

SPORT

A choice by default

NAIMUL KARIM

When selectors picked Shahadat Hossain for Bangladesh's first Test against Zimbabwe last week, analysts, journalists and even a number of cricket enthusiasts seemed to have had a brain freeze momentarily.

Why would Bangladesh's selectors recall a bowler whom the think-tank had written off 19 months ago after a dreadful series against Sri Lanka? Is it his current domestic record? Not quite.

Shahadat has played a total of ten first-class matches since he was dropped from the national squad in March last year.

He scalped eleven wickets in the Bangladesh Cricket League which finished earlier this year. While in the National Cricket League he picked 16 in five matches. His statistics are ordinary when compared to the likes of other pacers such as Sajedul Islam, Delwar Hossain, Shuvashish Roy, all of whom had taken more wickets than the 28-year-old.

Shahadat, according to chief selector Faruque Ahmed's official statement, was picked ahead of Robiul Islam as the player's fitness levels had 'improved' in the last two years. While Faruque's statement may be true, Shahadat has been working hard on a pace bowler's fitness programme in the BCB's academy for the last year, the reality though is a tad cruel.

Rather than his own performance, Shahadat owes his return to the lack of pacers being produced in Bangladesh's cricket, which in turn have compelled selectors to stick to a cycle.

And that cycle, in the last five years, has seen the selectors juggle between Shafiqul Islam, Rubel Hossain, Shahadat and Robiul. With Robiul out of the picture, the selectors had no one else to go to.

“Who else do we take? We are not confident about the other bowlers in the domestic circuit.”



SHAHADAT HOSSAIN

“It's a sad situation,” admitted Faruque. “Who else do we take? We are not confident about the other bowlers in the domestic circuit. And the ones that have impressed are battling injuries. We are looking at Taskin Ahmed for the future. Abul is another bowler who remains uncertain because of his injuries,” explained Faruque.

Al-Amin Hossain is the latest addition to this cycle. The youngster, in fact, is currently the most favoured. In the Test against Sri Lanka in February this year, the Tigers had fielded him in a one-man pace attack. The over-dependence on the 24-year-old however, has had a toll on him; he broke down during the last Test against the West Indies.

Whether Shahadat manages to weave his magic in the Zimbabwe series or not, the very fact that he has been selected once again displays the brittle scenario of Bangladesh's pace bowling pipeline. The root cause of which lies in the domestic circuit and has repeatedly been pointed out by various cricketers.

Captain of Dhaka Division Mohammad Sharif, after guiding his side to the NCL championship last year, criticised the organisers. “Bangladesh will never be able to produce a good pacer as long as we play on dead wickets,” he had said.

Tigers' bowling coach Heath Streak pointed out that the difference in the volume of overs bowled by pacers in domestic and international cricket was the main reason why Bangladesh's pacers get injured so frequently. “You can't expect them to bowl 30 overs in international cricket when they only get to bowl eight or ten in domestic tournaments,” the Zimbabwean said in an interview last month.

In the end it seems as though the move that initially caused a brain freeze was in fact the only possible option available for the selectors. What remains to be seen now though is whether the lanky Shahadat can use this opportunity to restart his career.

'My heart is crying'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national team's departing coach Lodewijk de Kruif left here for the Netherlands yesterday morning with 'a broken heart' and with a hope of coming back to Bangladesh in future.

“I'm very sad about it (departing), my heart is crying because I want to continue. That is the feeling I have with my boys and my staff but in the middle of the process, we came to a point where we thought it was best to separate for this moment,” an emotional de Kruif said prior to his departure.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) decided to part ways nearly one-and-a-half years into the relation in an amicable way.

“For me, it is not a happy ending. Normally I want to work; normally I should be in camp in Jessore now with my boys, who call me every time and tell me they miss me. What BFF meant is that we tried to settle in an amicable way and that is what we agreed upon,” said the 44-year-old coach.

De Kruif informed that he had talked with the BFF president Kazi Salahuddin and vice president Tabith Awal about a possible return in the latter part of 2015 and that he would be in regular contact with the BFF. The Dutchman also claimed that he has drawn interest from clubs in Africa and Latin America.

“Certain people came to me and said they are interested, especially from Africa and also from Latin America. Let's see what comes out. But I have to be honest with my hands on my heart that my first intention is Bangladesh, it always was. Unfortunately we can't continue at the moment. That is the situation we have to face,” said de Kruif.

De Kruif also wished the best of times for the Bangladesh players in the upcoming matches against Sri Lanka.

“I miss the team very much. Those boys are my kids. That is how I treat them, I think the best of them, I want to teach them the best, I feel from their side the same feeling because they call me everyday several times. They are in my heart and I hope they perform very well in the games against Sri Lanka. I wish them all the best,” ended de Kruif.

Zim's practice ends in draw

SPORTS REPORTER

The bowling attack which Zimbabwe faced in the drawn three-day practice match at Fatullah was not challenging enough for their batsmen to prepare for the three-match Test series against the home team. Bangladesh are expected to rely heavily on their slow bowlers to maximise the home advantage from the pitch in the upcoming series.

Nevertheless, match practice always helps a team to acclimatise with the conditions and in this drawn contest, which is their opening and also the lone game before the Tests, the visitors scored some runs.

After the match Zimbabwe skipper Brendan Taylor said he was disappointed with their batting in the first innings, but also added that his batsmen showed character in the second, where Craig Ervine hit an unbeaten 85 after the home side was bowled out for 297.

Ervine, who hasn't played a Test match since March last year, hammered eleven fours and four sixes in his 98-ball knock while Sikandar Raza made 45 with eight

fours as Hamilton Masakadza added 31 and Vusumuzi Sibanda 22.

The reality however was that the home side's think-tank offered the visitors a weak BCB XI team and allowed the occasional bowlers to bowl, seemingly without any purpose.

From the local side, three players -- Shamsur Rahman, Marshall Ayub and Shuvagoto Hom -- are in the squad for the first Test and scored some runs which may help them in the upcoming series. Shuvagoto hit 75 runs which included nine fours in the 176-ball innings.

Shuvagoto, who made Test debut in Bangladesh's last series in the West Indies, believes that this kind of score can help them to get back the confidence and it was needed for them though he believes the Tests will be a different ball game. He was also unperturbed with the batsmen's failures to turn their half-centuries into larger scores.

SCORES IN BRIEF
ZIMBABWE: 241 and 201 for 5 (Ervine 85 not out, Sikandar 45; Sabbir 2-17)
BCB XI: 297 (Shuvagoto 75 not out, Shamsur 69, Rony 46, Marshall 31; M'shanwege 4-109)
Result: Match drawn.

Two records on Day 3

SPORTS REPORTER

National records continued to tumble in the MM Group 27th National Swimming Championships as three new records were set on the third day of the four-day meet at the Gopalganj Swimming Pool and Gymnasium Complex yesterday.

The two records took the number of total records set over the three days, on hand timing, to 13 out of a total of 28 events settled. Mahfuza Khatun Shila and Nazma Khatun of Bangladesh Navy produced one record each while Navy's women's team set a new record in the 4X200m freestyle relay yesterday.

Shila, who had broken her own record in the 100m breaststroke on the second day, eclipsed the 50m breaststroke record by clocking 34.85 seconds. The previous record of 35.21 seconds was set by Dolly Akhter of Bangladesh Ansar in 2010.

Nazma followed the footsteps of her senior teammate by setting her second national record of these championships yesterday in the 50m butterfly clocking 31.73 seconds. Papia Akhter of BKSP held the previous record with a time of 31.96 seconds, set in the 2013 Bangladesh Games.

Meanwhile, Mahfuzur Rahman Sagar continued his gold spree as he won his fifth gold medal in the 4X200 freestyle relay, teaming up with Asif Reza, Nazrul Islam and Rubel Rana.

Bangladesh Navy topped the table with 20 gold while Bangladesh Army were behind Navy with nine gold medals.

Serena left red-faced



A dejected Serena Williams rests during the WTA Finals against Simona Halep in Singapore yesterday. Serena suffered her worst loss in 16 years.

REUTERS, Singapore

Ecstasy and euphoria are the usual emotions world No. 1 Serena Williams experiences on a tennis court. On Wednesday, she encountered a different one -- embarrassment.

One of the game's all-time greats, a winner of 18 Grand Slam singles crowns, 63 WTA titles, the owner of four Olympic gold medals, Williams has become accustomed to success.

But on Singapore's purple indoor hard court on Wednesday, Simona Halep took her back 16 years to a time when, as a teenager, she was trying to make a name for herself.

Halep's 6-0, 6-2 success in their Red Group clash at the WTA Finals was the worst defeat Williams had experienced since she was crushed 6-1, 6-1 by Joannette Kruger in the quarterfinals at Oklahoma City in 1998.

Halep served well, pushed her opponent around the court and went for her shots, but Williams, by her own admission, was woeful.

Djokovic becomes a father

AP, Belgrade

Novak Djokovic is a proud father.

The top-ranked tennis player tweeted Wednesday that he and his wife, Jelena, were celebrating the birth of their first child - a boy named Stefan.

“Stefan, our baby angel was born!” Djokovic posted on Twitter early Wednesday. “I'm so proud of my beautiful wife Jelena! Thank you so much for your love and support. We love you all!!!”

On his website, Djokovic said the “birth passed in the best way, and the baby and the mother are feeling fine.”

RTS, Serbia's state TV, reported that Djokovic's wife gave birth on Tuesday in Nice, France, close to where they reside in Monaco.

The new parents met in high school, and they have been together for more than eight years.

The couple married on July 10, four days after Djokovic won Wimbledon by beating Roger Federer in the final.

Younis equals with Inzy

AFP, Dubai

Younis Khan hit a record-equalling century to guide Pakistan to 219-4 on the opening day of the first Test against Australia in Dubai on Wednesday.

The 36-year-old right hander scored 106 for his 25th century to help Pakistan counter the fiery pace of Mitchell Johnson (3-22) after Pakistan won the toss and decided to bat on a flat, grass-less Dubai stadium pitch.

At close, skipper Misbahul Haq was unbeaten on 34 and with him Asad Shafiq not out nine.



Younis Khan of Pakistan celebrates his 25th Test hundred on the opening day of the first Test against Australia in Dubai yesterday.

SCOREBOARD

PAKISTAN: First innings
 Shehzad b Siddle 3
 Hafeez lbw b Johnson 0
 Azhar c Doolan b Johnson 53
 Younis lbw b Johnson 106
 Misbah not out 34
 Shafiq not out 9
 Extras: (b-2, lb-12) 14
 Total: (For 4 wickets in 90 overs) 219
 To bat: Sarfraz, Zulfiqar, Yasir, Rahat, Imran
 Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-7, 3-115, 4-198

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Johnson	20	13	22	3
Siddle	17	8	27	1
O'Keefe	15	2	49	0
Marsh	11	4	18	0
Lyon	24	2	78	0
Smith	3	0	11	0

AUSTRALIA: Clarke, Warner, Rogers, Doolan, Smith,

and 17 minutes and hit ten boundaries and a six.

Younis added 108 for the third wicket with Azhar Ali (53) and another valuable 83 with Misbah to steady the innings.

He played an innings of maturity and guile after Pakistan had lost both openers by the fourth over, with Mohammad Hafeez (nought) and Ahmed Shehzad (three) dismissed by Johnson and pace partner Peter Siddle.

It was Johnson who gave Australia the breakthrough as early as off the fifth ball of the match, trapping Hafeez leg-before with a superb yorker.

Shehzad was set up by Siddle as he exposed his leg-stump and was bowled.

ICC to discuss Ind-WI crisis

AFP, New Delhi

The International Cricket Council said on Wednesday it was concerned at the stand-off between the Indian and West Indies boards, but would not intervene unless asked by the two parties.

In a statement on its website, the world governing body said it was “closely monitoring the developments” which would be discussed at the ICC's Executive Board meeting in Dubai on November 10.

The ICC, the statement said, is “concerned with the dispute between the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) and it was closely monitoring the developments arising from the recently cancelled tour of India. “The ICC hopes that the matter will be resolved amicably, but clarified that, unless the matter is otherwise referred to it, it does not have the power to intervene in disputes resulting from a bilateral Future Tours Programme [FTP] tour.”

The ICC said it would not comment further on the matter until the board meeting.

The West Indies cut short their tour last week because of an internal pay dispute, even though the fifth one-day international, a Twenty20 match and three Tests still remained to be played.

India retaliated by freezing all future tours to the Caribbean, starting with the one in February and March 2016 to play three Tests, five one-dayers and a Twenty20 International.

The BCCI, the game's financial powerhouse, also said it would “initiate legal proceedings” against the West Indies but gave no details.

The WICB, worried it could lose out heavily on television rights if India refuses to tour, has sought a meeting with the BCCI to resolve the matter.

4th Sunnydale Games begin today

SPORTS REPORTER

The 4th Sunnydale Games, introduced in 2011, will begin today at the Mohammadpur Physical College ground, with 36 English medium schools participating.

Students will compete in six events -- cricket, football, basketball, handball, volleyball and table tennis. Apart from cricket and football, all events will feature both boys and girls' teams.

Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Reverend Father RW Timm, CSC, will inaugurate the six-day sports carnival as the chief guest.

BHF to purchase school hockey gears

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation will hold next year's School Hockey Championship on a bigger scale covering all 64 districts.

To make it a success, the game's governing body will purchase 1500 hockey sticks, 1200 balls, 320 shin-guards and 40 sets of goalkeeping gear, through an open tender and after the completion of the process, all of the gear will be distributed among the participating teams, said a BHF statement yesterday.