

SPORT

Fizz breaks the ice

Just over a year has passed since Mustafizur Rahman was introduced to international cricket and yet he has certainly exceeded any individual dream. The 20-year-old left-arm pace bowler has never been out of the spotlight since he announced his arrival on the big stage with the wicket of Shahid Afridi. His victims on debut in three different formats -- Afridi in T20I, Rohit Sharma in ODI and Hashim Amla in Test -- are only a small statement of what the cutter-master has achieved so far. Ask him and he will tell you to add AB de Villiers to that list of firsts after his outstanding exploits in the Indian Premier League (IPL), considered as the biggest stage for a galaxy of world stars, where he confirmed his status as the most sensational left-arm pace bowler who has come to stay for a long time. Mustafizur has not talked for a while after playing a big part in leading Sunrisers Hyderabad to their IPL glory. But after enjoying an undisturbed rest in the tranquil settings of Tetulia village and in the care of his beloved mother, he broke the silence to The Daily Star's Sports Editor Mohammed Al-Amin on Monday night. And during that nearly hour-long session at the BCB Academy lounge, the soft-spoken Mustafizur, sporting a red T-shirt, navy-blue jeans and with a new-look mo-hawk hair cut, has decided open up to the world that has so far acknowledged him as an introvert individual and prone to homesickness. It was an amazing experience for someone whose first bout with the cricketer during the T20 World Cup in India produced only answers such as 'yes', 'no', 'very well'. This time around Mustafizur not only provided a lot of insight to his thinking as a cricketer, he also said how keen he is to learn English and how much he enjoys batting while playing tape-tennis cricket with his friends at home. Here is the first part of his thoughts on an array of issues and events.

On his IPL experience

Actually no matter how good you bowl sometimes you need to depend on luck as well. Sometimes I got wickets even with bad balls while in the national team. You don't always get wickets with your best deliveries. Maybe if batsmen tried to attack me like the other bowlers, then maybe I would have gotten more wickets. My bowling is best for wickets that are dry. It turns after landing. It was similar in Kolkata but it got a little slow off the pitch.

Everybody cared for me in the IPL. Tom Moody used to constantly enquire about my fitness levels. Even when I came back here, he asked me about my side-strain and wanted to know if I was fit. (David) Warner... what can I say about him. He is a lot of fun on the field. He is good to watch. He is quite aggressive on the field as well against the opposition and that's fun to watch.

I did not see the IPL life outside of cricket. My teammates had a lot of fun. I never used to go to the parties. They used to go there and have a lot of fun. I preferred watching serials online. I enjoyed that.

I enjoyed bowling against (Virat) Kohli. He is a very good batsman. In the final he hit me for a six. But again, that's nothing really bad. I may get hit for boundaries. I am not a machine after all. There is nothing

wrong in that.

The game that I enjoyed most was against Punjab when I gave away just nine runs and took two wickets in four overs. On that day, everything I wanted to do with the ball happened. Everything went my way. My favourite wicket was the yorker I bowled against Andre Russel. I enjoyed that.

Actually I didn't notice the increase in my pace in the IPL. I feel that if a bowler can bowl at around 135, that is good enough. What is more important is to be in a good rhythm.

His ideal recipe for food and travelling

I lost a lot of weight in India mainly because of food and travel. We actually played almost all our away games a day after reaching that place and so it was a bit taxing. We enjoyed more rest days when we played at Hyderabad. Actually, I could not eat that much because in India the taste of the food was different from ours. (At home) I used to eat fresh food from the kitchen markets and my mother cooked them in a specific way. I have grown up this way and had hardly tasted foods from hotels. Even when I stay in Dhaka I hardly go out to have a taste of different foods. I still only prefer eating from two hotels -- Hotel Prince in Mirpur, where they have an item that includes llish, begun and alu and Cookers 7's bhuna khichuri. In England I might not have the same problem because



there are a lot of Bangladeshis living there and I'm not talking about Bangladeshi restaurants. Actually, I'm talking about the Bangladeshi families. When I last toured England with the U-19 team a few families served us home-made food. Those might not have been fresh (frozen) but that's what I loved most. That will do.

On his bowling arsenal

I don't bowl round the wicket because the deliveries I bowl are not effective from that end. I was working on a different type of delivery but I have decided to stop that after feeling pain in my shoulder again. I will work on it

again while I'm in England. For a left-arm bowler it's natural to bring the ball in to the right-hand batsman. I was trying but it was not happening. Besides, Wasim Akram showed me a style of gripping the ball. It's not exactly shaping up like his action. Everyone has their own style. For example [Trent] Boult wanted to learn the way I bowl cutters. I showed it to him. But when he tried it didn't even land on the wicket. So I need to practice the in-swingers, but I also need to keep in mind my style.

Honestly speaking, I like it when batsmen jump around a lot. When a

batsman moves a lot I start to think. When I bowl towards the end I can grip the ball in a particular way and bowl four different deliveries. So when batsmen move around a lot I can do a lot of things. I can change the way I want to bowl right at the last moment. So that helps me. I hold the ball the same way, but some may think that I might bowl a bouncer, a slower or even a faster ball.

Early inspirations

Actually when I was playing for the under-16 level, Sheikh Salauddin sir, who passed away, used to show me on the laptop videos of national players bowling in the academy. I used to see those videos back then and feel inspired and determined to do well. I don't think of my achievements as something extraordinary. I don't take the pressure. I don't think much about the game. I just like to play the way I feel. Yes, you have to listen to what the coach says, but the coach won't teach me by holding my hand.

His ambition in England

Back when I went to England with the Under-19 team I could hardly understand anything like what to do and how to do it. I don't want to say that I know everything now but I can understand what I have to do or how to do it. Our fielding coach is from Sussex and I have talked with him. He said in England I will get all types of wicket including a type of wicket that we have

in Mirpur. Besides, if I can bowl in the right areas it will be a problem for them.

On learning English

There won't be any problem for me when I go to England. No matter what happens, I will learn while playing. When BPL was going on everyone told me that I will get a call in the IPL. Even though I couldn't speak English I used to go to our foreign team members and try to speak to them. I used to learn. Even during the team meetings I spoke English that I knew was wrong but it didn't matter. Now, if I get to know a little too much there may be a problem. I will learn slowly as time passes by. I won't need books or pens. I will learn it through cricket.

Bowling boots

When I was in the U-19 team I was having ankle problems because of not having proper bowling boots. My foot size is 12 but I was using 11 at that time. This is a kind of size you will not get in the shops and the official boot provider to the national team could not find one for me. So, I tried a different brand and it worked for me. Still, I need to work through my agent to have those tailor-made boots straight from the factories. I have done that in India during my participation in the IPL and I have already communicated it in England where it's a bit easier to get the size of my boots. This time I have asked for 12-and-a-half.

Holder leads Windies for India Tests

AFP, St. John's

The Jason Holder-captained West Indies squad for the upcoming four-Test series against India was released on Monday, with Denesh Ramdin a frustrated absentee.

Ramdin took to social media to express his displeasure at being overlooked for the series with the first Test starting in Antigua on July 21.

The West Indies wicketkeeper was served with an unspecified punishment for venting his frustration in public, the West Indies Cricket Board announced in a statement. Also missing was 32-year-old right-arm fast bowler Jerome Taylor.



Yet to pen a deal with the Bangladesh Football Federation, coach-in-waiting Tom Saintfiet has already started his work with the national team. He got the players through his first practice session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium as the team's camp for the Asian Cup qualifying playoff against Bhutan got underway yesterday.

Saintfiet's first day

SPORTS REPORTER

With a vision of building one solid team before Bangladesh encounters Bhutan in the Qualifier play-offs, Belgian Tom Saintfiet, possibly the new national team coach, started his six-day training camp with 29 players at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Saintfiet, who has yet to sign a contract with Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), wasted no time to get to know his charges after he arrived in Dhaka early in the morning, the players as well as Saintfiet were to report to BFF headquarters by 11:30am but the 42-year-old opted to show up an hour and a half earlier than scheduled. Of the 32 players listed, three footballers—Nabib Newaj Jibon, Shahedul Alam Juniro and Monamem Khan Raju—did not report due to sickness as well as personal matters.

Despite the dark cloud that now seems to loom over the issue of appointing the Belgian as the

booter's boss, after his name was placed in a short-list of candidates for the post of Nigerian football team's head coach, both parties—BFF and Saintfiet—seem optimistic about signing a three-month contract within a few days and working together in the near future.

In an effort to clarify his position on the matter, after meeting with BFF president Kazi Salahuddin and vice president Kazi Nabil Ahmed who is also chairman of the national teams committee, Saintfiet told reporters:

"I saw exactly what you saw. As a coach, I was without a job for the last two months. I sent my CV to different federations all over the world and Nigeria was one of them and on Friday I saw I was in the short-list but I don't have proper information about it. Even I don't have any information to compel me to go there for an interview.

When he asked about the possible contract with Bangladesh, the Belgian had this to say:

"I received the contract while I

was in the plane yesterday [Monday]. I arrived here today [Tuesday] at 4:45am and haven't really looked at it yet. I will check it briefly then forward it to my lawyer and so within the coming days expect to finalise the deal."

Though there may be ambiguity over the contract, it has been proven that there is no shortage of professionalism in Saintfiet as he took it upon himself to deliver a 15-minute motivational speech to the players during the introductory session at the BFF house yesterday.

Saintfiet also stressed the importance of discipline and requested his charges to be professional in order to achieve their goals.

"I have seen videos in Youtube and such, this team has potential, you guys can't believe how much. We need a team of players who want it. In football we don't win with the best performers but the best team. So discipline, occupation, ambition will be very important, not only skill but also personality and mentality. Sometimes a player with less quality

and more discipline brings more success than the better player with lower discipline."

Saintfiet then went on to add how he lives with great discipline.

"I'm disciplined. I'll give you an example, I'm not Muslim but I don't know the taste of beer, wine or any kind of alcohol and I never smoked in my life.

"For me, the name of the footballer is of little consequence. I am not here to create a famous player rather I am here just to create a single team that will get good results against Bhutan and also other games in the future," Saintfiet warned the players adding that he may bring in new players to his Bhutan-bound squad after watching the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League.

Lastly, BFF vice president Kazi Nabil Ahmed stated that they expect to sign a three-month deal with Saintfiet, who is expected to leave on July 21 for a one-week vacation before returning to complete his contract, in the next three to four days.

Root ready for No 3

AFP, London

England batsman Joe Root is confident he can cope with the added responsibility of batting at number three during the upcoming Test series against Pakistan.

Root has been promoted one place up the order following former number three Nick Compton's decision to take time out from cricket following a poor series against Sri Lanka.

Although not true of Compton, number three has historically been the place occupied by a team's leading batsman.

Root, who had a brief spell as an England opener, was persuaded to make the move by captain Alastair Cook and coach Trevor Bayliss.

Now the 25-year-old Yorkshireman will slot in at number three for the first of a four-Test series against Pakistan starting at Lord's on Thursday.

"We had a few discussions throughout the season that it could be a possibility moving forward," Root told a Lord's news conference on Tuesday.

"I think the fact I had quite a long time to think about it and to chat it over with the selectors and Trevor and Cooky, it probably made it a bit easier, rather than being thrown into the role," added Root, who has scored nearly 3,500 runs in his 42 Tests at an average of over 52 with nine hundreds.

"The way they've dealt with it has been really good and it's given me time to get my head around it.

"I feel pretty comfortable going into the series and it's now just about trying to make sure that moving forward that's something I feel comfortable with and I can keep making big scores and contributing to winning Test matches."

'Amir can do us damage'

IANS, London

Veteran England pacer Stuart Broad said his team needs to forget about Pakistan bowler Mohammad Amir's past and concentrate on his cricketing abilities as he is capable of doing some real damage during their upcoming Test series.

England will begin their Test series against Pakistan on Thursday at Lord's and Amir is set to make a high-profile return to the Test scene, at the very ground where he became embroiled in a spot-fixing scandal in 2010.

The 24-year-old was one of the hottest properties in world cricket at the time and is now playing again after serving his suspension.

His performance in the tour opener against Somerset last week suggested that he could be a real threat to England this summer.

"It is a huge story, back for his first Test at Lord's since the controversy six years ago, a massive story. But, as a team, it is a dangerous place to get waylaid by that, because we could find ourselves in a lot of trouble," Broad was quoted as saying by Sky Sports on Monday.

"Having seen the way Amir has bowled at Taunton, we need to get in the right frame of mind, because he can do us some damage. Let's start looking at him as a cricketer and a bowler, and how we can negate that."

"I think what will help the team move on is that there is only me, Alastair Cook and Steve Finn who played in that Test. It is a very new team," he added.

England will be without Broad's regular new-ball partner James Anderson for the Lord's Test, meaning Jake Ball or Toby Roland-Jones will be handed a debut.

Broad memorably bowled England to an Ashes win at Trent Bridge when Anderson was absent last year, and again impressed when England were without the Lancashire pacer in Durban last Christmas, but still managed to secure a victory over South Africa.

Broad will again lead the England bowling attack against Pakistan at Lord's this week.

"I have played 90-odd Test matches, and I can only think of maybe five or six without Jimmy. You are stepping into the unknown, but that can give you a bit extra. Trent Bridge went well, Durban went well. I hope it will go the same here," the 30-year-old said.

Broad's chief concern is the Lord's pitch, which has not tended to offer much help to pace bowlers of late.

"I think our biggest challenge is going to be this wicket, because you look at all the Middlesex scores and they are all bore draws - 500 plays 500," he concluded.



STUART BROAD