



AT MASHRAFE'S COURT: A training without a lively adda (chat) centering Bangladesh's inspirational one-day captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza cannot be fulfilling. Here Mashrafe is conducting an unofficial stimulation class at the BCB Gymnasium yesterday, the opening day of the Tigers' training session for next month's Asia Cup.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Trophy on Tigers' minds

SPORTS REPORTER



Young Nazmul Hossain Shanto topped the beep test with a score of 12.6 on the opening day of the Bangladesh 31-member preliminary squad's preparation camp yesterday ahead of the upcoming Asia Cup in UAE.

Apart from Test and T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad, all other members of the squad were present for the fitness testing and screening session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

The cricketers, divided into two groups, also spent time in the gym where head coach Steve Rhodes later conducted a fielding session after a team meeting in the afternoon.

It was also a reunion for the cricketers after a break -- including the Eid vacation -- following the largely successful tour of West Indies where the Tigers won the ODI and T20I series after crumbling to defeats in the two Tests.

Pacer Abu Jayed, who interacted with the media just after the team meeting, informed that skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has given clear instructions that the Tigers will not just go to participate in the upcoming Asia Cup, but rather look to clinch the title.

"If you want to know the planning for the upcoming Asia Cup then I would say that we are going there to win the trophy. We just had a team meeting in the dressing room where Mashrafe bhai told us to keep the belief that we can become champions. We are not just going to participate in the tournament," said Jayed to the media yesterday.

The 25-year-old had a successful debut for the Tigers in the Tests in West Indies where he showed his ability by bagging seven wickets in the two Tests and, more importantly, displayed a lot of character and the will to fight with the ball.

The cricketer from Sylhet is now eyeing his ODI debut in the upcoming Asia Cup, but admitted that he has to overcome the tough competition in the fast bowling department.

Jayed also added that he is looking to work on variations and that he will work on his wrist position with the Tigers' bowling coach and West Indies fast bowling legend Courtney Walsh.

"We are literally jealous of Walsh whenever he bowls in the nets as he can still swing the ball in both directions, which is outstanding. At the same time we also thought that if he can do that now we should also be able to do so," Jayed said.

Shakib likely to play

SPORTS REPORTER



There is a strong possibility that Shakib Al Hasan will play the Asia Cup to be held in UAE from September 15. The final decision regarding surgery on his troublesome left little finger will be taken once the ace all-rounder returns home on August 29 after performing Hajj.

But sources with knowledge of the issue informed that Shakib has been considering going under the knife after the Asia Cup, especially as the high-ups of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) have indicated a preference for the surgery happening before the home series against Zimbabwe

in October.

"Shakib expressed his desire for early surgery before going to Hajj as he was not ready to play competitive cricket with the slightest discomfort in his injured finger, but it does not mean he will be unable to play the Asia Cup. As his finger has now gotten some rest and he is feeling good, he may take part in the Asia Cup," said an official on condition of anonymity yesterday.

Soon after Shakib's return, BCB's medical team will do a fresh scan on his troublesome finger and send it to Australian orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Greg Hoy but it will be Shakib and BCB president Nazmul Hassan who will take the final decision about the timing of the surgery.



A case of inappropriate action

SAKEB SUBHAN



When news filtered through Sunday that young Bangladesh batsman Mosaddek Hossain was being sued by his wife of six years, it was not a big surprise because young players' personal lives becoming more newsworthy than their performances is now a common phenomenon.

Not long ago, Nasir Hossain found himself in trouble because he was a participant in an unsavoury Youtube video. During the tour of West Indies in July, batsman Sabbir Rahman unleashed a foul-mouthed tirade on a Facebook user who criticised his performance.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury had then said "if such a breach [of discipline] has occurred it will be referred to the disciplinary committee and appropriate action taken."

The first of the two actions that the CEO promised is simple enough -- he informed yesterday that Sabbir and Mosaddek would be called up before the disciplinary committee soon to give their version of events -- but the 'appropriate action' part has been a complicated issue as far as the board is concerned.

While all three incidents have the common thread of the concerned players being unable to manage their personal lives to the standard required by people in the public eye, Sabbir's issue is a deeper one

because of the severity and frequency of his disciplinary breaches.

In the 2016 Bangladesh Premier League, Sabbir was fined Tk 12 lakh by the BCB for breaching curfew; in December 2017 he assaulted a young fan in Rajshahi during a National Cricket League match and the BCB subsequently banned him from domestic cricket for six months and levied a Tk 25 lakh fine. This is where the appropriate action comes in -- Sabbir was allowed to play international cricket even after the grave offence of hitting a minor, even when it is known that international cricket is the be all and end all for young Bangladeshi cricketers.

"We will decide what to do when the BCB president [Nazmul Hassan] returns [from Hajj],"

Nizamuddin told reporters in Mirpur yesterday. In July he had also talked about there being a process for such matters. That begs the question that if there is a separate disciplinary process, what need to wait for the president?

It also has to be asked whether Sabbir's claim two days after the latest incident that his account -- by then deactivated -- had been hacked was made with the team management's blessings, which would make the guardians as misguided as the one who got caught.

"We have to take sterner action, because these things keep happening," Nizamuddin added. That will require as much a change in character from the BCB as they want from their players.

BCB mulls Test batting coach

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is mulling over the appointment of a batting coach specifically for Test matches, as current batting coach Neil McKenzie is only available for the limited-overs formats.

"After [former coach] Chandika Hathurusingha left [in November 2017], we were busy with the appointment of a head coach," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told reporters in Mirpur yesterday. "Along with that we were also looking for support staff. Our target was appointing staff who would be available till the 2019 World Cup. The recent appointment of the batting coach was for the T20Is and ODIs. So the plan now is to appoint a batting coach for the Test team."

It should be a welcome addition because Bangladesh's batting performances since the tour of South Africa in September-October last year have been woeful. In 12 innings since the start of that tour, Bangladesh have been bowled out for less than 200 on nine occasions, the nadir coming in their lowest ever Test total of 43 in the first innings of the first Test on the tour of West Indies.

The Tigers were also without a head coach for seven months since Hathurusingha's departure, with current coach Steve Rhodes coming in on the eve of the West Indies tour. During that time they also had no batting coach until former South Africa batsman McKenzie joined the team for the limited-overs leg of the Caribbean trip.

If there is a new Test batting coach, it will mark the first time that the BCB has appointed format-specific coaches.



Mushfiqur watches his stumps rattled in Bangladesh's second innings of the opening Test against the West Indies in Antigua on July 6.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

A humbling experience

ATIQUA ANAM from Jakarta



The life of a sports journalist can be a pretty frustrating one at times. However, it can be a hell of a lot more frustrating if you are a sports journalist from Bangladesh, especially when covering major international sporting events such as the Asian Games.

It is frustrating because it is difficult to find much scope to write positively about Bangladesh when negativity seems to be the order of each day during the Games. When a 163-strong contingent leaves such a tournament with nothing to show in terms of the medal count, there idea of finding something positive to write home about seems bleak for even the most optimistic writers.

The other day, an Indian journalist from Tripura expressed his exasperation at the media centre about how he has to hurry from one venue to another in order to catch his country's medal-rush. Asked about his country's success, he practically gloated about how well his countrymen and women have fared. However, when he returned the same question to the Bangladesh contingent, there was a slight murmur among the journalists before it was deemed wise to divert the conversation to something more pleasant.

THINGS ARE PRETTY DESPERATE.

For the first time in 32 years, the Bangladesh contingent will leave the Games empty-handed after the teams in kabaddi -- an event which has produced at least one medal in each of the previous editions since it was introduced in 1990 -- failed to earn any medals. The other discipline that had brought medals in the last two editions -- cricket -- was scrapped from the games altogether.

There were a few bright spots

during the Jakarta-Palembang Games, thanks to the performance of the football and hockey teams and improvements in their personal records for archer Ruman Sana and athlete Sumi Akter, but overall, this has been a campaign that fell well short of expectations.

Mabia Akter Simanta, one who has overcome many a hardship on her way to becoming a first class weightlifter -- she is a South Asian Games gold medallist -- perhaps knows the feeling of frustration more than anyone else. She had come to Jakarta with modest hopes knowing her limitations, but when even those modest hopes were not met, she could not resist having an outburst, saying 'It's better to not send athletes to these Games without proper preparation so that this embarrassment can be avoided'.

She has always been fairly outspoken regarding their lack of opportunities and the whole system in general but even those who do not speak so loudly against the system were unequivocal in their reply that the preparation and training facilities were barely enough to 'better their personal bests', a target set forward by the Bangladesh Olympic Association.

What they could not speak of though, was the poor choice of personnel sent by the federations to accompany the players.

Mabia was trained and accompanied by a coach who was a former female weightlifter that retired not too long ago, instead of being coached and guided here by a veteran.

The two swimmers from Bangladesh failed to even get close to their previous best scores and they were accompanied by an official, not by the coach who trains them yearlong.

Sending proper coaches may not guarantee success, but that is certainly a step in the right direction, given that the earlier steps such as training them long-term under



Weightlifter Mabia Akter has every reason to feel disappointed for the lack of concerted preparation before participating in big events like Asian Games.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

good coaches and with proper training facilities, not inside some shabby gymnasium with obsolete equipments, are taken.

The coaches, especially the foreign coaches in shooting and archery -- two events which get more privilege compared to other individual events -- spoke of the need for more participation in international events to earn match-temperament in a bid to compete with the best at the Asian Games. The consensus is that without proper training and participation in international events, the targets we have, however modest they are, will in most cases remain elusive. And to ensure proper long-term training, there has to be an investment from the private sector

as well patronisation from the government.

It took our neighbouring country India 112 years to earn their first individual gold medal in the modern Summer Olympics, and that achievement came through shooter Abhinav Bindra in 2008. India had won a number of gold and other medals in hockey and silver and bronze medals in other categories leading up to 2008. But that feat by Bindra, and the two other medals won in wrestling and boxing, showed the country that they were finally on the right track, investing in various sports, not just a few team games. Subsequently, there was a medal-rush in the Guangzhou Asian Games in 2010 and the 2012 Olympics in London.

Amlan Chakraborty, a Reuters reporter based in Delhi who is currently covering the Jakarta-Palembang Asian Games, gave his opinion on this issue. "You see there has been quite a lot of interest from the corporate sector in sports. It came over the last decade or so, when one or two boxers or wrestlers and shooters were doing well. Wrestler Sushil Kumar's feat [he won a bronze in 2004 Olympics and a silver in 2008 Olympics to become the first Indian to win wrestling medals in the Olympics] got the government and corporate houses keen to invest in Olympic events. And now you can see the outcome," explained Amlan.

Some people often argue that we should concentrate more on sports which are less physical and more technical in nature. While this argument is valid to an extent, there is always a way to get around physical limitations with proper training and fitness. West Bengal, the Indian state which is closest to us both geographically and ethically, have produced quite a few Asian level athletes in many disciplines, including table tennis and athletics. In fact, we do not have to go that far for an example. The Bangladesh footballers, who had always been criticised for the lack of fitness that lead to their loss of focus and stamina in latter parts of football matches, have set a fine example this time by reaching the knockout rounds, riding on their improved fitness owing to routine fitness drills and a proper diet. They have shown that their deficiency in skill can be overcome to some extent with improved fitness.

Long-term training, proper training facilities and a focus on better fitness are issues that sports authorities should start to focus on so that next time, the athletes do not feel that they are in the Games to embarrass themselves.