

SPORT

Rafique admits match was fixed

Mahmud denies involvement

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh cricketer Mohammad Rafique denied allegations, published in a leading Bangla daily, that he had introduced Mohammad Ashraf to fixers but admitted that officials of the Dhaka Gladiators had compelled their players to 'throw' a match during the second season of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

In an interview with a local TV channel, Rafique, who was bowling coach for the Dhaka Gladiators during the BPL, denied he was involved and instead pointed the finger of blame towards another ex-cricketer Sanwar Hossain, who was employed as team manager. The match in question is the Dhaka Gladiators versus Chittagong Kings game in the second edition of the BPL.

"The officials compelled players to throw the match," said Rafique. "The night before the match, the players would sit with the team officials in Sanwar's room. He would make the deals through a foreign liaison officer," he said.

"This person would get into the dressing room to speak to Sanwar and then get out. I only came to notice him at a later stage. I suspected him ever since," continued Rafique.

"Players were told that if they didn't follow instructions they would not get to play any matches," said the former left-arm spinner.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Sanwar flatly denied the allegations: "These are not true. The reports that have been coming in the papers these days are without any evidence and I won't comment on them," he said.

On a similar note ex-national captain Khaled Mahmud also denied the accusations that he had introduced Ashraf to fixers. "Set up an investigating committee and if I am found guilty then I am ready to be punished. But one cannot tarnish my image without any proof," said Mahmud.

The report published in Prothom Alo, also alleged that slow-left arm bowler Mosharrif Hossain Rubel, who played for the Gladiators, was also involved in spot-fixing. According to the report Hossain was instructed to leak a stipulated amount of runs in a specific period of the match -- a task which he could not accomplish.

Rubel stated that he was 'surprised' to see his name on the paper. "There is a problem if I bowl badly, there's a problem if I bowl well. It all seems very strange. How can some one say this when there's no evidence?" said Rubel.



MOHAMMAD RAFIQUE



KHALED MAHMUD



KHALED MASHUD

Exclusive: What Ashraf said to the ACSU

BISHWAJIT ROY, SHARIFUL ISLAM and QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

While numerous stories have been doing the rounds regarding the match-fixing scandal, one of the most important yet unresolved questions is what Mohammad Ashraf actually confessed to the ACSU (Anti-corruption and Security Unit) officials who recently visited the country to investigate the alleged match-fixing in the last Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

Yesterday, The Daily Star exclusively spoke to a source who was involved in the ACSU investigation and aided the team during the interrogation process who revealed the details of the ACSU investigation and the admission of Mohammad Ashraf.

"In 2013 the Anti-corruption and Security Unit (ACSU) sent some of their officials to Bangladesh. The team met with some local and foreign cricketers to query about some suspicious matches. Among the players, Dhaka Gladiators' Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraf, Mosharrif Hossain Rubel and Robin (Mahbubul Alam) and Khaled Mahmud Sujon were interrogated by the ICC's investigation team," said the source.

"The ACSU's main doubts surrounded the Dhaka Gladiators' matches on February 2, February 12 and February 14. According to their information, the fate of these three matches had been decided either by match-fixing or spot-fixing before a ball had been bowled. Some spoiled cricket players were involved. During the interrogation many fingers were raised towards the performance of some players in these three particular matches," said the source.

"The anti-corruption team was very experienced and explicitly warned the players that they had ample evidence, before proceeding with the interrogation. Almost all the players said that they were unaware about the match-fixing but it seemed that some were reluctant to provide information. Finally, however, Mohammad Ashraf let the cat out of the bag.

"In the face of extreme pressure and solid evidence from the investigators, Ashraf finally took the decision to admit for, what he said was the sake of his career and the truth. And thus opened the story of match and spot fixing by the owners of the BPL franchise Dhaka Gladiators, Selim Chowdhury and Shihab Chowdhury.

"According to Ashraf's statement to the ACSU, before the start of the 2013 BPL, Selim Chowdhury invited Ashraf to his Banani office, when the player wanted his last year's (2012) dues, and told him that they would have to lose some matches in this year's competition. He likened the situation to how Kolkata Knight Riders had earned crores of rupees by throwing away the matches in IPL. According to Ashraf, Selim stated that his and his teammates'

"As per the plan the sixth, seventh and eighth overs were supposed to be allotted to Rubel, Robin and Luku and Ashraf carried out these instructions. Ashraf also said that he thought that the bowlers were also very much aware about what they would have to do, although he had never discussed with them. He stated that as the captain he just carried out the instruction of the owners by giving them the ball.

"According to Ashraf, on February 4 Selim Chowdhury called Ashraf and handed him a cheque of Tk 10 lakhs while he was returning home from the team hotel. Ashraf did not ask any questions about the cheque and stated to the investigators that he had accepted it as his dues from last year. Apart from this, he said that he had not been involved in any monetary dealings."

"Similarly, on the February 12 and February 14 matches against Barisal Burners and Khulna Royal Bengals respectively he handed the ball to the assigned three bowlers. Ashraf said to the investigators that in his opinion, more players were aware of this plan, although he had never discussed it with them.

"Ashraf also said he had met with CEO of Dhaka Gladiators, Gourav who is an Indian citizen but was living in Myanmar as far as Ashraf was aware. He had been introduced to Gourav in Sri Lanka during the SLPL through an Indian bookie, whose name Ashraf could not recall.

However Ashraf admitted that this same bookie had offered him match-fixing opportunities when he was still captain of the national side between 2007-2009. He also said that he had not responded to the offers and instead revealed this to the media in 2009. But the bookie had remained on friendly terms with Ashraf till 2012 even though Ashraf continually rebuffed fixing opportunities. However, in 2012 after meeting Gourav through this bookie, Ashraf got the chance to play in the SLPL. Ashraf also went on to state that he was sure that both Gourav and this bookie are involved in earning money through gambling.

At the end, Ashraf also regretted his mistake and asked for forgiveness from the nation.



MOHAMMAD ASHRAFUL

current and owed dues would be paid on time if Ashraf consented to their plan. Ashraf also said that the owner told him that both coach Ian Pont and player Stevenson had agreed to comply with this condition," revealed the source.

"Ashraf went on to say that before the February 2 game against Chittagong Kings, Shihab Chowdhury spoke to him in the Peninsula Hotel and gave him a note outlining the plan by which they would have to lose the game. Ashraf was not ready to take the captaincy but still when Stevenson didn't want to take the job, Pont instructed Ashraf to lead the team in the match.

Papon questions allegations

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon questioned the authenticity of the claims made by leading national daily Prothom Alo, on Friday, alleging that ex-Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraf had engaged in spot-fixing since 2004 in both international cricket and the Bangladesh Premier League. The leading Bangla daily also alleged that former cricketers Khaled Mahmud, Khaled Mashud and Mohammad Rafique had introduced Ashraf to fixers.

"At this point of time, all this information that has been published, what is their source? Nobody can give a guarantee," said Papon at a press conference in Gulshan yesterday.

"Naming a person on paper is not that difficult. If the allegations don't turn out to be true then what will happen to the player?" he asked.

"I have talked to Ashraf. He said that he told ACSU the truth. And he can't disclose these things because of ACSU's bindings," said Papon.

With regard to the allegations against the former cricketers Papon said, "I am not worried about these allegations because firstly they don't play cricket anymore and secondly there is no hard evidence against them. I don't believe it. I still think they have not done anything," wrong," added Papon, urging more thorough analysis.

Fixing roots from 2004?

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A sensational disclosure from the country's leading Bangla daily, Prothom-Alo, regarding spot and match-fixing allegations shook the sports fraternity yesterday.

If the allegations made by the daily are indeed true, it will likely bring to an ignominious end the career of Bangladesh's first cricketing superstar, Mohammad Ashraf.

While there have been numerous reports linking the former national captain to irregularities during the second edition of the Bangladesh Premier League, Prothom Alo's exposé went above and beyond, digging out the darkest story in Bangladesh cricket history.

If true, match-fixing has been deeply rooted in Bangladesh cricket and has implicated not just Ashraf but also former captains Khaled Mahmud and Khaled Mashud along with former left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique.

The report suggested that Ashraf, the poster boy of Bangladesh cricket, not only confessed his involvement in fixing in the BPL matches but also in international

cricket, at least three since 2004, during recent interrogations by the ICC's (International Cricket Council) Anti-Corruption and Security Unit (ACSU) in Dhaka.

The recent ACSU officials visit had hit the sports headlines and most of the talk was centered on the match-fixing allegations in the money-spinning BPL. But it was beyond anybody's imagination that the evil force of the game made its poisonous bite long before in the country's cricket. According to the report, Ashraf entered into the dark world back in 2004 through the assistance of three national stalwarts—Mahmud, Mashud and Rafique.

He then proceeded to involve himself in a variety of situations with a number of noted fixers, including the recently apprehended Sunil Bhatia, involving both Test and One-Day Internationals as well as the Sri Lankan Premier League and the Bangladesh Premier League.

With these allegations, a dark chapter of Bangladesh cricket is set to unravel. However, by the word of law, one is innocent until proven guilty and thus the cricket lovers of Bangladesh will have to wait for the ACSU reports to know, once and for all, the true and likely painful story of Bangladesh cricket.

Sachin speaks as BCCI duo quits

AFP, New Delhi



Batting superstar Sachin Tendulkar on Friday called cricket's betting and spot-fixing scandal "shocking and disappointing", becoming India's first big-name player to speak out on the issue.

"The developments in the last two weeks have been shocking and disappointing," Tendulkar, the world's leading scorer in both Test and one-day cricket, said in a statement.

"It has always hurt me when the game of cricket is in the news for the wrong reasons.

"As cricketers we are always taught

to go out, fight hard, give our very best and play in the true spirit of the game."

Indian cricket has been in turmoil after police arrested three players, including Test paceman Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, accusing them of deliberately bowling badly in exchange for tens of thousands of dollars during the just-concluded Indian Premier League (IPL).

N Srinivasan, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, is also under pressure to quit after his son-in-law was arrested for allegedly betting on IPL matches.

Betting on sports other than horse-racing is a crime in India. Spot-fixing is an illegal activity in which a specific part of a game, but

not the result, is fixed.

"During this difficult phase, I join every cricketer, from the boys and girls in the maidans (grounds) across the country to those who represent clubs, states and the country, who trust the authorities to take sincere steps to get to the root of the issue," said Tendulkar, 40.

"The faith reposed by the millions of fans should be justified and we owe it to them to ensure that Indian cricket is all about pride and joy."

Tendulkar, who figured in all six editions of the IPL, announced his retirement from the Twenty20 tournament after his team won the title on Sunday.

Top BCCI officials quit

Meanwhile, two top officials of the Indian cricket board quit on Friday over an escalating spot-fixing scandal, reports said.

Sanjay Jagdale, the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and treasurer Ajay Shirke submitted their resignations to the board president, the NDTV news network and other channels said.

"I don't want to give any reason. I have sent my resignation to the BCCI president," Jagdale was quoted as saying by NDTV.

Seeds sail smoothly

AFP, Paris



Defending champion Rafael Nadal blasted French Open schedulers as a "joke" Friday as long-time rival Roger Federer remained on Roland Garros easy street.

Spanish third seed Nadal, chasing an unprecedented eighth Paris title, saw off Slovakia's Martin Klizan 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-3 to record his 54th win in 55 matches at the tournament.

With third seed Nadal having to play his third round match on Saturday, second seed Federer had already ensured his place in the last 16.

His 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 win over France's 30th seed Julien Benneteau, who was restricted by a leg injury, marked his best start to the tournament.

Spanish fourth seed David Ferrer, who made the semifinals in 2012, continued his low-key run.

Raonic or 23rd seed Kevin Anderson of South Africa.

Croatia's 10th seed Marin Cilic was the biggest name to fall, losing 7-6 (14/12), 6-4, 7-5 to Serbia's Viktor Troicki.

German 12th seed Tommy Haas ended the run of American qualifier Jack Sock, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2, 7-5.

Haas will face another American in the fourth round, 19th seed John Isner who needed five sets to beat compatriot Ryan Harrison, 5-7, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3, 6-1, 8-6.

World number one Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova stayed firmly on course for a showdown on Friday by swatting aside overmatched opponents.

Defending champion and second seed Sharapova was first up, needing only four games and a handful of minutes to finish off her second round tie 6-2, 6-4 against Canadian teenager Eugenie Bouchard.

Top-seeded Williams, playing in the opening tie of the third round, needed just 61 minutes to dispose of Romania's Sorana Cirstea 6-0, 6-2 and she has now lost just six games in three one-sided matches.



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