

# SPORT



## THE PROCESS MAN

*Over the past five years, Bangladesh cricket has been obsessed with superstars like Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal. But there is one man who is as, if not more, integral to the team's growth. It is perhaps odd that the captain of a team is often relegated to the background, but that is the type of person and cricketer Mushfiqur Rahim is. In an era when Bangladesh's results have reached unprecedented heights, it is his influence as the most hard-working cricketer of the bunch that has been the main ingredient. His approach has been defined by a focus on processes, with the belief that if those are taken care of the result will take care of itself. Mushfiqur is at the helm of a team that pulls together in one direction under the influence of his philosophy. The little big man of Bangladesh cricket talked to The Daily Star's Bishwajit Roy after a typically gruelling practice session on Tuesday. The following are excerpts from the interview:*

**Daily Star Sport (DSS):** This must feel like the best time of your career, considering the good times both on the personal and professional front.

**Mushfiqur Rahim (MR):** Certainly, it feels good when the result is good. There has been a change in the environment, something that comes only after a lot of hard work. The result is not in your hands, but the process is. If you give your hundred per cent and don't get the result, there is nothing much one can do, but there is a sense of satisfaction. This is what we have tried and this is the reason why everyone's mentality is slowly changing which has led to a collective change. Now I don't have to tell them to do certain things; they tell themselves.

**DSS:** What is the significant change you have seen in your eight-year career?

**MR:** Earlier, we never played to win matches. Back then we didn't have many performers and we couldn't compete against big teams. It's not that we were at fault; there were many difficulties. This mentality has changed. The number of performers has increased and now if we play to our potential in one-day cricket, on the day we can beat any team. This is a big change.

**DSS:** Where do you think Bangladesh cricket is at?

**MR:** You can say that we are in a position where we should have been three to four years ago. The biggest plus point is that young players have come in and performed. In many teams, youngsters take time to perform. But in our case we have to compete with them and that's good. Also because they are playing well it takes the pressure off the senior players. The maximum credit goes to the youngsters.

**DSS:** Do you think the team is lagging behind in terms of the rate of progress?

**MR:** I think we could have been in a better position. But honestly speaking, it is a good position and it's not that easy to hold on to. There's a lot of planning and analysis in international cricket, I think it may have started a little late but the improvement graph is really good. I believe not everyone can achieve this graph in international cricket.

**DSS:** Have the recent successes made cricket more challenging or comfortable for you?

**MR:** Now it seems that when we win a series, it is almost expected that we will complete a whitewash (laughs). There is a confidence now. Often there is huge expectation and responsibility. But now, not just us, but the

public -- even rickshaw-pullers -- also know that when we are in trouble someone will put his hand up. Not just Shakib or Tamim, but anyone like a (Shohag) Gazi, a Mominul (Haque) or a (Shamsur Rahman) Shuvo can turn up and play a big hand. So I think in this position all the players feel good and comfortable.

**DSS:** The team seems like a happy family with barely any controversies surrounding it. What is the recipe behind that?

**MR:** Main recipe, and I have always tried to follow it ever since becoming captain -- I just had one motto and that all players are equal. No matter how many match-winners we have, if there are five players who play well one of them may bowl and get a wicket, but someone else has to catch it. So I always tried to create a comfortable zone for the players, so that they feel that they are very important. I think I have

really disappointed -- the way I worked I think I deserved more. It may have been in my hands; maybe at times I was satisfied with my performance. The current position that I am in now is because of me, and I can improve a lot. If I can gradually improve a bit more I will be happy.

**DSS:** You average 36 in Tests and 26.33 in ODIs. To what extent do you want to change these figures?

**MR:** In the last two-three years, from a batting and keeping viewpoint, it's been good. I am hopeful that the Test average will be at least 40 and in ODIs above 35. Hopefully, that may happen.

**DSS:** Are you satisfied with your captaincy?

**MR:** From a technical point of view, everyone wants that their team performs better under them. For me, the important thing is to hold

For instance, Rubel (Hossain) and Shafiul (Islam) were discovered in a pacer hunt. I think work should be done at the grassroots level, so you don't have to learn much after coming into the national team; you have to learn a lot from there and come into the national team.

**DSS:** Your hard work and dedication has been praised by many. How did you develop it?

**MR:** From a very young age I have been taught by my family that even if the Almighty gives me everything, I should aspire to be something more. I was always told to take as much as possible. It's not just about my success; I tried to be an example for everyone, so that through me five more players know that if they take certain steps they can improve. Every day I remind myself that this is a huge responsibility and responsibility doesn't go to just anyone, so I always hope to work hard and be dedicated mentally.

**DSS:** Time and again you have stated the importance of being a good human being apart from being a good cricketer. How do you compose yourself?

**MR:** I try to stay compact as much as possible. Because we get so much exposure, so many people see us, if I do something bad they will think that players talk like this and behave rudely. So I try to present myself in such a way that nobody has a wrong idea about cricket players.

**DSS:** What irritates you the most?

**MR:** There are times when we can't perform to potential. Then some say that we can't do this or that, which is not true; we hear that there is something going on in the team, which again is not true; these things feel bad. At least the things we are not doing should not be spread. Nobody feels worse than us when we play badly. This is the one thing that feels really bad.

**DSS:** Do you plan to give up the gloves in the near future?

**MR:** Maybe in the future I might not be keeping in Tests, but to be honest there are no thoughts that way as my body is currently allowing me. I will keep as long as my body allows me. In the future if I feel that it's time to concentrate more on batting I will do so, but right now I am enjoying all the roles.

**DSS:** Do you remember the first time you held a bat?

**MR:** Before joining BKSP, I used to see my two elder brothers playing and one day I caught the ball. That was the first time I saw and felt it

and I started playing with them. But my real cricket began from BKSP.

**DSS:** How important is it to love the game?

**MR:** You have to love the game. For instance, when Sachin (Tendulkar) retired, he didn't ask anyone to stand up and clap -- it was respect that he earned for his love for the game. The more you love the game the more you will perform.

**DSS:** How is Mushfiqur Rahim at home and what do you do aside from cricket?

**MR:** We are a joint family, whenever I am at home there is a lot of adda, and whenever I get time I go to meet my friends in Bogra. I have a friend circle who I mix with a lot. I am not an introvert but I like to stay in my comfort zone.

**DSS:** Has living in a joint family helped you to enforce a similar bonding mechanism in the national team?

**MR:** Yes, the majority of it has come from my familial instincts. I have seen with my own eyes how my parents have shared things with each other. That's when I realised that if I do these things, I can be a good human being in the future.

**DSS:** How difficult was it to study alongside cricket?

**MR:** It was a lot of trouble. There were days when I was returning from tour, and sitting with my books in hand on the plane I broke down in tears because I would have to sit for my exams in two days' time. But my parents told me that no matter what you do you have to complete your graduation. I have a motto that no matter what I do, I will do it hundred per cent. In this case, my friends have helped me a lot with notes.

**DSS:** Tell us something about Sri Lanka's visit in January. What are your expectations?

**MR:** Against Sri Lanka the challenge has always been big -- they are one team who have beaten us by innings at will in and made us work hard. So when we went there and played well (in March 2013), it was ten times more satisfying. They play very well in our conditions. It will not be easy; they have to play their best cricket to beat us.

**DSS:** How is life as an engaged man?

**MR:** So far so good. Honestly speaking I wanted everyone to know but because it was during the series (against New Zealand), I had to manage a lot of things. But I didn't know that everyone would have known. But everything is going good by the grace of the Almighty.

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The result is not in your hands, but the process is. If you give your hundred per cent and don't get the result, there is nothing much one can do, but there is a sense of satisfaction. This is what we have tried and this is the reason why everyone's men-

managed to achieve this to a large extent. I tried to share this recipe with coach Shane (Jurgensen). Credit goes to him as well.

**DSS:** How do you rate our achievements at home?

**MR:** When we can start playing well against India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka consistently at home, then we can say that we are truly a strong home side. To be honest, we have lots of areas to improve in the T20 and Test format, but if we can hold this current position then within three years we can make a big leap.

**DSS:** Are you satisfied with where you have reached after eight years?

**MR:** I feel very hurt inside because it's not that easy to come here and perform, I took some time initially to get into the team -- how to process, how to approach the innings -- but after that I enjoyed. After eight years, I am

on to the way we are gradually improving in cricket, that we play consistent cricket in all three formats.

**DSS:** Who are the captains who inspire you?

**MR:** No it's not like that. But I see a lot of games, I always try to follow the planning and techniques. I like a few things of many captains -- Mahela (Jayawardene), Michael (Vaughan), (Ricky) Ponting, (Mahendra Singh) Dhoni, so the things that I like I pick them.

**DSS:** Do you agree that in order to make strides in Test cricket, we need to improve our pace department?

**MR:** If you want to win Tests, you need good pacers. We are lacking in this department. We have to work on this from the age-group levels, so that they can gradually improve from there, because it's not possible to do so after they come into the national team.

## More foreign quality this time?

SPORTS REPORTER



The dazzling performance of Haitian Sony Norde in the Sheikh Russel shirt last season has inspired some of the title-contenders this time like Sheikh Jamal DC, Abahani and Mohammedan to sign up 'quality' foreign players in search of domestic silverware.

So far ten clubs of the Bangladesh Premier League have signed up a total of 59 foreign players -- 29 of whom come from Nigeria -- a country which has historically been the biggest exporters of footballers to Bangladesh. But interestingly the local scouts have brought players from a few other countries this time, including players from France, Uruguay, Jamaica, and Gambia. Three players each from Egypt and Haiti and two from Brazilian have also been signed up by some of the title-hopefuls.

Sheikh Jamal have already roped in Sony Norde from rivals Sheikh Russel and brought another Haitian striker -- Wedson Anselme while Sheikh Russel themselves signed up Haitian national midfielder

Pascal Millien, who has is yet to arrive here though. Sheikh Russel also flew in Uruguayan midfielder Francis Andres, who has already had his first training session with the team yesterday.

Abahani have seemingly pinned their hopes on their old guard which includes Awudu Ibrahim, Samad Yussif, Lucky Paul, but they have also signed up two Brazilians - Andre Luis De Souza and Luiz Romulo De Castro -- along with Cameroon's Ekele Patick.

Mohammedan have hardly signed any foreign player except for Mostafa Moamed Seddik of Egyptian. Two more Egyptians will play for two other clubs -- Elgilani Mohmoud Nagi for Muktijoddha Sangsad and Bassam Abouelhadi for Brothers Union.

Even though the quality of these signings remains to be proved, the club officials are claiming that some of these players will be as good if not better than Sony Norde. However, by the requisition it is already evident that the organisers are already venturing into new sources of talent rather than only going for mediocre African

## Super League from today

SPORTS REPORTER



The Dhaka Premier League's Super League round, which will witness top six sides of the first phase battle it out for the championship, begins today with all the teams featuring in three venues.

Leaders Gazi Tank Cricketers -- led by Mahmudullah Riyad and powered by their foreign recruits Jacob Oram and Ryan Ten Doeschate -- take on sixth-placed Kalabagan Cricket Club, who will be banking on Hamilton Masakadza and Marshall Ayub, at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

At Fatullah, second-placed Prime Doleshwar face Prime Bank Cricket Club, who are occupying the fifth place with 12 points. Doleshwar's Mominul Haque and Shohag Gazi will look to continue their good run of form whereas Prime Bank will hope their foreign recruits -- the likes of Brendan Taylor and Ravi Bopara -- fire for them.

At BKSP-2 it will be a battle between Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's Mohammedan Sporting Club and Mushfiqur Rahim's Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club. Mohammedan have 14 points while Sheikh Jamal have 12.

Sheikh Jamal's Junaid Siddique with 434 runs is the highest run-scorer among the players in the Super League, where as Prime Bank Cricket Club's Enamul Haque Junior with 21 wickets is the highest wicket-taker of the tournament.

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