

Disability not a difficulty

Int'l cricket meet for physically challenged starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

"I used to play gully cricket back in the schooldays and that was fun. But never did I even dream of representing my country in an international tournament," an emotional Alam Khan, who seemed to be breathing heavy, told reporters.

The enormity of the achievement was evident in the way Alam spoke; he took his time and cautiously chose his words. Alam is going to lead Bangladesh in the ICRC International Cricket Tournament for People with Physical Disabilities, which begins at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the tournament.

The other participants in the five-nation T20 event are Afghanistan, England, India and Pakistan. The captains of these teams were present at a press conference that marked the preview of the tournament, and like Alam, they all seemed equally excited.

"We're a little less experienced than the others," admitted Alam. "We just trained for four months. The other teams have been playing for a long time. Gradually we will get better. But this is obviously a big occasion for us.

"People who looked at us differently in the society will now come to the field to cheer for us, cheer for our country and that feeling is amazing," he added.

Alam is one of the 26 members who were selected during a talent hunt camp organised by the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) in March 2015 in a bid to form a team for this tournament.

Bangladesh's ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who is also the brand ambassador of the ICRC, echoed Alam's views.

"I think this is a tournament that should not only inspire the physically challenged cricketers but also us. I have practice sessions to attend the



Captains representing the five teams that will take part in the ICRC Cricket Tournament for People with Physical Disabilities pose with the championship trophy at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

next few weeks so I don't know how much of the tournament I can watch, but I think it's more important for the media to provide them with exposure.

"You may know the physically challenged don't get much exposure. The Bangladesh team perhaps has lesser exposure than the others. So I think this is a great initiative," said Mashrafe.

While Alam put in a measured statement, his Pakistani counterpart, Hasnain Alam, exuded much more confidence. But towards the end he too resorted to the tournament's bigger motive.

"As far as the Pakistan team is concerned, we are very well prepared. We played against England and Afghanistan and beat both of them.

"But more importantly, this is a good opportunity for the physically challenged people, those who are playing and watching to understand that

the most important thing is your will. The ability basically comes from confidence," said Hasnain.

Speaking of confidence? England skipper Iain Nairne seemed to have no shortage of it.

"This is a chance for us to show to the world that disability does not impact our ability. We will be playing the same shots as the Test cricketers, bowling the same balls and probably take the same catches," exclaimed a motivated Nairne.

Afghanistan captain Mohammad Ashraf and India skipper Dinesh Kumar reflected a similar intensity. Of the five teams, India's are the only one not recognised by their national cricket board.

Bangladesh will take on England at Mirpur in the opening game today; after which the rest of the games will take place at BKSP in Savar. The final of the tournament will be held on September 10.

Sohel ready for Aus challenge

SPORTS REPORTER



As Bangladesh brace for the Australian onslaught in their World Cup and Asian Cup joint qualifier on September 3 with an outright defensive display in mind, the man who might have to play the most important role is goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel.

The Sheikh Jamal goalkeeper, who had been part of the national team for the last four years but lost his place to other keepers quite a few times, has seemingly reinstalled the confidence of the team management and the coaching staff with a brilliant performance in the recent friendly against Malaysia following some valiant displays for his club in the AFC Cup Play-off Qualifiers.

Sohel made a number of saves from close range to hold the Malaysians to a goalless draw in last Saturday's friendly, which seems to have charged him up for the Australia challenge. The lad from Chittagong said he feels no pressure and is ready to put up his natural display against the Socceroos.

"I don't have any additional pressure because I want to play my own game," said Sohel over the phone from Perth, Australia yesterday. "Everyone is telling me that I have played well against Malaysia and I want to carry that performance into the match against Australia."

"I don't know what will happen against Australia and I also don't want to keep that

in mind. Whatever happens, I will be trying to put my best effort," said Sohel.

The goalkeeper was out of action for nearly one-and-a-half month following a knee injury during the latter part of the Bangladesh Premier League. He went into rehabilitation phased where he trained under goalkeeping coach Christian Schweichler before returning to action at the fag end of the league.

Replacing Mazharul Islam Himel as Sheikh Jamal's number one, Sohel had some fine performances as the Dhanmondi giants earned a play-off spot in the AFC Cup. With their backs to the wall, Sohel almost single-handedly kept FC Alga Bishkek at bay at their own backyard to earn his side the play-off spot. Those performances helped him earn back his place in the national team after missing the first two qualifiers against Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan at home in June.

"I have improved a lot under Christian (Schweichler), admitted the tall goalkeeper. "I have learnt a lot of things from him and I think that's why my performance graph is going upward."

However, Sohel knows that the Socceroos, at their own turf, will be a completely different challenge altogether. So he conceded that Bangladesh will have to put on a collective effort, beginning from himself and the defenders right up to those in the front line to keep the four-time World Cuppers at bay.

"To overcome the challenge of the Australian attack, not only goalkeeper but also the defenders and the rest of the team, will have to play as a unit," said Sohel.

Ishant & SL trio charged

AFP, Colombo

Three Sri Lankan players and one Indian have been charged for misconduct in the third Test, the International Cricket Council said on Tuesday.

India's fast bowler Ishant Sharma and the Sri Lankan trio of Dhammika Prasad, Dinesh Chandimal and Lahiru Thirimanne were involved in a heated flare-up during the fourth day's play on Monday in Colombo.

Tempers rose in the final session as Sharma and the Sri Lankan fielders had a heated exchange after Prasad bowled three consecutive bouncers to the Indian tailender.

Chandimal nudged Sharma with his shoulder and Thirimanne too joined in the verbal spat, forcing umpires Nigel Llong and Rod Tucker to step in to calm down the players.

As Sharma hurried off the field after the Indian innings ended, Prasad sprinted behind him and television pictures showed the two players speaking to each other outside the dressing rooms.

Sharma, who was fined 65 per cent of his match fees for misconduct during the second Test, faces a possible suspension by match referee Andy Pycroft.

India's long wait ends

AFP, Colombo



India overcame a gallant century by Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews to win their final Test by 117 runs on Tuesday and end a 22-year wait for a series win on the island.

The hosts, set a victory target of 386, were bowled out for 268 after tea on the fifth day at the Sinhalese Sports Club in Colombo to hand the tourists a 2-1 series scoreline.

Sri Lanka were revived by a 135-run stand for the sixth wicket between Mathews and debutant Kusal Perera, but the dismissal of both batsmen on either side of tea sealed their fate.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin finished with four for 69 to complete the series with 21 wickets.

Seamer Ishant Sharma took three wickets in the innings, including the vital scalp of Mathews after tea, to take his tally to 200 wickets in his 65th Test.

India fought back after losing the opening Test in Galle by 63 runs to win the second at P Sara Oval in Colombo by 278 runs and then took the enthralling final Test in the last session of play.

India's last series success in Sri Lanka came under Mohammad Azharuddin's captaincy in 1993 when they won 1-0.

Sri Lanka had slipped to a shaky 107 for 5 before lunch when Mathews and Perera joined hands to bat out a major part of the afternoon session and lift the hosts to 249-6 by tea.

Mathews made 110, his seventh Test century and the second in successive matches after scoring 102 in the second Test, before he was leg-before to Ishant in the first over after tea with the second new ball.

Left-handed Perera followed his 55 in the

first innings with 70, becoming only the second Sri Lankan after Dinesh Chandimal to score two half-centuries in his debut Test.

Perera looked set for a bigger score when he was dismissed shortly before tea, playing a reverse sweep off Ashwin straight to Rohit Sharma at point.

India grabbed the last five wickets for 26 runs after Sri Lanka were sailing at a comfortable 242-5 before Perera's dismissal.

Sri Lanka began the final session with a reasonable hope of surpassing the difficult target -- needing 137 runs more with a possible 36 overs remaining -- but India tightened the screws after tea to emerge victorious.

The tourists grabbed two key wickets on the fifth morning when Sri Lanka resumed at the overnight score of 67-3.

Sri Lanka added seven runs when they lost opener Kaushal Silva for 27, caught at mid-wicket by Cheteshwar Pujara attempting to hook Umesh Yadav.

Left-hander Lahiru Thirimanne made 12 when an alert Lokesh Rahul at silly point pounced on the ball and held it on second attempt as a delivery from Ashwin found an outside edge.

Mathews reached his century by pulling medium-pacer Stuart Binny for his 12th boundary and celebrated the feat by driving the next ball to mid-on for another four.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 312
SRI LANKA: First innings 201
INDIA: Second innings 274
SRI LANKA: Second innings 268 (Silva 27, Mathews 110, Perera 70; I Sharma 3-32, Yadav 2-65, Ashwin 4-69)
Result: India won by 117 runs and clinched 3-match series 2-1.
Player-of-the-match: Cheteshwar Pujara.
Player-of-the-series: Ravichandran Ashwin.



After a light warm-up session yesterday morning, the Bangladesh players and officials stopped by at the Kings Park in Perth. The booters will take on the Socceroos in a World Cup-Asian Cup qualifier at the Nib Stadium in the Western Australian city tomorrow.

PHOTO: BFF



India seamer Ishant Sharma (3rd from L), with a match-haul of eight wickets, scripted India's win in the third and final Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'We're part of history'

PTI, Colombo

A delighted India Test captain Virat Kohli termed his team's 2-1 series win in Sri Lanka on Tuesday as a "magnificent milestone" as they now became a "part of history".

"It's a magnificent milestone for a young team winning here after 22 years. I am told that no Indian team has won a Test series coming back from being 0-1 down. So we have created a bit of history," a satisfied Kohli said at the post-match presentation ceremony.

Kohli termed the brilliant dressing room environment being one of the primary reasons for this success.

Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews conceded that poor batting let his side down.

"Disappointed, especially after winning a crucial toss. Our batting flopped again. The bowlers were outstanding. And then after giving them a 100-run lead, we did not bat well. We could have kept them under 300 in the first innings."

Feni-N'ganj final today

SPORTS REPORTER



The curtain falls on the Sailor-BFF U-15 National Football Championship today as Narayanganj take on Feni in the final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

These two teams have earned their place in the final two months after they had started the campaign alongside 59 other district teams in the preliminary round of the nation-wide completion. The A total of eight teams -- Sylhet, Natore, Barisal, Narayanganj, Jessore, Thakurgaon, Feni Dhaka -- emerged as zonal champions, who then engaged in the final round matches over the last 10 days at the country's premier football venue.

Now Narayanganj and Feni, both teams coming from two districts with distinct footballing culture which produced champions in national competitions such as the Sher-e-Bangla Cup, the Suhrawardi Cup, the Ma and Moni Gold Cup and Club Cup Championship, will try to follow the footsteps of their seniors by clinching the title of the Sailor-BFF U-15 National Football Championship.

"Even though we have had little time to prepare for the tournament, we are hopeful about returning home with the title as we have some quality players, who are capable of making the difference on the pitch," said Narayanganj coach Aslam Chowdhury, adding that captain Antor Kumar and Hridoy were part of the Bangladesh team which recently clinched the SAFF U-16 Championship title.

Terming Narayanganj as strong opponents, Feni coach Ashraful Anwar said, "We have been having hard training and competition since June. Now, we are waiting to finish it on a high by winning the title."

Clarke skips Big Bash League

CRICINFO, Melbourne

Former Australia captain Michael Clarke has withdrawn his contract with his Big Bash League team the Melbourne Stars, according to a report in The Age. Clarke, 34, signed a two-year contract with the team in April and was set to captain them.

Currently holidaying in Europe with his wife Kyly following his retirement from international cricket after the Ashes, Clarke has decided to make his next move after taking some time off from the game.

However, Clarke hinted that his association with cricket will continue and hoped to join Australian broadcaster Channel Nine's commentary team. Back injuries frequently disrupted Clarke's 11-year Test career and he also said that he may have to reconsider putting his name up for the Indian Premier League auction next year.