal surprisingly started to walk soon after the announcement of the team but after a hue and cry the BCB boss came back with the selectors to take questions from the media.

"Yes, it's our team. We discussed with everyone but ultimately we [the selection committee] took the final decision and it's nothing new," Rafiqul responded when he was asked whether this team is what they actually selected.

Coach Jamie Siddons and captain Shakib Al Hasan were also satisfied with the team.

"It was my team, I talked with the selectors and we discussed long and hard. There were lots of arguments and fights. Yes, the chief [Rafiqul Alam] fought for the team. I'm happy with the team," said a delighted Siddons.

"It is without Mashrafe who is probably our best bowler. I want him in the team and I hope he will recover in time. He

will be our first replacement and I'm sure he'll come back. It would be better if he's fit by February 19," he said.

Chief selector Rafiqul, captain Shakib and coach Siddons echoed the sentiment that the World Cup is not over for pace spearhead Mashrafe.

"I think this is best possible side. I don't think the World Cup is over for him [Mashrafe]. I hope he will be okay before the start of the tournament proper and there is a scope to include him in the team. His heart might be broken but I have no doubt that he will come back strongly. He is a strong man and has proved it time and again," said Shakib.

Rafiqul also went on to explain why they had left out Mashrafe despite there being a precedent of including injured players, as seen in the selections of teams like India and Australia.

"You can't compare Mashrafe's injury with other players," said Rafiqul.

The former national cricketer also defended the inclusion of Mohammad Ashraful and left-arm spinner Sohrawardi Shuvo and explained why they didn't consider Alok Kapali in the team. Rafiqul rated this team highly as he said that there were eight batsmen who averaged over 30 in the line-up.

"Kapali didn't play international cricket for the last two

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TAMIM IQBAL
Born 20-03-1989, Chittagong
Playing Role Left-handed batsman



IMRUL KAYES
Born 02-02-1987, Meherpur
Playing Role Left-handed batsman



JUNAED SIDDIQUI
Born 30-10-1987, Rajshahi
Playing Role Left-handed batsman



SHAHRIAR NAFEES
Born 25-01-1986, Dhaka
Playing Role Left-handed batsman



MOHAMMAD ASHRAFUL
Born 07-07-1984, Dhaka
Playing Role Right-handed



ROKIBUL HASAN
Born 08-10-1987, Jamalpur
Playing Role Right-handed



MUSHFIQUR RAHIM
Born 01-09-1988, Bogra
Playing Role Wicketkeeper



NAEEM ISLAM
Born 31-12-1986, Gaibandha
Playing Role Right-handed



MAHMUDULLAH
Born 04-02-1986, Mymensingh
Playing Role Right-handed



ABDUR RAZZAK
Born 15-06-1982, Khulna
Playing Role Slow left-arm



SOHRAWARDI SHUVO
Born 21-11-1988, Rajshahi
Playing Role Slow left-arm



SHAFIQL ISLAM
Born 06-10-1989, Bogra
Playing Role Right-arm fast-



RUBEL HOSSAIN
Born 01-01-1990
Playing Role Right-arm



NAZMUL HOSSAIN
Born 05-10-1987, Hobigonj
Playing Role Right-arm

TEAM TALK

Soon after news filtered through of the 15-member Bangladesh squad for the World Cup, *The Daily Star Sport* caught up with some ex-national captains to get their immediate reaction on the make-up of the squad and the exclusion of Mashrafe bin Mortaza from the final list.

FARUQUE AHMED

I am not satisfied with the number of pace bowlers in the team. I understand we will be playing in the sub-continent where spinners are the main weapon, but at times you may need to play three seamers against certain teams.

Mashrafe should have been included because World Cup is still one month away. He might have recovered. We need his experience. At the moment we have a very inexperienced pace attack.

Ashraful is a big occasion player. When he'll score Bangladesh will win and I hope it happens in this WC.

KHALED MAHMUD

Mashrafe should have been in the squad. He has nothing to prove and his experience, which is very important, will be missed.

I think three seamers are okay, but Mashrafe should have been among those pace bowlers.

KHALED MASHUD

I think it's a beautifully formed team. The number of fast bowlers is fine and I think there is reason to pick three left-arm spinners. It is a balanced team and I think they will do well. Of course, Mashrafe's exclusion is very sad but as far as I know, he is still struggling.

RAQUIBUL HASSAN

I think this is a well-balanced squad. Kudos to the selectors, who I think have done a very good job. The Mashrafe situation is unfortunate, but it was predictable considering the comments from the physio. I still think this is the best eventuality for Mashrafe and the Bangladesh side because Mashrafe has another five years of cricket in him and taking a risk here might have jeopardized that. I do think that the team is one pace bowler light though. [Shahadat Hossain] Rajib has been firing on all cylinders, and the team could have done with a bowler like him.

Tears of a braveheart

MOHAMMAD ISAM



It was written all over his face, which was flush with disappointment, rage, fatigue and most of all, sadness.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, celebrated for his fighting spirit and often regarded as the braveheart of the team, finally broke down. Only a cricketer, a fast bowler more precisely, of his calibre and guts can face rejection with such a bold face and ultimately, it was an obvious reaction.

Before his feelings unraveled, Mashrafe was seen joking with a local television crew and replacing

the call 'hello' with 'I'm out, I'm out'. But when the respected sports journalist Utpal Shuvro asked Mashrafe whether this was the most disappointing moment of his mostly volatile career, the 27-year-old probably couldn't answer without shedding a few tears.

"Today is the most painful day of my life," he managed, but before he had finished the sentence, Mashrafe sobbed, head bowed, unable to talk.

The afternoon had already begun badly when at around noon yesterday, Mashrafe was informed of his exclusion. It was almost clear that he would not be part of the 15-man World Cup squad but he was immensely hopeful.

"I wasn't ready for this news. I was 100 per cent confident but now I have nothing to do. I respect their decision and I wish the players well.

"When I came here on crutches 26 days ago, I said I would play the World Cup. But now I haven't even started to bowl. I thought I would get a chance but it's just my bad luck," said Mashrafe, although it was clear he wanted to be left alone.

As news filtered around the area that Mashrafe wasn't included in the team, hundreds of fans lined up on the walkway overseeing the Academy ground where some of the Tigers were training. He slammed one big hit after another and it was

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BROKEN EXPRESS: Bangladesh paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza breaks down in tears at news of his non-selection for the World Cup at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Chief selector Rafiqul Alam (R) fields questions at the press conference announcing Bangladesh's World Cup squad at Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Different outlooks, differing hopes

SPORTS REPORTER



Shahriar Nafees and Mohammad Ashraful were all but confirmed a place in the Tigers' 15-man World Cup squad that was announced yesterday, but their expectations from the tournament are quite different.

While Shahriar Nafees wants to be constructive in his approach, Ashraful banked on the hackneyed promise of 'one good innings' as both looked forward to the mega event that begins on February 19.

The left-handed Nafees, considered one of three openers, strengthened his case through back-to-back centuries in late-December (against Bangladesh Biman and Mohammedan Sporting Club) in the Premier League after some solid knocks against New Zealand back in October.

"If I get the chance, I would want to improve on what I did during the New Zealand series," said Nafees, who was among a small group of Bangladesh players who trained at the Academy ground yesterday.

"I missed the Zimbabwe series, but that is all in the past. I was in good shape after I hit those hundreds so I feel confident now," he added.

Ashraful, on the other hand, wanted to relaunch his career through one good knock. "After my performance in the Dhaka league, I thought I would be an automatic choice. Now I have lots of time to recover my form and it is a matter

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