

SPORT

I never gave up hope: Mosharraf

BISHWAJIT ROY

He is still two big steps away from the last chapter, as he says. 34-year old left-arm spinner and useful late order batsman Mosharraf Hossain was called up for Bangladesh's 20-member ODI Pool and was hopeful that the fortune will favour him in making the 15-member final squad and then into the playing eleven.

In the domestic circuit he is considered a utility cricketer and he came to the national side with a lot of promise in 2008 but till date has played only three ODIs, which tells the story of a career that did not move in the right direction – one hindered by an ICL stint and the BPL match-fixing controversy.

How did he keep his hope alive?
"I never gave up hope. I was discouraged and frustrated, but I never gave up hope. I never guaranteed that I would make it, but I always kept striving for it.

"It's very hard to keep that desire alive because you're completely out of the team picture. I think it's going to be an example for the young stars that nothing's over unless you give up. I kept my hopes alive and now it's paying off," said the experienced cricketer.

"I'm considering this a new beginning. Whatever happened before, that chapter is closed. If you consider my career in three parts,

then the first is the early stage -- when I was young -- then there is the middle stage and then it's the final chapter. So I'm considering this my final chapter, from where I can give my career a proper ending," he continued.

But it was a surprise for him when he was called up to the national side from the High Performance squad. The recommendation from former Indian spinner Venkatapathy Raju played a role behind the revival.

"Definitely it came as a surprise. I heard that he (Venkatapathy Raju) gave positive feedback about me. When the [spin-bowling] camp was going on he gave me a lot of tips, shared his experience and all that has helped me. I'm following his advice. He said that compared to the others, I have more variations in my bowling arsenal because there is bounce. Everyone bowls in a very orthodox way but mine is quite unorthodox and that's why I have more variations. A coach of his stature saying that and giving me such good feedback helped my confidence a lot," said Mosharraf, who studied history at Dhaka University and got a gold medal and blue.

He regrets not being able to capitalise on his potential in international cricket, where some errors in judgement also played a part, but he has been able to draw enough satisfaction from domestic cricket in his long career.

"I definitely feel regretful as I didn't play

many internationals, but I have played a lot of top-level cricket such as the BPL. And I have some very special performances in the domestic league which most of the others don't have. I have a good record even in four-day matches in the National Cricket League, Bangladesh Cricket League. So that makes me wonder that if I had stayed in the national team during that time maybe I could have had a different career," said Mosharraf.

Having played a lot of domestic cricket, Mosharraf feels that there are still some improvements to be made to reach the desired standard, but he can now see a gulf of difference in domestic cricket from when he first started playing.

"I was new in the NCL then. Our team was batting and Halim Bhai (Halim Shah) still hadn't reached the field. Then everyone started saying 'call Halim quickly, he has to go and bat'. So then we called him and he rushed to the field. After that he put on his kit and his hat and got ready. This was at the Abahani field a long time ago.

"He was bowled off the first ball when he finally arrived and then he came back to the pavilion and went to sleep. He woke up at five in the evening and he probably had no idea that he came from home, batted and got out. Now I see players calculating till the last ball. We can take it to the next level and it is not far off. The immediate need is to fix a calendar,"



recounted Mosharraf.

The improvement in the national team has been even more marked. "In 2013 I was in the squad but didn't play a match, so my last match was eight years ago and since then Bangladesh cricket has reached new heights."

And Mosharraf, approaching his last chapter, wants to be a part of it.

Booters to play Solidarity Cup?

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh will be granted a spot in the inaugural AFC Solidarity Cup this year if they fail to beat Bhutan in their Asian Cup Play-Off Qualifier.

Though only time will tell whether Bangladesh will progress to the Asian Cup Qualifying round -- their away match against Bhutan is on October 10 -- the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has ensured at least four more international matches for the national team after confirming their entry into the Solidarity Cup, which is being arranged for the nations which fail to qualify for the 24-team Asian Cup Qualifiers.

The tournament will be held in Malaysia from November 2-15 with the participation of nine nations, from which six teams have already been eliminated from the Asian Cup Qualifiers, while the rest are waiting to know their fate after the second-round of the Asian Cup Play-Off Qualifiers on October 10.

A draw of the Solidarity Cup was also held yesterday at the AFC headquarters in Malaysia. Bangladesh has been pitted against Nepal, Pakistan, Brunei Darussalam and Timor-Leste / Chinese Taipei in Group A. Group B features Sri Lanka, Macau, Mongolia and Maldives/Laos.



Bangladesh fast bowler Taskin Ahmed (L) and left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny flash a smile for the camera during the serious business of having their bowling actions tested in Brisbane yesterday.



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Time for action, not excuses

SPORTS REPORTER



After a goalless draw against lowly Bhutan in the Asian Cup Play-off Qualifiers on Tuesday, the Bangladeshi strikers' inability to score goals has been the talk of town. It is common to lament the finishing of the strikers following any failure of the national team for the past decade, but it seems no steps have been taken to overcome the problem upfront.

A lack of individual training sessions and commitment from players, the allowance of many foreigners in the domestic league, irregularity of competitions at the lower level, the unavailability of coaching education, frequent changing of coaches, a flawed domestic structure and the game's governing body having no football plan; these are all issues commonly brought to the fore after the national team's failure in international engagements, but they are all muffled within a few days.

A lot of finger-pointing takes place after each failure, but it appears that nobody is actually eager to address the problems and consequently the standard of football is on a downward spiral.

How can we expect goals from the players like Mohammad Abdullah

and Jafar Iqbal, who have played only 16 matches at the top flight? How can we expect goals from the striking pair of Shakhawat Hossain Rony and Sohel Rana, who have hardly got a place in the starting eleven of their clubs in domestic competitions?

It is not possible to solve the dearth of quality strikers overnight, but top local coaches and club officials believe the time has come to think about a solution. They believe the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) and clubs will have to come forward and find a way to produce quality strikers in the near future.

"This question has not been raised for the first time. The same question was raised eight years ago when I guided the national team in Malaysia. So it is an issue which is being discussed for a long time. It is time for both the federation and clubs to sit together and take effective decisions on how to produce quality strikers through domestic competitions," said Sheikh Russel KC coach Shafiqul Islam Manik yesterday.

"The federation and clubs can reach a consensus to give local strikers regular spaces alongside a foreign striker in a match, then the finishing ability of the local strikers may be honed," said the former national player, adding that they hardly had any time to conduct

special training for the strikers during club training as they spend most of their time with the team's combination, tactics and game plan while analysing the weak and strong points of opponents.

Arambagh KS coach Saiful Bari Titu believes there is no question about the positional sense of the strikers who are poor finishers at both the domestic and international level.

"It is up to a player whether he wants to sit on a reserve bench of a club or play for a club throughout the season. There is hardly any opportunity to hone the skills in club training but there is no initiative from the players to undergo individual training which may help them," Titu said.

However, Titu added that there were presently a lot of distractions around footballers and the game's governing body should take an initiative to conduct a special training for upcoming strikers as well as goalkeepers during the off-season in a bid to produce quality scorers.

Abahani's football team manger Satyajit Das Rupu said that they had been giving enough opportunities to local strikers, who failed to meet the expectations of the club and that it was now the players who must take responsibility to hone their skills individually.

First ODI washed out

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh women's team tour of Ireland has so far been plagued rain and yesterday was no different as the first ODI between the sides at the Bready Cricket Club was abandoned without a ball being bowled.

It is the second time a game had to be abandoned after the second and final T20I at the same venue was abandoned due to a wet outfield. Ireland, courtesy of their 6-run win in the first T20I, claimed that series.

The second and final ODI will be held on September 10 at the same venue.

Clarke picks commentary over BBL

AGENCY, Sydney

Michael Clarke will be seen behind the microphone during the Australian summer after he penned a contract as a commentator for the forthcoming season. The 35-year-old also said that the commentary stint would stop him from partaking in the Big Bash League (BBL) for the 2016-17 season.

Clarke has also ruled out playing for New South Wales Blues in the Sheffield Shield.

Pak finish on a high

AFP, Manchester



New Twenty20 captain Sarfraz Ahmed was delighted to end the England tour on a "high note" Wednesday.

Pakistan inflicted a crushing nine-wicket win over England at Old Trafford on Wednesday in Ahmed's first match in charge of the Twenty20 side and the final match of their tour.

Fresh from Sunday's four-wicket victory in Cardiff, where Ahmed made 90 as Pakistan avoided a one-day series whitewash, the tourists held England to 135 for seven in their 20 overs.

Left-arm spinner Imad Wasim removed both England openers before fast bowler Wahab Riaz took a Twenty20-best three for 18.

Openers Sharjeel Khan (59) and Khalid Latif (59 not out) then shared a blistering century stand as Pakistan won with 31 balls to spare.

"Credit to our bowlers ... and then Khalid and Sharjeel played really well," Ahmed told reporters. "After we won the match in Cardiff, the morale was very high when we arrived here.

"But I told the players that when we are playing T20 cricket we want some energy and we want some good fielding on the ground. The players did that," he added. "This is how to play modern-day cricket."

Riaz had been plagued by no-ball problems as Pakistan came from behind to draw a four-Test series with England 2-2 -- a result that took them top of the Test standings -- before losing the one-dayers 4-1. But there was no over-stepping in Manchester.

"The credit goes to the bowling coach [Azhar Mahmood], he really helped me, he was very strict with me about the no-balls," said Riaz. "Because I was resting the last two games, he really worked hard with me," the 31-year-old man-of-the-match added.

Pakistan confounded a succession of England batsmen with their changes of pace, none more so than Riaz, who broke the 90mph barrier.

"When I was running in, I had a plan within that if I have to bowl fast, it has to be very fast and if I have to bowl slow, it has to be very slow," said Riaz.

"You have to have a lot of varieties in this T20 game. I think I was successful in that and getting wickets."

"The whole tour was very good, our Test cricket was very good. We

wanted to finish on a high note and we did," said Ahmed.

Beaten England captain Eoin Morgan blamed a rapid change in conditions for a crushing loss. Morgan said evening dew had made the new ball come on to the bat nicely, even though there was a gap of just 10 minutes between innings.

But England coach Trevor Bayliss was scathing after a disappointing end to his team's season.

SCORES IN BRIEF
ENGLAND: 135 for 7 in 20 overs (Roy 21, Hales 37, Buttler 16; Wasim 2-17, Hasan 2-24, Riaz 3-18)
PAKISTAN: 139 for 1 in 14.5 overs (Sharjeel 59, Latif 59 not out)
Result: Pakistan won by nine wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Wahab Riaz.



Pakistan batsman Sharjeel Ahmed (R) set the foundation for his side as he and opening partner Khalid Latif scored over 100 runs. PHOTO: REUTERS



Dilshan set for swansong

AGENCIES, Colombo



Sri Lanka and Australia will face-off for one final time on this tour in the second T20I at Colombo and while the hosts will be eager to level the series they will, more importantly, want to give a fitting farewell to one of their titans, Tillakaratne Dilshan.

Australia came out firing on all cylinders in the first T20I, amassing a world-record total of 263 in their 20 overs courtesy of Glen Maxwell's unbeaten 185. Fresh from the wounds of the 85-run defeat in that match, the hosts will have it all to play for.

Dilshan -- one of the few remnants of Sri Lanka's 2014 World T20 winning team -- has done it all for his country and will be looking to go out on a high, but his teammates will be well aware of the Aussies' destructive abilities and will have to counter aggressively if they want to give their former captain a fitting farewell.

In his 497th international match, Sri Lankan fans will be hoping that the 39-year-old can conjure something out of his heyday to give his side a win. Equally as much, they will be hoping that their bowlers can put the brakes on Australia, who have been blazing through since a 3-0 whitewash in the Test series.

However, the odds seem stacked against the hosts, who have only won only three T20Is out of the 15 which they have played in 2016.

Meanwhile, Australia will be hoping for another dominant showing to wrap up a clean sweep and complete their recovery after their abysmal performance in the Tests.

Port-of-Spain, Durban get ICC warnings

CRICINFO

The ICC has handed official warnings under its pitch and outfield monitoring process to Kingsmead in Durban and the Queen's Park Oval in Port-of-Spain.

Kingsmead hosted the first Test between South Africa and New Zealand from August 19 and the Queen's Park Oval the fourth Test between West Indies and India from August 18. Both matches were heavily curtailed because of outfield conditions.

Andy Pycroft and Ranjan Madugalle, the match referees for the two Tests, both rated the outfields "poor" in their official reports.

Madugalle and Geoff Allardice, the ICC's general manager, reviewed CSA's response to the "poor" rating, while Allardice and match referee David Boon reviewed WICB's response.

Since this was the first occasion either ground had received a "poor" rating, they stood to receive either a warning or a fine not exceeding 15,000 dollars, along with "a directive for appropriate corrective action".

In all, 11 sessions out of 15 were lost to a wet and soft outfield at Kingsmead. Only 22 overs of play were possible in the Port-of-Spain Test.