

SPORT



'I respect my critics'

Mushfiqur Rahim is the example of the ideal cricketer who has the determination, hunger and ability to work hard and achieve the unachievable. The first ever double-centurion in Test cricket for Bangladesh has grown from strength to strength over a 12-year international career. The Bangladesh Test captain talks about his immense work ethic, how he handles criticism along with his emotions in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin. The following are some excerpts of the conversation:

TDS: How has the journey with the Bangladesh team been so far since making your debut in Lord's back in 2005?

Mushfiqur Rahim (MR): Alhamdulillah it has been a journey full of ups and downs, which is pretty normal for every cricketer. There were a few moments which were not good and some were very good and even some of those taught me a lot and few which really makes me proud. Overall it has been a good 12 years. I think the way things went in the last 4-5 years I am happy for that and I will try to continue what I have been doing till I finish my career.

TDS: What drives Mushfiqur Rahim?

MR: I think playing for Bangladesh is the biggest blessing from Allah as everyone wants to play for Bangladesh but only few get that opportunity. I still believe maybe someone else could have been in my place or played even better than me but Allah chose me for this and I am really lucky. This has been the reason I try to be honest with my work and always try to improve myself. To me how I can do my best is important; not the result as I can look myself in the mirror and say that I have tried my best; may be the result did not went in my favour, maybe Allah is testing me.

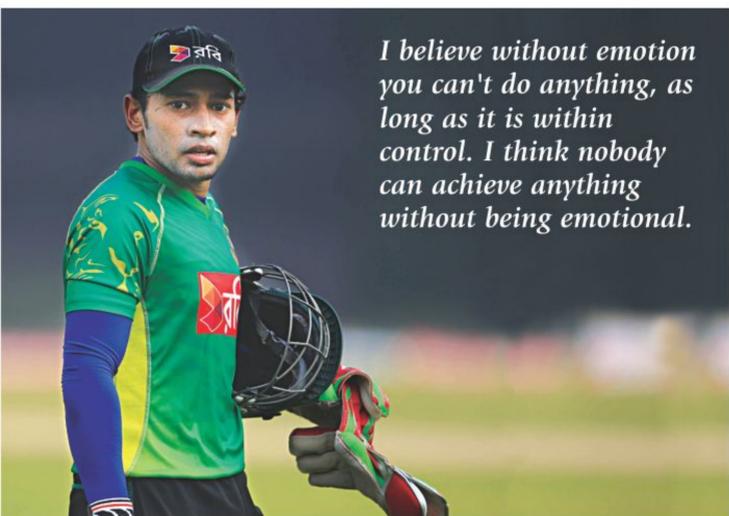
TDS: You are known as the hardest working and most determined cricketer in the

TDS: There were incidents sometimes when you weren't able to quite contain your emotions...

MR: I believe without emotion you can't do anything, as long as it is within control. I think nobody can achieve anything without being emotional, if you don't feel emotion for whatever you are doing then I personally think there is no value in that. If you don't take things emotionally along with being professional I think a person cannot achieve many big things in life. But yes there were times when I shouldn't have expressed my emotions but I did -- as I am getting older I am also maturing and trying to be more complete. So I think when your emotions work in the right way anything is achievable.

TDS: Being the Test captain how do you compare the performances in ODIs to those in Tests?

MR: I think ODIs and Tests are totally different and the most important thing is the amount of matches we play in a year -- we don't get to play even half the number of Tests as we do ODIs. It's difficult for a team if they play less number of Test matches as the reason that we have a core group of five-six players in ODIs is because we have been playing this format for a long time. I give you as an example Mominul



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national team. At times when you fail to perform many criticize your workload. How do you see this?

MR: It depends how an individual sees these things but I do what makes me feel that I have done my preparations and gives me confidence before going into the match. And until I feel that I am prepared I work on that as I am a big believer in preparation. I have a different mindset, tempo and touch which helps me perform well. I think obviously there will be bad times for a player and surely there is some problem so I try to rectify that before going to a game as I try to correct whatever is in my control. After playing 12 years of international cricket I am mature enough to know how much I have to do. At the same time I also think that age is a factor as previously I might have been over-excited -- now I try to work more purposefully but my work ethic is the same.

TDS: There was a time when questions were raised about your wicketkeeping abilities, and also as Test captain after you made a few mistakes. Your take on that?

MR: I think cricket itself is a big challenge and I think the best way to cope is to face these challenges and try to overcome them. Yes, at times it might look like things are not going in your favour but being a captain I always tried to do something to bring success for my team, but at times I didn't get that. At the same time you also have to think whether you have enough resources available at that time, or let's say I made a plan but the bowler is unable to execute that plan. For example, I set up seven fielders on the off side and the bowler bowls on the leg side but ultimately it all comes against the captain. And being the captain I have to take responsibility and I take it. But yes, I have full respect for my critics as it helps me to correct my mistakes at times and it drives me to return even stronger than ever. On the other hand talking about my wicketkeeping I enjoy the job; it's a thankless job but still I always try to improve myself and contribute for the team.

TDS: How do you feel when you see that you are the most successful Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman till now?

MR: Obviously it feels really good but I truly believe that there will be a time when someone will come and overtake me.

Haque, he has been playing for Bangladesh for some time now but still he is not settled in the Test side. When you have a settled team or unit, the individuals know their duties and role and as we play fewer Tests, whenever Mominul or Tajjul Islam come to play a Test after a gap it's always difficult for them. We are still struggling in Test cricket but I think in the last three years we have improved a lot, maybe at a slow pace but to be honest we are a very good team in Tests at home, where we levelled 1-1 against England last year and we almost won the series 2-0. But I think the most important thing is to be consistent both home and away and we have that strength. If this group can continue for the next few years it will change Bangladesh's course in Test cricket.

TDS: You have been the main bridge of the five pillars of the Bangladesh team. How do you see that?

MR: In every team in world cricket there are is a core group and we also have that. I think it's something to be proud of. I think players like Tamim [Iqbal], Shakib [Al Hasan], Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] and Mahmudullah [Riyad] will go down as the all-time best cricketers in Bangladesh. And I think our responsibilities are huge and we also discuss that amongst ourselves as we have a very good bond, having played together for over 10 years now. We discuss our weak points and it's our duty that a young player does not feel uncomfortable or find it difficult to cope. Obviously the juniors also have their contributions but I think the seniors have given the guidance for the success we had in the last 3-4 years.

TDS: You have completed your Masters degree beside performing your national duties. Do you have the desire for further education on sports?

MR: In fact I have already started as I have a plan to do a PHD on sports and at the moment I am planning to do a PHD on South Asian cricket. Education is very important because it will help you become more knowledgeable. As a human being I want my next generation to look up at their parents and realise how important education is, no matter who you are. My father and mother have always encouraged me to continue that.



Bangladesh pace bowling coach and West Indies great Courtney Walsh (R) imparts some tips to Taskin Ahmed during the Tigers' training session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Siddikur moves up

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman moved up to 34th position with a two-under (69) in the third round of the TAKE Solutions Masters in Bangalore, India yesterday.

The 32-year-old golfer, who started the day in 49th position, exchanged five birdies against three bogeys at the Karnataka Golf Association Golf Course. That took his overall tally to even-par (213), thanks to 73 and 71 in the opening two rounds.

Having come into this 300,000 dollar event on the back of a third-place finish in the prestigious Porsche European Open, the Bangladeshi golfer was expected to perform well in this event in more familiar territory. However, he will go into the final day twelve shots behind leader Poom Saksansin of Thailand.

Mezbah disappoints

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's fastest sprinter Mezbah Ahmed put on a frustrating performance in the preliminary heats of 100m sprint in the World Athletics Championship in London on Friday night.

The Bangladesh Navy sprinter, who won his sixth straight national gold in this event in June with a timing of 10.80 seconds, took 11.08 seconds to finish his race in London. The 22-year-old finished fifth among seven participants.

This timing is far off from his career best 10.72 seconds.

To bring some perspective into what this timing means in terms of regional athletics, the 2016 South Asian Games silver medallist, Hassan Saaid of Maldives, qualified for the preliminary heats with a timing of 10.45 seconds.

'Looking beyond the basics'

SPORTS REPORTER



There is always need for extra effort when conditions are unfavourable. There is not much doubt about what is needed from the pace bowlers when they will take on Australia in the coming two-match Test series on home soil. Pacer Taskin Ahmed was well aware that they will need something beyond the basics to be successful in conditions expected to favour the slow bowlers.

The young fast bowler believes that while patience and accuracy would be key, one will need to do the things differently -- he placed special emphasis on reverse swing with the old ball. He also believes that things have changed for pace bowlers all over the world and that's why the true

test of a fast bowler is his performance on flat tracks.

"On these wicket and in these conditions I think reverse swing can be a weapon and we are working on that. We are learning how to reverse the ball. Our bowling also has to be more consistently accurate. All the best bowlers excel regardless of conditions and although there will be less help for pacers here, the pacers will have to be more patient and employ more variations with the old ball," said Taskin while talking to reporters on the first day of training in Chittagong yesterday.

And they are lucky enough that they have someone like Courtney Walsh to learn new tricks from.

"Courtney Walsh is a legend and if we cannot learn from him, then there is some failure on our part. He has 519 wickets in Tests and that is something

more than a dream. He tries to teach us new things in every practice session. I am trying to take as much from him as possible and that is our responsibility," he added, adding that he has been trying all the new things without compromising on pace.

"Those who want to do well, have to do well everywhere. I need to know how to bowl in all conditions and find success," he added. He also said that the pitches are becoming more flat and favouring the batsmen even in England, South Africa and Australia; the once dream destinations for pace bowlers.

Taskin expressed his confidence on his individual goal and was also confident about Tigers' chances against Australia and that they will try to do something special and 'gain more respect in the cricketing world'.

Bird replaces injured Pattinson

SMH



Australia's fast-bowling stocks have taken another hit with James Pattinson ruled out of this month's Test tour of Bangladesh.

Pattinson, 27, has been replaced by Jackson Bird, who toured India earlier this year but did not play a Test.

Pattinson had complained of soreness in recent days and was sent for scans on Friday. These have shown inflammation around an old stress fracture which contributed to his long lay-off last year.

The Victorian quick had returned from injury late in the Australian summer and helped the Bushrangers to the Sheffield Shield title. He recently returned from a successful stint in English county cricket and is said to be "shattered" by his latest injury. It's expected Pattinson will be able to resume full training in about a month, ensuring his focus can be on regaining his Test spot ahead of the home Ashes series. He is expected to be available come the start of the domestic summer.

He played the last of his 17 Tests against New Zealand in Christchurch in February last year, and had been encouraged to modify his



AUSTRALIA TEST SQUAD

Steve Smith (c), David Warner, Ashton Agar, Hilton Cartwright, Pat Cummins, Peter Handscomb, Josh Hazlewood, Usman Khawaja, Nathan Lyon, Glenn Maxwell, Jackson Bird, Matthew Renshaw, Mitchell Swepson, Matthew Wade.

bowling action as a result of back problems.

Pattinson's absence follows the decision to rest spearhead Mitchell Starc, who had complained of soreness in his foot after the Champions Trophy in England.

Bird will join Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins in the pace attack. Mitchell Swepson's rise to becoming Australia's next frontline leg-spinner will continue after he was included in the squad.

Mendis hits defiant ton

AFP, Colombo



India tightened its grip on the second Test against Sri Lanka despite a fighting century by Kusal Mendis during the hosts' follow-on in Colombo on Saturday.

Mendis put on 191 runs for the second wicket with opener Dimuth Karunaratne (92 not out) before falling to paceman Hardik Pandya for 110 just before stumps on Day Three.

The hosts were 209 for two at close, still trailing India by 230 runs in their second innings. Karunaratne and night-watchman Malinda Pushpakumara on



Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis celebrates his century on the third day of the second Test against India at the SSC ground in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

two were at the crease.

"Credit to them, they batted really really well. I don't think we did too much wrong," India's ace

spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who took five wickets in Sri Lanka's first innings, told reporters.

Earlier in the day, Sri Lanka

nosedived from their overnight 50-2 to 183 all out at lunch, handing the visitors a chance to clinch the three-match series 2-0.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Niroshan Dickwella, who top-scored for the hosts with 51 in the first innings, said the team needs to back itself at the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 622-9 dec (Pujara 133, Rahane 132; Herath 4-154)
SRI LANKA: First innings 183 (Karunaratne 25, Dickwella 51; Shami 2-13, Ashwin 5-69, Jadeja 2-84) and 209-2 (Karunaratne not out 92, Mendis 110; Pandya 1-12)