

# SPORT

## The building blocks of the five pillars

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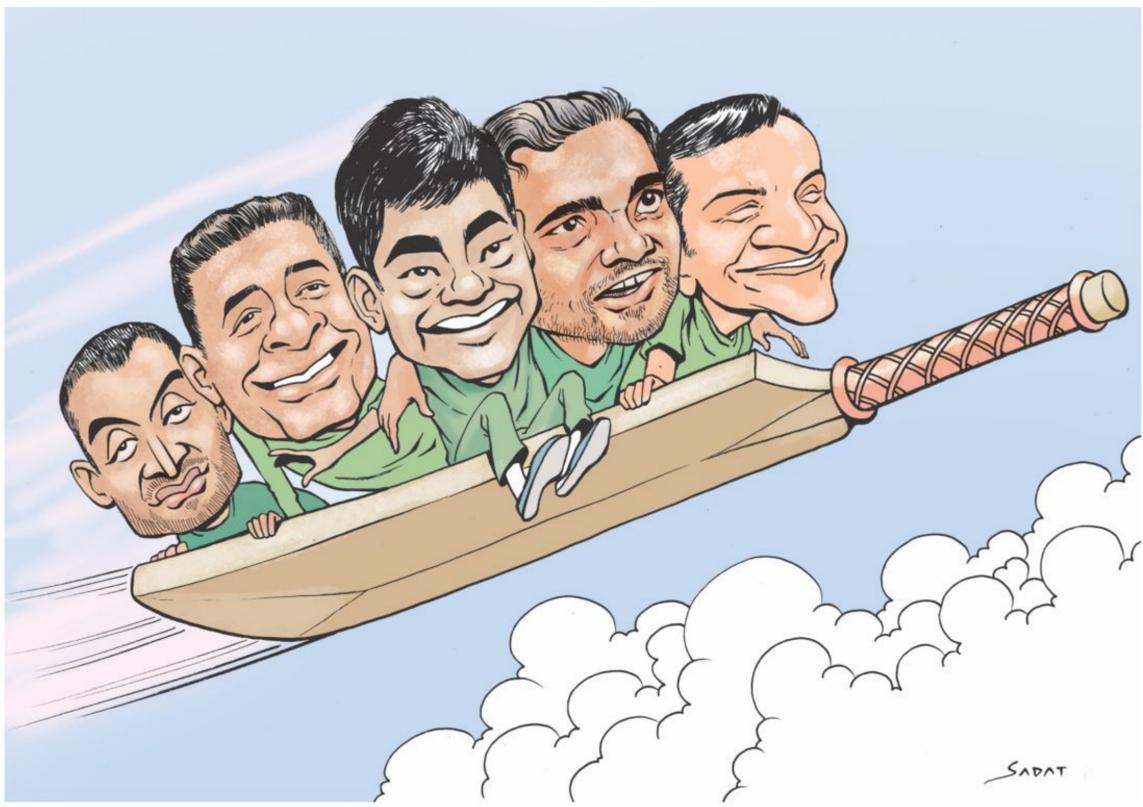
Since being elevated to Test level in 2000, Bangladesh cricket has gone through many ups and downs. There were a few players who shone brightly yet briefly. There were players along the way who donned the red and green cap for quite some time. But the formation of a core group was a far cry, which of course should have come with the experience of playing together for a long time.

However, along the way of so many defeats and disappointments the core group slowly but surely formed and the impact of that wealth of collective experience started to reap results, particularly over the last three years or so when Bangladesh cricket has undergone a significant facelift. And the Tigers' recent success is neither magical nor miraculous, but the result of hard work and sacrifice from coaches, management and of course from the players who wanted to shift gears to the next level.

But more importantly it's the core group of five -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad -- that have been defined as the pillars of Bangladesh cricket and architects of the new Bangladesh on the world stage.

Each of these five cricketers has been playing international cricket for over 10 years now and at one point or another, have gone through a roller coaster ride both individually as well as part of the team. Consequently, their confidence has grown immensely over the years but despite that, these five cricketers, who have played a combined 850 ODIs and 221 Tests for Bangladesh, had to go through those tests of trials. They had to overcome the obstacles, had to live up to expectations day in day out, assume the role of responsibility and face the adversity that defined experience in true sense.

From the cumulative effect of seven surgeries on Mashrafe's legs, that at one point threatened his cricket career, Tamim being left out of



the Asia Cup squad in 2012, Mushfiqur's dipping performance behind the wickets, Shakib's six-month ban from all forms of cricket due to off-field disciplinary breaches to, last but not least, Mahmudullah being dropped from Bangladesh's historic 100th Test in Colombo recently, these five pillars have endured their

fair share of troubles. Most importantly, each of them have shown the gumption, grit and technical skill to correct their mistakes and emerge from those trials stronger than they were before.

The fight and quest to think about their games and to constantly keep improving have

not only taken Bangladesh to new heights, but set world-class examples which youngsters can look up to and learn from.

When it comes to passion and expectations, cricket is not that far short of a religion in Bangladesh. Cricket lovers expect Shakib, Tamim, Mushfiqur, Mahmudullah and ODI

skipper Mashrafe to perform in every game and win matches no matter what the situation. Of course, the players themselves realise the level of expectations whenever they meet their close friends or when they cast their eyes upon news media and across social network websites. It can put extra pressure on players, but these cricketers have been there for nearly a decade and know how to handle the situation and perform as professionals.

Perhaps the biggest lesson experience teaches is to remain responsible and there is no shortage of responsibilities for each of these five senior players. According to the situation each senior player contributes their valuable input during the game alongside playing their individual roles. The seniors also guide the youngsters in the team in pressure situations, help them remain calm and inspire courage, which helps the team win matches. This role extends off the field -- there have been a few instances in the past where senior members came forward to help when their younger teammates had personal issues. At the same time, being superstars and idols for the youth, these senior members also have to maintain a responsible social life with fans and the media.

Another very important aspect of being a senior member is to face critics whenever they fail to fulfil their responsibilities. At times the fans will go hard at them if Bangladesh lose or if they fail to perform; even board members lash out at the cricketers. At times there have been incidents when cricketers lose their cool with the fans and even with the media, creating headlines worldwide. There was a time when criticism had an adverse effect on Tamim's performance, but now he has learnt how to cope with criticism.

At the end of the day, as the late Randy Pausch said: "Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted. And experience is often the most valuable thing you have to offer."



Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha (R) gives some tips to pacer Rubel Hossain (2nd L) during a training session at the BCB indoor facilities in Mirpur. The pacer started bowling with full run-up yesterday after having missed a few sessions due to his recovery from injury. PHOTO: STAR

## Making up for lost time

SPORTS REPORTER

With a slinging action, Rubel Hossain has proven that he can deliver good pace and bounce. An in-form Rubel has always given the Bangladesh pace attack diversity and he has had some outstanding performances since making his ODI debut with a match-winning four-wicket haul against Sri Lanka in January 2009.

He proved time and again how much impact he could make; one cannot forget his figures of 9.3-0-53-4 against England in Adelaide that ensured the Tigers' first quarterfinal in World Cup history. But inconsistency, off-field controversies, injuries and most importantly his inability to cash in on the good times have held back his chances to establish a position in the national side.

The 27-year old right-arm paceman, who has so far played 24 Tests and 77 ODIs, however said yesterday that he now knows the reasons behind his failure especially in Test cricket where he has taken just 32 wickets at an average of 77.93 and a strike rate of 119.8.

"I think I had a few breaks in my career which has been the main reason why I am yet to establish my place in the Test side, as you see my performance in Test cricket is not that good. Obviously I also know the reasons and I am working hard to overcome those and trying to improve myself as a bowler in the longer format as well," said Rubel without elaborating on the reasons.

He was confident as the mentor guiding him is none other than great Courtney Walsh. "One can learn many things from him [Walsh] because his Test record is outstanding. I will work to learn the craft of how I can maintain a [good] line and length and how I can

be successful against the big teams," Rubel continued while talking to reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

He was a bit late, due to a mysterious injury he had suffered during July's ICC Champions Trophy in England, in joining the current fitness training camp as well as the special bowling skill camp under the guidance of Walsh but he was confident that he could make up for lost time.

"I am fully fit now and bowled off a full run-up today. There is still a lot of time. Yes, I missed a few sessions but I will try to cover it."

When asked about the butterfly delivery, a ball that doesn't rotate in the air and just floats like a butterfly, Rubel said: "I bowled in a different action against New Zealand and I will try it in the next matches. It's okay now, I will also do it in the BPL and in the South Africa series if I get the chance."

## Volleyball camp starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

In quest of keeping the players in action, the Bangladesh national volleyball team begins its training camp today at the Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur, where 30 selected players from the recently concluded national championship will take part.

Though the Bangladesh Volleyball Federation (BVF) kept domestic tournaments rolling, the national team has been idle since they clinched the Bangabandhu Asian Senior Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship title in December last year. The game's local governing body now wants to keep the team in action until the next South Asian (SA) Games in 2019.

"It is an attempt to keep the players in training. We will send them to Nepal for a few matches in the latter part of this month. We also want to keep the team in action in a bid to producing good results in the SA Games at Nepal," said BVF general secretary Ashikur Rahman Miku.

Miku also informed that coach Nazrul Islam will conduct the training camp while Iranian coach Ali Pour Arosi will join the team soon.

## D-Day for ACA, CA in pay talks

SMH

Australian cricket's interminable pay talks were still on the edge on Tuesday night as negotiating parties from both sides went back and forth on key terms for a new pay deal.

Nothing has been signed despite widespread speculation Cricket Australia (CA) and the players union were due to hold a joint press conference on Wednesday to announce an end to the pay war.

Sources have told Fairfax Media CA were trying to change the definition of revenue sharing, which was not received well by the Australian Cricketers Association (ACA).

CA has relaxed its threat for the issue to go to arbitration but that remains an option should satisfactory progress not be made on Wednesday on outstanding points of difference.

This has been met with scepticism from the ACA which believes sufficient progress is being made to avoid the already protracted saga heading to a third party and being prolonged.

Relations between both sides remain frosty with negotiations being conducted amid a climate of mistrust.

Players have successfully argued that adjustment ledger funds of \$29.5 million from the current memorandum of understanding be paid now and not carried forward, and for back pay to be awarded to the 200-plus players who have been unemployed since July 1.

It's understood players will be given a 30 per cent share of revenue, up from a sliding scale of 27, though they are now absorbing 120 more female players who are entering the new agreement.

CA sources, however, believe this will be a serious modified agreement that gives the governing body flexibility to allow them to invest more into grass roots cricket and have gender equity pay.

It's believed match expenses and the money CA spends on its integrity unit are among streams of revenue that have been excised.

The ACA executive met on Tuesday morning and, happy with the deal, were waiting for CA to sign off.

## Mushy defends foreigners' quota

SPORTS REPORTER

The decision from the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) governing council to revert to five foreign players in the playing eleven for the fifth edition raised a few concerns, but Tigers' Test captain and new icon of Rajshahi Kings Mushfiqur Rahim believed that it would foster more competitiveness among local cricketers.

The governing council opted to go with four foreign players the previous season after the first three seasons of the tournament were played with five overseas cricketers in the playing eleven.

"Any decision can have a good or bad side. If you look at those five foreign players then maybe a local player's spot will be reduced, but those who get a chance will have to go through fiercer competition," Mushfiqur said after being unveiled as the previous season's runners-up's new icon player.

"I think if they go through that in the domestic circuit then it will help them when they reach the international level. And the foreigners who come here are all of very high quality and just sharing the dressing room with them will lead to improvements, which we saw even in the first edition."

Mushfiqur added that any judgement should be reserved till the end of the season.

"There were five foreigners in the first edition and the team combination then was also very good. So hopefully the decision this time will be beneficial for Bangladesh cricket and we might see that at the end of the season."

The 30-year-old believed that the standard of cricket in the BPL would only get better with time and went as far as to rate the tournament as the second best domestic T20 competition in the world in terms of competitiveness, behind the

Indian Premier League.

However the wicket-keeper batsman, who has been the highest run-getter in the history of the BPL with 1172 runs in 42 matches, said that even his individual heroics were not enough when it came to team results and pointed to his previous season's experience with Barisal Bulls.

"T20 is such a format that if you alone do well then it will not amount to anything. I didn't have any magic that if I did well the team would do well because the whole team has to perform. If I'm not mistaken, I'm the highest run-getter in the BPL over the past four editions. Sometimes if you don't get support from the other end then it becomes difficult."

When his attention was turned to the two-match Test series against Australia slated for later this month, Mushfiqur -- who is yet to play a Test against the Aussies -- said that it would be a huge platform for the Tigers to showcase their ability on the world stage.

"I have not played a single Test against Australia and it will be a big opportunity for the team, everyone is excited. We have been doing well over the past few years and if we can do well against a big Test nation like Australia then it will send a different message to world cricket. So we will try to continue but it's not going to be easy because Australia have a very good record in the subcontinent," he concluded.



Bangladesh's Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim speaks at a press briefing, arranged to unveil him as the new icon of Bangladesh Premier League franchise Rajshahi Kings, at the owners' corporate office in the capital yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

## Erratum

On Tuesday's issue, The Daily Star Sport inadvertently made a couple of errors while quoting Dr. Shagufta Anwar, communication and business development director of United Hospital, in a story titled: Anxiety, curiosity engulf illness. We quoted her as saying that ailing former national cricket captain Khaled Mahmud was 'admitted to the hospital at 2:40am (Sunday early hours)... and then shifted to ICU at 5:45am.' It should actually be pm instead of am on both time counts. We regret the slips.

-Sports Editor