

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE BANGLADESH CRICKET TEAM

NAFIS IMTIAZ ONISH

Dear Tigers,
I have been quite sombre for the past few days. It pains to watch you lose in the semis. So close, yet so far. I was sad, I was angry; we could have put up a total that even the Indian "superstar" batting line-up would have struggled to cruise past.

However, once I swallowed the grief, I felt really guilty – for how WE, as a nation, do not appreciate you enough. Thank you so much for taking us beyond what we could ever dream of. Thank you, for showing the world what we can achieve when our heart is in the right place.

My journey with my beloved team began before I could even comprehend any of the rules. It is funny how we forget things that change the course of our lives and remember things we do not know why we remember. You are such an enigmatic memory. Bangladesh had beaten Pakistan in the 1999 ICC World Cup in Northampton. I somehow vividly remember everyone in our neighbourhood out on the streets, wild with celebration. As the little me watched the celebration, I could not fathom why it meant so much, but I so dearly wish I



PHOTO: AFP

could go back in time now and rejoice with everyone.

Growing up, I learned to watch cricket rather religiously with my father. However, it never felt quite satisfying to look up to Adam Gilchrist, Andrew Flintoff or Sachin Tendulkar as my favourite players while my own country strived to put up a "respectable loss". I would make up tournaments in my head and fantasise about Bangladesh lifting the trophy. I clearly remember the historic victory in 2005 against the then world champions, Australia. The overwhelming feeling was quickly marred by the following defeats. Sure, we won matches here and there against Zimbabwe and Kenya, but it never felt like we would grow as big as we are now.

It is an unforeseen yet absolute delight to go through the sweet dilemma of having to choose 1 out of 11 favourite players now, all from my very own country. It feels like I have known you forever. It fills me with immense pride as we chant "Bangladesh! Bangladesh!" on top of our lungs every time you are out on the field, wearing your hearts on your sleeves. From winning the first series abroad against West Indies and reaching the quarters of 2015 ICC World Cup to the semi-final of Champions Trophy this year, you have never looked back. And as your supporters we have forgotten to look back as well. Maybe that is one key reason why we often fail to remember how far you have come and cuss you out any time you deliver anything less than what we think you are capable of.

There is always such a plethora of emotions every time you step into the field. While you had nothing to lose before, you are now a force to be reckoned with. I



PHOTO: REUTERS

was there in the stadium when West Indies bowled us out for 58. I was there in both the Asia Cup finals. But as I solemnly sat under the gloomy fireworks, I realised a lot had changed between the two finals. As a wise fan aptly pointed out: "Somewhere between an Ashraful century in Cardiff and a Mahmudullah-Shakib partnership in Cardiff, Bangladesh grew up."

And Bangladesh has indeed grown up. As a cricket-playing nation, as fans, we have evolved together, and that has to be the best part. I consider myself privileged to be in the generation that saw the rise of this brilliant team. I am fortunate to have watched a loving passionate leader like Mashrafe, who despite all the injuries, comes back time and time again to look after a squad he calls his family. I am glad to have witnessed a Bangladeshi player dominate the all-rounder rankings for such a long time and make "Shakib Al Hasan" a household name. I have seen how a hard-hitting reckless young lad who took the world by storm in 2007 flourished into one of the finest composed openers. We have players like

Mushfiq and Mahmudullah who bolster the team while exciting youngsters like Mustafiz and Sabbir entertain the whole world.

There lies the beauty of the team. You get our blood gushing through our veins. You give our generation reason to take pride in the Bangladeshi athleticism. I, on behalf of everyone, apologise for not always having your back when you fail to deliver. Yes, there is room for improvement still, but know this, we will ALWAYS proudly don the red and green jersey for you. We will always paint our faces in your colours and follow you to the end of the world. Whether Mirpur or Cardiff, you will hear the stadium roar your name.

Do not lose heart. We know this is just the beginning of endless new, hopeful possibilities. Win or lose, you will always have us right beside you.

Nafis Imtiaz Onish believes grinning is the answer to everything and avidly loves art, astronomy & all things nerdy. Send him Carl Sagan fan art at nafisimtiaz17@gmail.com



BUBT বি ইউ বি টি
Bangladesh University of Business and Technology

Rupnagar, Mirpur-2, Dhaka-1216

Phone: PABX: 9024266, 9024277, 9015397, 9020132-4, Website: www.bubt.ac.bd

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