

SPORT

Silent conflicts of interest

BISHWAJIT ROY

Cricket Coaching School was renamed as Shinepukur Cricket Club almost silently. According to Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), Shinepukur is a sister concern of Beximco Group, which bought the club after they defaulted on their players' payments. Now this Shinepukur Cricket Club have become champions in the First Division Cricket League -- also silently because all the noise around the country's cricket is focused mostly on the Tigers' round-the-year activities -- to enter the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League.

Everything seems okay if we can stop here. But there are some issues which deserve attention. There have been widespread whispers about the low standard and the biased umpiring; a perennial problem in our domestic league competitions.

Most importantly, the incident during a match between Shinepukur and Rupganj Tiger Club -- which was so renamed from Kalabagan Cricket Academy -- at BKSP on February 11, brought the conflict of interest issue to the fore once again. Former Bangladesh captain turned BCB director, development committee chairman and national team manager Khaled Mahmud played a vital role as coach to bring glory for Shinepukur but on that particular day he was at the centre of chaotic scenes and unleashed filthy language towards opposition players.

When contacted yesterday, Mahmud admitted that he had said something bad but also explained the reason behind the incident -- the opponent players' 'unsporting' behaviour forced him to do so. He also said that he later apologised for that.

This kind of incident is nothing new in the domestic circuit but the question is whether an influential board member can be directly involved with a domestic team because therein lies the conflict of interest.

It would have been fine had Mahmud sacrificed his multiple duties with the BCB and the national team to be the coach for Shinepukur in his capacity as a Beximco employee, but as many observed his presence influenced domestic matches on many occasions.

The issue of conflict of interest is a major issue in the incumbent cricket authority as it has also dogged the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) with BCB directors having connections to franchise owners.

Like Shinepukur, the Dhaka Dynamites franchise is also owned by Beximco, where BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon is managing director of their pharmaceuticals unit and board director Ismail Haider Mallick is an executive.

Kazi Inam Ahmed, another BCB director, is a director at Gemcon Group, which bought the Khulna franchise while another BCB director Abdul Awal Chowdhury has been part of the Barisal Bulls' ownership since 2015.

It is in no way a healthy situation for an organisation like the BCB. So when Mahmud flexed his muscles in a first division match, one cannot judge it as an age-old practice to be papered over; rather it is an issue which needs to be addressed properly for the wider health of the country's cricket.



Latvia women's Rollball team practise diligently at the Mansur Ali Handball Stadium yesterday, ahead of the Rollball World Cup which begins today.

PHOTO: STAR

Rollball World Cup set to roll out

SPORTS REPORTER



The way players moved back and forth on the Mansur Ali Handball Stadium's newly painted red surface instantly gave the impression of figure skaters, but teams were actually practising for a little-known sport called Rollball, a relatively new discipline that combines skating, handball and basketball.

Dressed in protective gear and their inline skates, the Latvian men and women along with the Slovenian girls displayed a glimpse of their skills yesterday afternoon, a day before the Rollball World Cup which gets underway today in the capital.

Rollball, which originated in neighbouring India, is not only a little-known sport in Bangladesh but in Latvia, Slovenia and other parts of the world as well.

"Rollball is not popular in our country as the people of Slovenia don't know much about the game. We have only one team but we are trying to make the game popular and we are going to schools to teach students about the game," said Slovenia women's team captain Nina Lonoar, who

has arrived with only five players even though each team features six players during a match.

The Slovenian team comprises players from different disciplines such as ice hockey, inline hockey and basketball while Lonoar herself is an ice hockey player and coach.

Latvian women's team captain Ilze Kronberga is also an ice hockey player but prefers to play rollball in order to meet new people around the world.

"It is something new, interesting and a great opportunity to meet teams we don't play in other sporting competitions. In Latvia, ice hockey is much more popular than basketball but rollball is still unfamiliar," said Kronberga, who has a profession other than rollball while her teammates are also involved in different professions such as medicine, teaching, etc.

However, Latvian men's team captain Viesturs Cimermanis believes rollball will one day become a popular sport across the globe as he terms it a unique discipline.

"It is a pretty unique game. There is nothing similar being played around the world. There are big opportunities in countries like Bangladesh and India because they have big

populations to see it and get knowledge on it. It is getting popular in countries like France, Netherlands, Latvia and Slovenia. What happens in the next five years, I can't predict, but I hope its popularity will go up in the future," said Cimermanis, who is also an ice hockey aficionado and feels that the Bangladesh weather is 'crazy', having come from a minus-nine degrees celsius environment.

Like Cimermanis, Bangladesh men's team captain Mohammad Asif Iqbal also has big hopes for rollball and believes the game will spread in Bangladesh through this World Cup.

"Rollball is now a known game in Bangladesh and it has good prospect in the future," said Asif.

"Our international results are not bad. As we became second runners-up in the inaugural Asian Rollball Championship in 2007 and then finished seventh in the last World Cup in India. This time we have set our sights on the final as under local coaches and the Indian coach, we have undergone three-and-a-half months of preparation, which was unusual in the past," said Asif.

Bangladesh will play their first match against Hong Kong today at the newly-built Sheikh Russel Roller Skating Complex in Paltan.



(L) Players of Kyrgyzstan's FC Alga Bishkek and (R) Nepal's Manang Marshyangdi Club practise at the Chittagong Bandar ground yesterday, ahead of the Sheikh Kamal Int'l Club Cup tournament which will start tomorrow.

PHOTOS: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Siddikur falters

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's top golfer Siddikur Rahman had a forgettable start to the ISPS Handa World Super 6, ending the first round in joint 128th position at the Lake Karrinyup Country Club in Perth, Australia yesterday.

The tournament replaces the Perth International on the European Tour and is trialling a new format, through which 156 players will be cut down to the top 65 after the first two rounds. After the third round on Saturday, the top 24 will go through a knock-out round on Sunday with the top eight being seeded and the bottom 16 being brought down to eight after a one-on-one six-hole round. The bottom eight will then meet the seeded eight in a similar round, which will be followed by quarterfinals, semifinals and a final to decide the winner.

Siddikur, however, is unlikely to make it through to the weekend as his three-over-par 75 has already placed him in the wrong end of the table, nine shots behind leaders Brett Rumford of Australia and Mark Foster of England (six-under-par), and four behind the group currently in 65th spot (one-under-par).

Siddikur traded five bogeys for two birdies through the 18 holes of golf yesterday.



SIDDIKUR RAHMAN

Wade sure that back will hold up

REUTERS, Mumbai

Australia wicketkeeper Matthew Wade is confident his back problem will not flare up during the team's four-Test series in India, the 29-year-old said on Thursday.

Wade abandoned the recent one-day tour of New Zealand to return home to manage a bulging disc before joining his team mates at a pre-series training camp in Dubai.

"It's just something that I'll have to manage," Wade told reporters at Mumbai's Brabourne Stadium.

"The disc just bulged a little bit but it just hit one of the nerves, so it took a little while to come right.

"I've done it before, touch wood it doesn't happen again but if it does I'm confident that I can turn it around pretty quick."

Australia will take on world number one India in the first of the four Tests at Pune next Thursday and Wade is aware that his keeping techniques will be thoroughly tested in India's spin-friendly conditions.

"It's trying to get all that out of your mind and stick to the basics," the Victoria captain said.

"The ball that turns and bounces, you'll react if your technique's good.

"It's about trying to hone my technique in the next week or two, then when you do get one that spits out of the rough it's just trusting your technique.

"But I quite enjoy keeping over here, the ball beats the bat a lot more up to the stumps so that's probably the challenge.

"In Australia the ball doesn't beat the bat consistently so it's hard to get a consistent rhythm up to the stumps," he said.

Malinga set to return against Aus today

ESPN CRICINFO



Sri Lanka fast bowler Lasith Malinga is set to make a return to national colours for the first time since playing his last international match in February 2016 when Sri Lanka take on Australia in the first of three T20s at the Melbourne Cricket Ground today.

The match will feature a new-look Australian team as many of the seniors -- Steven Smith, David Warner, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, etc. -- will be part of the team that begins a three-day warm-up match in Mumbai today ahead of the first Test against India.

Aaron Finch will lead Australia's Twenty20 outfit in the first of three games against Sri Lanka. It is a remarkable scenario, but one that will at least give a few new faces - Jhye Richardson, Ashton Turner and Michael Klinger, for example - an opportunity to represent their country. Still, the absence of such key players

makes it hard not to view this as nearer to an Australia A outfit than the true national side.

Sri Lanka enter the series with closer to a full-strength squad, although like Australia they are without their regular T20 captain - Angelo Mathews is unavailable due to a hamstring injury, and Upul Tharanga will stand in as skipper. But it is a squad with plenty of changes from their most recent T20 group, with allrounders Dasun Shanaka and Milinda Siriwardana, as well as batsmen Dilshan Munaweera and Chamara Kapugedara included, having been left out of the touring party that won in South Africa last month.

But the most notable inclusion is that of Lasith Malinga, who has played virtually no cricket for nearly a year due to injuries. It didn't take him long to have an impact on his return against the Prime Minister's XI on Wednesday: he struck in the first over of the game.



Pakistan vow to host PSL final in Lahore

AFP, Dubai

Pakistani cricket officials have vowed to stage the final of their Twenty20 league in Lahore next month, despite a powerful Taliban suicide bomb blast which killed 13 people there this week.

The first two rounds of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) are being played in Dubai and Sharjah, but organisers had planned the March 5 final in the eastern Pakistani city, vowing "head of state security" for international players.

However multiple Taliban suicide attacks in Pakistan this week, including Monday's bomb in Lahore, put those plans in jeopardy.

"We are committed to hosting the final in Lahore as our people want it there and it will be a step towards reviving international cricket," PSL chairman Najam Sethi told AFP Thursday in Dubai.