

SPORT

'Best to play when I'm at my best'

SPORTS REPORTER

There were constant discussions with his wife, his other family members and his friends over the past few days before Shakib Al Hasan decided to take a break from the upcoming two-match Test series in the South Africa and eventually handed the Bangladesh Cricket Board a letter last week asking for a six-month break from Tests.

When it was revealed that the premier all-rounder asked for the break and was subsequently granted leave from the South Africa Tests, the news spread like wildfire and was the centre of all discussion on cricketing circles.

Yesterday, Shakib invited media personnel to his residence to explain the reasons behind his decision, an invitation that was accepted by a large number of reporters.

The 30-year-old finished his lunch and had one last talk with his friends and family before coming down to face the media in the garage area of his apartment building.

He generally likes to cut to the chase whenever he faces the media but it was a different Shakib who elaborated on his views and plans as to why he decided to take a break from the longest version of the game.

"I have been thinking about taking the break for quite some time now. I have spoken to my family and friends ahead of this series about it. I think this will help me. Since I play a lot, I can't focus on my fitness or even try to be mentally fresh. I have been playing for 10-11 years, so I think I deserve a break. I don't know what I will do during this break... I think I will spend more time with my family and maybe I will go for a holiday, hang out with friends and try to stay away from cricket as much as I can and I will also have time to prepare for the ODI and T20 series."

"In Test cricket, my role is such that I have to contribute in all four innings. If I am contributing half the time, I won't be able to meet the team's expectations. I think it is best to play when I know I can give my best in all four innings. It is not important to me to just play for the sake of match fees and salary. This is my job, for sure, but



Bangladesh's star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan explains his decision to sit out the two-Test series in South Africa during a press conference at his residence yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

I started playing out of interest, passion and love for the game. If that's not there, I don't see the point in playing. The main reason is I think I still have a lot of cricket to play for a longer period and if I want to play for a long time, this break is very important. I do want to play but do you want me to play for just 1-2 years or for the next 5-6 years? I feel that if I continue like this I will only be able to play for the next one or two years, not more. I want to take the break to get refreshed, more mentally than physically, so that I can continue playing for the next five years without any tension. I think it's more important for me to stay away from cricket for a month or for two Tests.

"It was not hard for me to convince the board to grant me the break because I don't think there is anything wrong or unethical about my wanting some respite," he added. Many have criticised his decision to take a break from Tests and not the limited-overs format. "I don't react to those [criticisms]. I

know how much my body goes through. I am surprised when people question why I am not resting from limited-overs matches or other T20s. There is really no pressure when playing those T20 matches. It seems like a holiday to me, with a bit of experience and of course, it is financially important too," Shakib said. When asked whether he wants to quit the longest format of the game to focus more on limited-overs cricket Shakib insisted that Test cricket is the format he will retire from after, calling time on his T20 and ODI careers.

However, Shakib is happy to have been granted the break and said that if the board wants and if he or Shakib feels ready mentally he will think of returning for the Sri Lanka series at the end of this year.

He also opined that there will not be much of a difference in the upcoming South Africa tour and said that the Tigers have the ability to perform well without him.

The top-ranked all-rounder also urged his teammates to speak up whenever they need a break to recover from the workload.

"Obviously if someone thinks that they are playing a lot and they need a break I think they should speak up from the bottom of their hearts. Let's say I am not feeling at a hundred per cent, but I still play and perform badly in these two tests; then you will say that I should be dropped. That's normal, so as long as I am playing I will try to give my best," he added.

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Saif Sporting hold Sk Jamal

Arambagh move out of doldrums

SPORTS REPORTER

Former champions Sheikh Jamal Dhamondhi Club missed an opportunity to catch league leaders Chittagong Abahani after being held to a goalless draw by newcomers Saif Sporting Club in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Three-time champions Sheikh Jamal came into the match on the

Colombian forward Valencia Olaya forced a spectacular fingertip save from Sheikh Jamal goalkeeper Mitul Hossain with a powerful shot from the top of the box. Mitul's parry brushed the crossbar before going out for a corner.

Sheikh Jamal too, were denied by the woodwork as Nurul Absar's diving header following a corner in the 50th minute hit the post.

With three minutes left till the final whistle, Sheikh Jamal were reduced to ten men after right-back Khan Mohammad Tara stabbed his

boots on the back of Valencia, but the former champions managed to turn the clock down despite the numerical disadvantage.

Meanwhile, Arambagh Krira Sangha notched their second victory of the league to move off the bottom of the table with a come-from-behind 2-1 win over beleaguered Farashganj Sporting Club in the first match of the day.

The Arambagh outfit conceded the lead on the hour-mark when Farashganj's Nigerian forward Chindu Mathew volleyed home

Mohammad Shamim's cross from just inside the box.

But Manul Haque's charges hit back 14 minutes later thanks to a towering header from young Mohammad Jewel before a counter attack after the Farashganj defenders and goalkeeper failed to clear a long-ball from the Arambagh midfield.

The win took Arambagh to eighth position on the table, with seven points while Farashganj remained rooted to the bottom with four points from eight games.

FARASHGANJ	1	-	2	ARAMBAGH
(MITHUN)				(MITHUN)
SAIF SPORTING	0	-	0	SHEIKH JAMAL

back of three straight victories and would have joined the early pace setters on top of the table with 22 points, but Saif Sporting Club, who themselves have emerged as one of the title-contenders, did well to hold them to a draw.

The draw left the Dhamondhi giants two points off the pace while Saif Sporting Club overtook defending champions Abahani in third position on 17 points, thanks to a favourable goal difference.

While on paper it was the battle between two of the most potent sides in the league, the exhibition on the pitch hardly matched that billing. Chances were few and far between, and the lack of penetrative moves or use of skills turned it into a rather drab affair.

The only notable move of the first half came right after the half-hour mark when Saif Sportings'



Sheikh Jamal's Khan Mohammad Tara is shown a straight red card after the defender stamped on Saif SC forward Valencia Olaya during their Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Ruhul blasts BFF committee

SPORTS REPORTER

Tarafar Ruhul Amin, chairman of Saif Global Sports, which holds the marketing rights for the tenth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League, has accused the league committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation of breaching their contract's terms and conditions, thereby forcing them to incur loss due to suspension of the league without prior consultation.

The businessman-turned-football organiser even hinted that the league's suspension under the pretext of the U-18 national team's participation in the SAFF U-18 Championship later this month may have been done to steal momentum from the league's top sides.

"They [Professional Football League Committee] have suspended the league without consulting us, which is completely against the terms and conditions of the contract," Ruhul Amin claimed at a press conference at his office yesterday.

"We have a lot of investment in the league. We are already running a loss due to this league committee and that is why we haven't got good sponsors. The broadcasters are facing trouble due to deferral of the league again and again," he said.

The league will be suspended after the end of the eighth round today and will not resume until the first week of October.

Ruhul Amin said that the league could have been rescheduled instead of being halted while claiming that the club with the most number of players in the U-18 squad was in favour of rescheduling.

"The matches should have been rescheduled instead of suspension of the league. Saif Sporting have most number of players (5) in the squad, but as far as I know they didn't ask for suspension," said Amin, who is also the chairman of football committee of Chittagong Abahani.

"We have heard that the suspension has been done to halt the progress of teams like Chittagong Abahani, Saif Sporting and Sheikh Jamal who are ahead in the league," he added.

Chittagong Abahani led the table before yesterday's fixtures, followed by Sheikh Jamal while defending champions Abahani are in third position, five points off the pace.

Steyn expects to play against Bangladesh

CRICINFO

Dale Steyn is expected to put himself in contention for selection in South Africa's Test side for the series against Bangladesh, if he plays in the opening round of first-class fixtures starting next Tuesday.

Steyn, who is five wickets away from becoming South Africa's leading wicket-taker in Test cricket, has been out of action since being a bone in his shoulder last 14 November in Australia. His comeback was delayed several times over a lengthy rehabilitation period, which concluded last month.

On August 17, Steyn posted a photograph of himself in wicket-taking celebration mode on Instagram with the caption, "The wait is over." It's been almost a month since but Steyn is now ready to return, as confirmed by reports from his international ambitions. Steyn has also been bought by the Cape Town Knight Riders franchise in the Global T20 League, which starts in November.

Gayle boost for Windies

AFP, Belfast

The recall of Chris Gayle to the West Indies ODI squad, for the first time since the 2015 World Cup, has dominated the countdown to the upcoming five-match series against England.

But Gayle - one of the biggest draws in the game - is likely to make his first appearance against Ireland on Wednesday.

Gayle arrived with the 15-man squad to Northern Ireland on Monday after the West Indies board announced an amnesty which has also seen the return of tri-series against Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe the following month, but while Gayle played in the one-off T20 World Cup in India in July, his next ODI will be his first since the 2015 World Cup.

Faf to lead SA in all formats

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa Test captain Faf du Plessis was on Monday named as the country's one-day international skipper to add to his leadership roles in Test and Twenty20 internationals.

Du Plessis, who is in Lahore this week to lead a World XI in three T20 internationals against Pakistan, was named as captain for the World XI currently engaged in the T20 Series against Pakistan.

Du Plessis has forged a strong captaincy record after initially being appointed only to the T20 role in 2012.

He was named full-time Test captain last year after De Villiers decided to take a break from the longest cricket format after missing two series because of injury.

Du Plessis led South Africa to series wins against New Zealand (twice), Australia and Sri Lanka before South Africa were beaten in a recent series in England.

He also captained South Africa to a 5-0 ODI sweep against Australia while De Villiers was injured.

Pak celebrate revival with win

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan Tuesday took a giant step towards reviving international cricket at home with a 20-run victory over the World XI in a match before excited crowds amid tight security.

In chase of 198, star Bangladesh batsman Tamim Iqbal opened the innings for World XI, and although he started slowly against left-arm spinner Imad Wasim, he soon found his range against pacer Sohail Khan. Tamim hit Sohail for back to back boundaries in the fourth over, the first one lashed through cover point and the next maulled over midwicket for four. However, he could hit only one more, a flick off the pads through square leg in Ruman Raza's first ball of the sixth over, before the bowler had his revenge

by beating Tamim's slog and hitting timber to send the left-hander back to a run-a-ball 18.

Hashim Ama smashing three boundaries and a six in his 17-ball 26 but left-arm pacer Ruman dismissed him in the same over to put the brakes on their innings.

Skipper Faf du Plessis hit four boundaries and a six while Darren Sammy smashed three sixes - both scoring 29 - but were unable to see their team through.

For Pakistan, paceman Sohail Khan and leg-spinner Shadab Khan finished with two wickets apiece.

Pakistan, sent into bat by World XI skipper Faf du Plessis, notched 197 for 5 with Babar Azam hitting a rapid 52-ball 86. His career best Twenty20 score had ten boundaries and two sixes.

Azam added 122 for the second wicket with Ahmed Shehzad (39) as Pakistan built on the loss of opener Fakhar Zaman for eight.

Shoaib Malik smashed a 20-ball 38 with two sixes and four boundaries to give the final touches to the innings. The second game is on Wednesday and the third on Friday - both in Lahore.

Pakistan hopes the series will help end their international isolation, with Sri Lanka due to play a Twenty20 on October followed by three Twenty20 internationals against the West Indies in November.

SCORES IN BRIEF PAKISTAN: 197 for 5 in 20 overs (Shehzad 39, Babar 86, Malik 38, Imad not out 15; Perera 2-51, M Morkel 1-32) WORLD XI: 177 for 7 in 20 overs (Tamim 18, Ama 26, Paine 25, Du Plessis 29, Perera 17, Sammy not out 29; Sohail 2-28, Ruman 2-37, Shadab 2-33) RESULT: Pakistan won by 20 runs.