

Developing young athletes

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there was plenty of love and the sport was very popular. However, we lacked a proper system in the initial days and it won't be wrong to state that we were pushed quite early to the top most tier of test cricket.

However, after the difficult years had passed, Bangladesh gradually began to win at the age-level tournaments. The likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Tamim Iqbal were quite popular even before they entered the national team and that was because they were used to winning in the age-level matches.

Today the age-level contests are a lot more competitive than the batch that gave birth to the likes of Shakib and Mushfiqur, and as a result, Bangladesh is churning out star cricketers one after the other.

Yes, there's a huge difference between age-level cricket and national cricket, but even that's going to change with time. That's a matter of crossing a barrier. At the moment, the Bangladesh cricket team is crossing barriers almost every season, and make no mistake, every positive step that they take will only further encourage age-level cricketers.

For a sport to develop, you need the youngsters to love the game first. That love arrives when they see results. In the case of the girls from Kalsindur, several of them joined Mofizuddin's team after their seniors won the Gold Cup. With regards to cricket, there were many highlights.

One of the top highlights would be Shakib Al Hasan. The cricketer has gone on to do things that no Bangladeshi cricketer could have imagined of doing in the past. It's not a coincidence that there are a number of spinning all-rounders in Bangladesh's pipeline. It is because they are particularly inspired by someone they love.

The second step would be to provide the youngsters with a place to play the



The Bangladeshi Under 16 girls football team wasn't the only group that did well in Football this year. Their juniors, the under 14 national team, brought accolades by winning the AFC Under 14 Girls Regional (South and Central) Championship. The wins just go on to depict the bright future of women's football in the country.

sport that they love. The Kalsindur girls got that and so did a majority of the cricketers who lived outside Dhaka. Again, it's not a coincidence that a huge number of national cricketers are from outside the capital.

Mustafizur Rahman used to play cricket with a taped tennis ball in his village in Tetulia, Shakib Al Hasan was a restless child in Satkhira and only realised his talent once he joined the

Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan.

Unfortunately, the urban areas haven't been able to provide that space. Just think about it, youngsters are compelled to run around on their terraces or are compelled to rely on digital games these days.

These may seem like small factors, but this is where it should begin.

Structures and policies are perhaps more important, but they start to mat-

ter at a later stage. Take for instance the case of hockey in Bangladesh. One can't expect them to do well if you aren't able to host a domestic tournament for years.

This in turn discourages youngsters to take up hockey as a professional sport and compels them to focus on something else.

The government has a huge role to play here. One needs to understand

that sports in Bangladesh does not mean cricket. A one dimensional approach can never be a good thing.

Policies that help Bangladeshis target medals in international events should be maintained. If we don't, we are bound to lose out on a number of talented athletes.

The writer is a sports reporter at The Daily Star.

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