

SPORT

A DECADE OF MAHMUDULLAH

Mahmudullah Riyad completed ten years in the national side yesterday. The right-hander spoke to the press on the occasion and admitted that although he had a few ups and downs since that fateful day in 2007, he was glad to be a part of the Tigers' meteoric rise. The excerpts are below:



On the occasion of Mahmudullah Riyad completing 10 years in the national side, one cannot forget the moment that the right-hander hit a match-winning hundred against England in the 2015 World Cup in Adelaide.

'Confidence is his secret weapon'

BISHWAJIT ROY



Mahmudullah Riyad became the last member of the Big Five of Bangladesh cricket to complete 10 years on the international stage on July 25, 2017. It is strongly believed that this core group comprising Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah has played a big role in transforming a mediocre team into a formidable force in international cricket. And that success story cannot be told without mentioning the name of the 31-year old cricketer from Mymensingh.

When it comes to Mahmudullah's silky batting, many have likened him to the elegant former India batsman VVS Laxman, but with the combination of the silky-smooth batting and a silent but deadly aggression Mahmudullah has established his own style of batting that suits all formats.

If you want to talk about Bangladesh's great one-day performances, one of the top mentions has to be his wonderful hundred at Adelaide in that fabulous win over England during the 2015 World Cup, which was swiftly followed by another ton against New Zealand. Another mention would have to be his latest hundred against New Zealand during the ICC Champions Trophy in England. When the all-rounder, whose tidy off-spin has also played some part in his journey, looks back upon his decade in international cricket these are the innings that will delight him most, although he has had some smaller but notable contributions during the journey.

Despite the success stories one question always arises about the soft-spoken cricketer's career - has he justified his talent on the international stage? Many see his solitary hundred in 33 Tests and three in 145 ODIs as evidence that his potential has not been truly fulfilled and that he could do much better in Test cricket.

Mahmudullah made his ODI debut against Sri Lanka on July 25, 2007 and from the very beginning he had to fight for his position in the team for quite some time before a reasonable performance against Zimbabwe in the 2014 winter lent some security until the uncertainty was back again during the last Sri Lanka tour.

Former national captain Khaled Mahmud had the opportunity to watch this cricketer as a teammate, coach and official from his early days and he observed that a confident Mahmudullah is dangerous but a demoralised Mahmudullah is ordinary.

"I got the opportunity to watch him from the very beginning of his career and honestly speaking he came to the scene with huge potential. I want to congratulate him for completing 10 years in international cricket. Now, the question is whether he can justify his talent. Yes, initially he failed to justify it but he has been outstanding in his last three-four years and has become an integral part of Bangladesh's success," said Mahmud.

"Why has he not yet blossomed fully? I think he was a bit unlucky because his uncertain position in the team did not give him the opportunity to settle. In my opinion he is a different player when he gets the confidence and he is simply ordinary when he is demoralised. He is such a player who can destroy any attack if he is confident but even an ordinary bowler appears unplayable when he is doubting himself.

"Riyad sometimes contributed with his innings of 40 or 50 and also with the ball but his hundred against England in Adelaide is special to me and only a master-class batsman can play such a knock," he continued.

Mahmud thinks that world cricket is yet to see how powerful a striker of the ball Mahmudullah is but believes the man from Mymensingh will fully blossom with the experience of 10 years in international cricket.

Question: How does it feel to be part of the national team for 10 years?

Mahmudullah Riyad: I feel good because I have crossed 10 years with the Bangladesh jersey on. And I hope to keep performing and keep the jersey on for a few more years.

Q: You've spent a long time here so how much of that was influenced by the other others who have played ten years?

MR: Mashrafe, Shakib, Tamim and Mushfiqur have done it before me. But personally I think it's a very positive thing for my career. I also feel that I have more responsibility because of the way we are moving forward now. So I have to complete my responsibilities as long as I play. The team we have now is a combination of experienced and young players so hopefully they will serve the Bangladesh team for a long time.

Q: How different is your game fitness-wise and skill-wise? When you came into the side your role wasn't really

clear, now it is more defined.

MR: I think I am mentally a lot more disciplined than before. I am more positive about my game and more aggressive than before and those things lead back to the mentality. I think that is what is helping me a lot more and I think my fitness levels are much better than before and holding onto that is very important.

Q: You have already played 10 years and you will play a few more years so do you have any unfulfilled desires?

MR: There a few things because I have had lots of ups and downs in my career. I just hope that we can continue playing the way we have been for the next few years. When I started we were 10th in rankings and since then we have reached number six. So I hope we can be in the top three or four. We have to prepare ourselves mentally for that and taking the team there is my personal goal.

Q: In the World Cup platform you are proven cricketer. When you look back at

your career how important would a World Cup be?

MR: This is a matter of time, but I already said that the 2019 World Cup is a big opportunity. Personally, I think that we are capable of achieving something brilliant with the way we have

STATS

MAT	RUNS	HS	AVE	100	50	WKT
Tests 33	1809	115	30.15	1	13	39
ODIs 145	3155	128*	34.67	3	17	70
T20s 58	810	64*	20.25	0	3	22

been playing cricket, but continuing that will be important.

Q: You have said that you want to play for the national team for a few more years. What is your personal target before ending your career?

MR: To be honest, I don't like to set goals. I take things step by step.

Q: After a player has completed 10 years in a team he is considered a stable cricketer. But there was a time in 2015 when there was a lot of discussion about you. And there were talks about you often when you were beginning. But after 10 years how would you evaluate yourself?

MR: It is a challenge everyday because that's what international cricket is. You will never be stable. Teams will work out your weaknesses. I said before that I am mentally more disciplined so I can understand what aspects to work on or what my strengths are. Personally I think that there is no alternative to hard work.

Q: Out of the top five in the team, those who have been there for years, is your life the most difficult?

MR: I can't judge that but although there have been many ups and downs I still have the Bangladesh jersey on and I'm playing. I wish to keep applying all the things I have learned to serve Bangladesh cricket.

'Consistency name of the game'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh bowling coach Courtney Walsh placed emphasis on control and consistency while conducting a camp with a group of pace bowlers for the first time since joining the Tigers' coaching staff in September last year. The former West Indies great talked to reporters at Mirpur yesterday regarding his camp, the prospect of a bowling partnership between Taskin Ahmed and Mustafizur Rahman, the returning Sri Lankan bowling coach Champaka Ramanayake and most importantly, Mustafizur's bowling issues.

"It's the first chance I've had to do any serious work with them. They have been in competition since my arrival and it's hard to be in competition and trying to do stuff at the same time. Contrary to what a lot of people are writing or saying

that I've changed actions, nothing of that sort has happened. Now this is the chance where we can rectify the mistakes that have been arising. That's one of the reasons I arrived here earlier," said Walsh.

"There are a couple of basics that they have to learn but the main one is just consistency. They have not been as consistent as they should be or can be and it's not just here, it's something that happens in the national team."

"I want to see more consistency, more control and variation and more thought into what they're doing. The first part is control and consistency," he outlined his motto.

Regarding Mustafizur, Walsh said: "Well I noticed that he was falling away a bit in England. So I've been trying to get him more upright and balanced so he can pull through. And trying to get his pace back up to where it used to be and for him to be a little bit closer to the stump. So

those are the things we are working on and he knows some of what needs to be done as well. I've got to give him credit because he is eager to get out here and practise because he wants to be the best there is."

"I haven't changed his action and I won't be trying to unless I think that's required. The last couple of days he's close to what he used to be so he's headed in the right direction. There won't be any massive changes."

"It's funny you should ask me that [about Taskin and Mustafizur] because that's what I was telling them back in the room. Fizz and Taskin complement each other. One of the bowlers mentioned was that he likes to bowl and help his partner. So they are thinking about that now," he said regarding the pair.

He also added: "I'll welcome him [Champaka Ramanayake] with open arms and hopefully we can help Bangladesh cricket."



After exiting his press conference, Courtney Walsh was jumped by Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, and everyone enjoyed the playful exchange between the two.

PHOTO: STAR

Bolt to lead Jamaican team

AFP, Kingston



Sprint superstar Usain Bolt is one of three Rio Olympic gold medalists leading a 59-strong Jamaican team named Monday for next month's athletics World Championships in London.

Bolt has said he intends to run the 100m and the 4x100m relay at the worlds, his final event before retiring.

He's one of two reigning world champions, along with sprint hurdler Danielle Williams, who will be defending titles they won in China two years ago.

Elaine Thompson, who won the Olympic Sprint double last year in Rio, and Omar McLeod -- the first man for the Caribbean island to win Olympic 110m hurdles gold -- are also in the team published by the Jamaica Athletics Administrative Association.

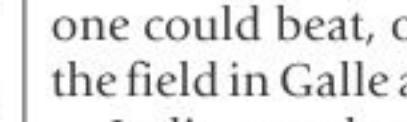
The team also includes sprint hurdler Hansle Parchment, shot putter O'Dayne Richards and 400m runner Shericka Jackson -- all individual medalists in Beijing two years ago.

Fredrick Dacres, the second ranked male discus thrower in the world, will attend his second World Championships.

India come full circle

First Test against Sri Lanka starts today

AFP, Galle



Two years ago Virat Kohli's India started a series in Sri Lanka as the team almost anyone could beat, on Wednesday they take to the field in Galle as the team to beat.

India may have been nervous last time, but now Kohli says the side has come full circle with "no massive areas of concern".

Two years ago, India had not won a series in seven attempts. They lost the opening Galle Test and it was an electro-shock. They won that series 2-1.

India have since been embroiled in near chaos off the field -- the governing body put under Supreme Court administration and a coach forced out by clashes with the captain -- but near domination in competition: 13 Tests played, 10 won, two drawn and just one defeat.

Kohli said Tuesday that he wants a defini-

tive end to the drama over the departure of Anil Kumble as coach and a winning start to the new era with Ravi Shastri.

"We have spoken enough about these issues and it is something that we are not focusing on at all now," the skipper said.

"We are just looking forward to the cricket now and in this series to showcase our skills and have consistent performances, which we have had as a side ever since we started our climb back in the rankings."

Kohli said Sri Lanka can expect a different start and that India can dominate Tests for years to come. They are expected to defend their top Test ranking in South Africa, England and Australia in the next year.

"It's pretty different sitting here two years after that particular series," Kohli said of the last Sri Lanka games.

Those Tests were "very important in us coming together as a team in believing that we can win a series and not just matches. So that was the beginning of that mindset."



An inspection team from Cricket Australia arrived at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday ahead of Australia's scheduled tour next month, which is hanging in the balance.

PHOTO: STAR