



Sabbir's lessons from suspension

SPORTS REPORTER



One can turn any negative experience into a positive one and Sabbir Rahman has done just that during his exile from domestic cricket.

During his banishment, which saw him miss this season's Dhaka Premier League and Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) due to suspension, two realisations dawned on the 26-year-old.

"What I think is that it is not always bad to stay outside for a while," was the all-rounder's fist epiphany. His second was that it was not all about technique; but rather that scoring runs is what matters most.

The 26-year-old, who was banned from the domestic circuit for six months in January this year and also lost his central contract after assaulting a young fan during a National Cricket League match in Rajshahi in December last year, responded to questions about his suspension, the upcoming Afghanistan series and his batting form at Mirpur yesterday.

"Staying outside is not a big deal. I missed the BCL and Premier League but I worked on my fitness during that time alongside a few technical issues. I think there are some positives to staying outside for a while. I spent time with my family. My mother was sick and I gave her time. I had a good time and I hope I will enjoy more good times over the next few years," Sabbir said in response to a question about how he

kept in touch with the sport during the enforced break.

Asked whether one good innings could sweep aside all his faults in previous knocks for the viewing public, he explained: "Confidence is key. The technique will be okay if you score runs and nobody will find any faults. And if you are out against a good delivery and you are not among the runs then everybody will say your technique is bad. Yes, I may have a problem with my technique and temperament but in my opinion nothing is bigger than scoring runs."

Sabbir added that his last good innings would give him confidence against Afghanistan. The right-hander scored a 50-ball 77 that included seven fours and four sixes in his last competitive game, the Nidahas Trophy final against India in March this year.

Regarding the upcoming Afghanistan challenge, Sabbir echoed the sentiments of Mushfiquir Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad and other teammates, saying that it would be a good series, that there are no big or small teams in T20 cricket and that the Tigers could handle the Afghan bowling attack as they have experience in their ranks.

Sabbir also informed that each day was new to him and came with its own unique challenges.

"It's my job to take the challenges," said a confident Sabbir, who was also not concerned about his batting position but rather only looking forward to scoring big.

Rashid can't wait to be a Test player

AGENCIES, Dubai

After winning the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier 2018 in Zimbabwe earlier this year, Afghanistan's next challenge will be their inaugural Test match against India in June.

Leg-spinner Rashid Khan is expected to feature prominently in their maiden outing and the bowler was very excited for his first outing in whites.

"Playing Test cricket is the dream of every country and every player. It is a big honour and achieving this in such short time is a proud thing for the whole nation, because we have got Test cricket status in 13-14 years. It will be a big day for cricket in Afghanistan. I can't wait to be called a Test cricketer! That means a lot to us," Khan was quoted as saying on the ICC's website.

"I think there will be no one who will not be watching it on television back home. Whether it is Test cricket or ODI or T20, they watch it. If it is not live, they follow it online. People in Afghanistan are crazy about cricket."

However, the 19-year-old does not believe that the Afghans need to worry about the strength of the opposition.

"I think we don't have something like that, to draw, to win or to lose. We just need to focus on playing good cricket. In Test cricket, anyone can give you a tough time. We should be like 'relax and we can win this'."

"The full focus is on playing good cricket and to prove that we are capable of Full Member status in Test cricket."

It's a very good initiative: Mash

BCB Academy Cup begins today

SPORTS REPORTER



Aspiring cricketers from 32 academies across the Dhaka metropolitan zone will battle it out in the BCB Academy

Cup, organised by the game development committee of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Ankur Cricket Academy will take on Clemon Indira Road Cricket Academy in the opening game today at the City Club Ground.

The intention of the 40-over-per-side tournament is to unearth new cricketers as well as to provide more opportunities to cricketers from the various cricket academies across Dhaka aged between 15 and 18 who have not featured in any of the Dhaka leagues.

Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who was present during the trophy unveiling ceremony, believes that these types of tournaments would give youngsters a platform upon which they can showcase talents and get a chance in the Dhaka leagues or

programmes of the BCB.

"Obviously it's a very good initiative and the BCB along with the game development committee and Sujon bhai [Khaled Mahmud] should be praised for this," Mashrafe told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. "Normally we

don't get to see such tournaments. Those who play in the Dhaka leagues will not be able to participate in this, so I hope those who will perform well will get the opportunity at various clubs along with the programmes of the BCB in future, so it's a huge opportunity for them."

Game development committee

chairman Khaled Mahmud informed that the board is planning to arrange the tournament on a broader scale in coming years.

"The criterion for this tournament is that those who have played Dhaka leagues will not be featured here. It's a pilot project as we included just 32 teams this year and set few criteria for the teams but we are planning to include more teams from next year," Mahmud said.

"It will definitely encourage the parents who are sending their children to the academies. From next year we will invite a few academies from outside Dhaka to participate and we are also planning to select 20-25 cricketers from this tournament for further training," the former Bangladesh captain added.

Mahmud also informed that the top four academies would get financial benefits from the BCB for the next five years and a total of 20-25 academies would get financial help from the board which will help nurture the pipeline at the grassroots level.



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Khaled Mahmud and Mohammad Rafique pose alongside the trophy and participants of the BCB Academy Cup, a tournament featuring 32 cricket academies from Dhaka.

PHOTO: BCB

SAFF final target set for Day

SPORTS REPORTER



New coach Jamie Day has been set the target of taking Bangladesh to the SAFF Championship final, national teams' committee (NTC) chairman Kazi Nabil Ahmed revealed yesterday.

The BFF vice-president said this while speaking to media at an official press conference after an NTC meeting, two days after it was disclosed that the former Arsenal academy player has been appointed as the head coach of the national team on a one-year contract.

"We have had a conversation regarding this, and we have told him that our target will be to reach the final of the SAFF Championship in Dhaka. Since he will be in charge of a national team for the first time, we believe he will have the urge to prove his credentials," Nabil told the media conference.

The SAAF Championship will take place from September 4 to 15 in Dhaka. Bangladesh have not gone past the group stages in the last three editions of the championship.

Although Day's most recent engagement was with a fifth-tier club in England, Nabil insisted that since the coach grew up in the Arsenal academy, he had the basics of an

academy player and that the UEFA A licensed coach has been involved long enough with coaching jobs to take charge of a national team.

The Bangladesh team, which has been idle for a month and a half since the sudden departure of Andrew Ord, will reunite on May 26 at the BKSP where around 45 players will start a training camp under local coaches. The 38-year-old English coach will likely take charge after arriving here in the first week of June.

"He will arrive here in the first week of June. We will, meanwhile, work out who to appoint as assistant coach, fitness trainer and goalkeeping coach after consultation with Day," Nabil said.

While the SAFF Championship remains the ultimate target, the men in red and green will have an immediate assignment in August when the Olympic team will play the Asian Games. The camp will likely continue till July before one or more international friendlies will be organised ahead of the Asian Games.

"We have sent letters to three or four countries of East Asia and Middle East. We will try to play one or two matches, could be at home or abroad, towards the end of July ahead of the Asian Games," Nabil said.

Tigresses' best still not enough

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh women's cricket team continued their losing streak in the tour of South Africa by conceding a 32-run defeat in the second T20 of the three-match series, which the hosts now lead 2-0, in Bloemfontein yesterday.

Chasing a 170-run target, Bangladesh ended up posting 137 for 5 -- their highest T20I score, surpassing the 117 for six against England in the 2016 Women's World T20I -- with opener Shamima Sultana scoring fifty and Fargana Hoque adding 37 runs. Panna Ghosh was the only other batter to reach double figures.

After being sent to bat, South Africa put up a fighting total of 169 for 4. Sune Luus top scored for the side with 71 off 57 balls, which included nine fours, while skipper Dane van Niekerk added 66 off 42 balls, featuring 11 fours and a six.

Left-arm spinner Nahida Aftab and seamer Panna Ghosh bagged two wickets each for the Tigresses.

Earlier, Bangladesh lost the series when they succumbed to a 170-run loss in the first T20. Captain Salma Khan and Co. will now face the hosts in final match of the tour today.

Rafa bests Novak

AGENCIES, Rome



Rafael Nadal won a royal battle against old foe Novak Djokovic to reach his 10th Rome Masters final and stay on course to reclaim the world No 1 spot. Nadal, who is now 10-0 in semi-finals at the Foro Italico, earned a hard-fought 7-6 (7-4) 6-3 win as he continued his bid to lift an eighth career title at the Foro Italico.

Second-ranked Nadal must win the final on Sunday to return to the top of the rankings after losing that position to Roger Federer last week.

"To play against Novak is always a challenge and I hit a couple of bad shots when serving for the set, but he played a good game. It's always the same against him, when your level goes down he's always there and you're in big trouble," Nadal told Sky Sports. "To play against him, you always have to play at the limit of your game with high intensity. That was the tactic we wanted to play."

"I needed to play aggressive with my fore-

hand and when I didn't I saw that I suffered more. But when I played aggressive, I changed direction and changed the rhythm of the point with high balls and then low balls, combined with going for shots down the line. That's the moment I felt a little bit more in control," the Spaniard added.

Nadal beat Djokovic in their last meeting in May in 2017 in a Madrid semi-final and the Serb was out for revenge after winning seven in a row prior to that.

Djokovic, seeded 11th after his elbow injury problems, put everything into a titanic opening set lasting 71 minutes, but it was the Spaniard who broke loose to edge out Djokovic in their 51st career meeting in a rivalry stretching back to 2006.

In the women's circuit, holder Elina Svitolina dominated Anett Kontaveit 6-4, 6-3 in 74 minutes on Saturday to reach a second straight final at the Italian Open.

The Ukrainian will play for the trophy in Sunday against the winner of the high-profile semifinal between Maria Sharapova and top seed Simona Halep.



Rafael Nadal hits a return against Novak Djokovic during the Italian Open semifinal at the Foro Italico yesterday. The Spaniard defeated his rival 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 and will face either Alexander Zverev or Marin Cilic in the final.

PHOTO: REUTERS