

# SPORT



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

## Test dream still alive

BISHWAJIT ROY



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Bangladesh's best fast bowler, wants to make one last attempt at reviving his Test career. There has been speculation about whether the pacer, who last played a Test in July 2009 against West Indies at Kingstown, has a future at all in the Test arena following a series of injuries that have restricted him to limited-overs cricket.

Since making his Test debut against Zimbabwe in 2001 at Dhaka, Mashrafe has played only 36 Tests, missing 40 due to a series of injuries. However, the 30-year-old paceman's mental strength and courage in fighting back from crippling physical setbacks each time have already become the stuff of

legend in the country's cricketing circles.

Many however think that returning to the five-day format, the most physically demanding form of the game, is a fight too far but the tenacious Mashrafe does not want to quit the challenge without one last fight.

Is he then targeting the next home series against Sri Lanka? No, Mashrafe first wants to provide enough evidence for the selectors by playing the longer-version matches of the National Cricket League (NCL) that he is deserving of a call-up to the Test squad.

"I still harbour the dream of playing Test matches again. I want to revive my career as a Test bowler. I have overcome a lot of adversity to continue my cricketing career and I want to make one last attempt to revive my career as a Test bowler," said confident Mashrafe.

"But I think it would not be wise

and logical for me to declare myself available for the next series against Sri Lanka; instead I want to play the next National League first. It is my duty to prove myself as good enough for Test cricket. I played my last Test match five years ago, so I cannot expect a return without proving myself at any level," he continued.

"But I am confident. We have some good pacers and I have to compete with them. I am not a cricketer who even subconsciously thinks about making a return through someone's blessing; rather I want to earn it in my own right," a determined Mashrafe said.

"And you know we usually have three or four months' gap between Test series, so that will help me to continue as a Test bowler if I get the chance. But before all that I want to make a new start in longer-version cricket this season," he added.

Mashrafe however wants one favour from the selectors to make his dream possible.

"It will be great for me, if the selectors give me a chance to play any four-day practice matches in the coming days," he said.

Mashrafe said that the coming limited-over opportunities will also help him to make his dream come true.

"We have a home series against Sri Lanka and then we have the Asia Cup and the T20 World Cup. As a team it's an opportunity for us to take our cricket to new heights this year and I can also make my way by contributing for in the limited-over competitions," hoped Mashrafe.

The courageous man expressed his satisfaction over his progress after recovering from his latest injury and he dearly hopes that another injury misfortune will not befall him.

## Cricket for football with Saudi Arabia?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has showed its interest to work for Bangladesh's youth football development, subject to Bangladesh's assistance to develop its cricket.

The proposal was raised recently during a meeting of the Bangladesh-Saudi Arabia Joint Economic Council recently and Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) informed the National Sports Council (NSC) about their position on the proposal.

"We have told NSC that we are ready to send the U-16 and U-18 football teams for foreign receiving training as the players these teams are the future players of the senior national team," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag yesterday.

However, Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) acting chief executive, Nizamuddin Chowdhury, said he was not aware of any such proposal from the sports regulatory body.

## Zia finishes 12th

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Grand Master Ziaur Rahman became 12th in the Masters event of the 89th Hastings International Chess Congress which concluded at the Horntye Park, East Sussex in England on Sunday.

Zia beat English IM Simon Knott in the final round to earn six points from nine matches.

Georgian GM Mikhail Mchedlishvili and German GM Khenkin Igor became champion and runner-up respectively with 6.5 points each, said a Bangladesh Chess Federation press release yesterday.

## GM chess

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Three Bangladeshi chess players recorded victories against their Indian counterparts in the seventh round of the 2nd Gurgaon International Grand Masters Chess Tournament in Hariyana, India on Sunday.

Sharif Hossain beat Sonkalan Bharat, Zoar Haque Prodhan beat Kaur Palkin and Sharon beat Bhanot Stuti while Saimon Siddiquir Rahman lost against FM Kurukulasuriya Prasanna. Sharif, Zoar and Sharon have four points each from seven matches.

## 'More pain to come'

AFF, Sydney



Coach Andy Flower warned Monday there was more pain to come in the wake of England's Ashes series meltdown in Australia.

Australia completed a 5-0 clean sweep on Sunday, routing the hapless tourists for 166 off just 31.4 overs to carry off a 281-run victory in three days in the Sydney Test.

Such was the magnitude of the series defeat that major ramifications are expected for English cricket, just months after they beat Australia 3-0 in England.

Flower said he would not identify individual players facing the chop, with reports that high-profile batsman Kevin Pietersen, one of the big English failures in the series, was under pressure.

Pietersen, who averages just over 47 in 104 Tests, was dismissed for three and six in the final Test to finish with 294 runs in the series at 29.40.

Flower, who has said he will not be

standing down as team coach, said he was prepared to make tough decisions, while admitting the nightmare series was the end of an era.

Asked directly whether Pietersen would be part of England's future, Flower told reporters: "This will be a new start, and so it should be.

"It does feel like the end of some type of era. We might have to take a little more pain before we have sustained success again.

"And we might have to ask for a little patience in that regard over the coming months."

As well as speculation over the future of Pietersen, 31-year-old wicketkeeper Matt Prior, who was dropped for the last two Tests, could also face the axe.

"I'm not going to discuss individuals, but looking at it a little more holistically, I think it will be the start of something new," Flower said.

"I think Alastair Cook as captain can lead that renewal and rebuilding (of) the England cricket side.

"We're not proud of (the Sydney

Test). And we're not proud of the Test series result, of course.

"It's quite a bitter pill to swallow. But that's what it is and we have to face up to that reality."

England have five months before they host Sri Lanka for a two-Test series, by which time a full review into the Australia debacle is expected to be completed.

Cook said after the Sydney defeat that he knows what it takes to rebuild shattered England.

He said he has been given a vote of confidence from the England and Wales Cricket Board to continue as captain as England look to regroup after sliding to fourth in the International Cricket Council rankings, below Australia at three.

"I am desperate to try and turn it around. I feel as if I am the right man to do it," he said at his post-match conference.

"If I'm not and people higher up want a change because they think that's the best way, I have to take it on the chin."

## BCL from Jan 12

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), one of two four-day domestic competitions in the country, will start from January 12 with an aim to give the national players some longer-version practice before the home series against Sri Lanka.

The first two rounds of the four-team franchisee-based competition will be held between January 12-21 before a long break for Sri Lanka's tour of Bangladesh, the Asia Cup and the ICC World Twenty20.

The remaining round and the final of the competition, which was introduced last season, will be held at a later date.

"The board took the initiative to ensure longer-version practice for the national cricketers ahead of the series against Sri Lanka," said Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director Akram Khan.

"As a very select group of cricketers appear in this premier event, the franchisee representatives have requested the BCB to ensure the participation of the maximum number of national cricketers. That is why the third round and the final will be held at a convenient time when all the top cricketers are available," explained BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury.

The BCL appeared in the domestic calendar for the first time last season. The inaugural edition comprised four zonal teams -- Central, South, East and North -- made of the best players from the National Cricket League (NCL), the other and older first-class competition. The NCL, which involves a lot of travel, was earlier postponed due to the political violence prevailing throughout the country.

## Wozniacki starts season with win

AFF, Sydney

Former world number one Caroline Wozniacki opened her season with a win over German Julia Goerges in the first round of the Sydney International on Monday.

Danish sixth seed Wozniacki, who became engaged to golf star Rory McIlroy on New Year's Eve, lost the first set to Goerges but rallied to come through 3-6, 6-2, 6-4.

The 23-year-old, who withdrew from a WTA event in Brisbane last week-end due to a shoulder injury, was making her sixth straight appearance at the Sydney tournament as she prepares for the Australian Open.

## Millennium golf

SPORTS REPORTER

The 1st Millennium Golf Tournament was held at the Bhatiary Golf & Country Club in Chittagong on Friday. A total of 172 golfers, including three female and 23 junior participants, took part in eighteen different categories in the day-long event.

Major General Sabbir Ahmed, senior vice president of Bhatiary Golf & Country Club and General Officer Commanding (GOC) 24 Infantry Division & Area Commander, Chittagong, and officials of Millennium Group were present at the inaugural and closing ceremony as chief guests.

The prize giving ceremony was followed by fireworks, laser show, a musical performance by LRB and raffle draw.

## Shadharan Bima pull out

Club Cup begins today

SPORTS REPORTER



Shadharan Bima have pulled out of the Club Cup hockey tournament, a day before the start of the season's curtain-raising tournament, turning it into a six-team competition.

"On Saturday, they (Shadharan Bima) requested us to start the tournament without them as they could not assemble their players, most of whom are outside the capital. So today (Monday), we have dropped them and revised the fixtures of the tournament. However, they will play in the upcoming premier division league," said Bangladesh Hockey Federation's joint secretary Anvir Adil Khan.

According to the new fixtures, Abahani will play against Dhaka Wanderers Club in the lone match on the opening day today.

It may be mentioned that the rebel teams -- Mohammedan SC, Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, Wari Club and Bangladesh SC -- are not participating in all tournaments as well.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Inauguration of the 1st Millennium Golf Tournament which was held at the Bhatiary Golf & Country Club in Chittagong on Friday.

## Mahela feels no extra pressure Gerhard shows interest

AFF, Dubai



Experienced Sri Lankan batsman Mahela Jayawardene brushed aside talk on Monday of being under pressure to perform after he failed twice with the bat in the drawn first Test in Abu Dhabi.

The 36-year-old scored five in Sri Lanka's first innings and was then out for a first-ball duck, dismissed both times by debutant Pakistan paceman Bilawal Bhatti.

Sri Lanka, who averted defeat with skipper Angelo Mathews hitting a career-best 157 not out in the second innings, will look to Jayawardene to score in the second Test starting in Dubai on Wednesday.

But Jayawardene said he didn't feel under any extra pressure.

"No extra pressure, because when you play for Sri Lanka there is pressure

to do well in every match. When you look at how many matches I've played, there's nothing special about my situation now," said Jayawardene, who had not played a Test since January last year.

"It's difficult to say that the long break had a big effect. I trained hard but in a Test match you can have a great match or a poor one.

"It's difficult to pinpoint why exactly things didn't go right. I got two good balls and I couldn't avoid getting out to them. I am not thinking too much about what's been, but I prepared well for that match and I am preparing for the next one."

Jayawardene praised Bhatti.

"He's a new bowler so I hadn't played against him before. My teammates had told me that he bowled well in the ODI series as well," said Jayawardene of the preceding series, which Pakistan won 3-2.

"When you face a bowler for the

first time there is always a small difference. He bowled in really good areas when I went to bat. That's also a factor."

Jayawardene praised his team's fightback to save the Test after conceding a 179-run lead in the first innings.

"I am really happy about that. The way our batsmen played in the second innings was really good, especially Angelo, (Dinesh) Chandimal, Kaushal (Silva) and Prasanna (Jayawardene). We got back into the game and that's what Test cricket is about.

"Different things happen on different days. When we are behind, we have to show a little character and we did that, even turning it into a potentially winning situation. That was a great boost of confidence, particularly for the young players who are getting that experience."

With 10,811 runs in 139 Tests, Jayawardene said he did not have any

SPORTS REPORTER



Former coach of Bangladesh national hockey team Gerhard Peter Rach has recently showed his interest to take the team's charges again even though Pakistani coach Naveed Alam has been at the helm since July last year and his contract has been extended up to June 2014.

The German was at the helm of the national team from 2009 to 2010 and under his tutelage Bangladesh's performance was disappointing in all the three international tournaments -- a fifth-place finish in the Asian Games Qualifiers at home, eighth position in the Asian Games proper and third position in the 2010 South Asian Games.

However, Gerhard gave some of the national players an opportunity to play in domestic competitions of Germany, Italy and Austria.

"Yes, he (Gerhard) talked to me over phone recently and then placed an application officially on Saturday to consider his proposal,"

said Wing Commander Rafiul Huq, representative of Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) president Air Marshal Enamul Bari yesterday.

Huq said that he would place it before the next Executive Committee meeting, which would take a decision regarding the proposal of Gerhard.

However, BHF general secretary Khaza Rahmatullah declined about receiving any such proposal and said that they would evaluate the performance of Naveed in the upcoming Asian Games Qualifiers before deciding whether to extend his tenure or look for a new coach.

Meanwhile, the game's governing body may run the national camp without the players who are not available due to the Club Cup and the Premier Division Hockey League.

"Of the 66 selected players, some 26 to 27 players will be playing in the Club Cup tournament and then participate in the Premier Division League, but we want to run the national camp with the available players as soon as coach Naveed returns from Pakistan," said BHF member and selector Rafiqul Islam Kamal.