

'Test success will fulfil my career'

SPORTS REPORTER



This is the era of T20 madness. Love it or hate it, the newest format of the game has cornered

all the glamour, especially in terms of financial attraction. Against this backdrop when someone sings the praises of Test cricket, it sounds pretty good to lovers of the original game. Bangladesh's uncapped batsman Mohammad Mithun and rookie pacer Abu Jayed both talked up the importance of Test cricket while talking to the reporters at the team hotel in Sylhet yesterday.

"As a player, I think my career will come to fulfilment when I will be able to play Test cricket. If I can be successful in Test cricket then I will feel that I am fit for cricket," Mithun said when asked about how it would feel to play Test cricket after playing T20Is and ODIs.

Jayed has already played two Tests, besides three T20Is, and said longer-version cricket is his favoured format among the three versions of the game.

"I have always said that while I like T20s and ODIs, I enjoy Test cricket most. I have loved to play longer-version cricket from my early days," said local boy Jayed, who has a long-cherished dream of playing a Test match on his home ground.

While Jayed was excited with the prospect of playing a Test against Zimbabwe at home, Mithun treated his maiden Test call-up with equanimity.

"It's never happened in my life [overexcitement with anything]. Maybe it's my nature. I try to take it easy even when I dropped from the team. I take everything easily," said Mithun when asked whether he felt special excitement upon receiving the maiden Test call-up.

Both Jayed and Mithun were however looking forward on banking on their domestic first-class experience ahead of the first Test of the two-match series.

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Bangladesh batsman Mohammad Mithun (L) and pace bowler Abu Jayed talk to the media at the team hotel in Sylhet yesterday ahead of the first Test against Zimbabwe that is set to start on Saturday. PHOTO: STAR

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> **Uncapped Bangladesh** batsman Mohammad Mithun

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> **Bangladesh pacer Abu Jayed**

because of that I had to be patient while bowling long spells," said Jayed.

"We have been playing first-class cricket on these kinds of wickets. We bowled the maximum overs with the old ball and last season the pacers bowled well with the old ball, so we will have to provide breakthroughs with both new ball and old," Jayed added, disagreeing with the notion that Bangladesh pace bowlers' impact is limited to new-ball spells.

Bangladesh pace bowlers got help from the Dukes ball in the last series in West Indies and this time they will bowl with the SG ball, but Jayed was hopeful of

"It's true that you get much swing with the Dukes ball, but SG is also the same as Dukes. And if there is no swing initially, we can reverse-swing the ball because there is movement in the SG ball. If it is a flat wicket, there is a chance of reverse swing,' explained Jayed, painting a bright picture of Bangladesh's pace-bowling department.

Mithun also stressed on the need for patience to make an impact in Test cricket, but believed that scoring runs is equally important these days.

"You have to take time in Test cricket. As a batsman, I will definitely take time to settle if I get the chance to play the first Test, but in the end runs are also important. You have to punish the bad ball. No matter how much time you spend in the middle you have to score runs, otherwise you are not a set batsman," opined the right-hander.

"Experience is important in Test cricket. You have to have great experience to play Test cricket. I have been playing first-class cricket for a long time and it will help me. If we look at other Test nations, most Test cricketers come into the team on the back of huge domestic experience. I have also got that experience and I will try to capitalise on it," he continued.

Mithun said that he was fortunate that he has got teammates like Tushar Imran and Abdur Razzak in Khulna Division, who have helped him learn the craft of how to cope in difficult conditions.

U-15 boys eye final

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh will hope to cross the last four hurdle of the SAFF U-15 Championship for the second time when they take on defending champions India in the first semifinal at the ANFA Complex ground in Kathmandu today.

The match gets underway at 10:45am [BST] before the second semifinal between hosts Nepal and Pakistan take place in the afternoon at the same venue.

Bangladesh only once made it to the final of these championships, which was an under -16 tournament in the first two editions, when they hosted the third edition of in 2015. They beat India 2-1 in group stages before beating the same opposition 4-2 in penalty shootout in the final after the regulation time of that game ended 1-1.

The boys in red and green will definitely hope to repeat the feat of 2015 against India rather than the 2013 edition where Bangladesh suffered a 0-2 defeat in group stage before being ousted with a 5-1 drubbing by Nepal in the semifinal.

The charges of Mostafa Anwar Parvez may, however, take inspiration from their first two matches against Maldives and Nepal where they scored a total of 11 goals. The boys in red and green showed great character by beating Nepal despite having a player sent off after the half-hour mark. The team's confidence is high but they are realistic ahead of the match against India, who ensured their semifinal berth with a 4-0 win over Bhutan after losing the tournament opener 2-1 against Pakistan.

"India are a strong side and we have taken preparation accordingly. We beat Maldives and Nepal in group stage which helped increase our confidence. We are hoping to reach the final by beating India," said Bangladesh captain Mahedi Hasan.

Anwar Parvez, who also guided Bangladesh in the previous edition, was a bit cautious about the progress to the final as his charges suffered a 4-2 defeat against Nepal in the 2017 semifinal.

"India are a strong team. I watched their match against Pakistan and gathered some ideas about them," Parvez said. "We have prepared our gameplan for the semifinal match and trained the boys today (Wednesday)."

"The boys are ready to face India and we are hopeful that we can qualify for the final by beating India," said the former national midfielder.

Sylhet's challenge to revive a rich history

MAZHAR UDDIN from Sylhet



Although Bangladesh's first Test against Zimbabwe starting on November 3 will make the Sylhet International Stadium the country's newest Test venue, the north-eastern city has a history of producing top-class

players for Bangladesh. The list of cricketers from Sylhet who

have represented the Tigers with distinction extend from Shafigul Hague Heera and Golam Faruk Suru -- both of whom represented Bangladesh in the early days -- to Hasibul Hossain Shanto, Alok Kapali, Rajin Saleh, Tapash Baisya, Enamul Haque Jnr and Nazmul Hossain.

In that respect, Sylhet is not too far behind Rajshahi and Khulna -- two regions known as the main hub when it comes to producing players for the top flight.

Two pacers in the current Bangladesh Test squad -- Abu Jayed and Khaled Ahmed -- are the latest Sylheti additions to the Tigers' Test side while the likes of young Zakir Hasan and pacer Ebadat Hossain are also in the wings. There are also a few first-class cricketers from Sylhet such as Nabil Samad and Imtiaz Hossain who have stood out with their performances.

However, there are various reasons that have prevented Sylhet from producing cricketers of the highest class in recent times.

The Sylhet district sports association has an ad-hoc committee that has been running the show since 2014 and it is yet to form a full-fledged committee. The Sylhet league, which boasted the presence of former Sri Lanka captain Arjuna Ranatunga during the early 1990s, has faded so much that it did not take place for two consecutive seasons between 2000 to 2010, during which it was also beset by irregularity.

A lack of grounds in Sylhet is also one of the biggest reasons for the region's failure to provide top-class players consistently.

The Sylhet International Stadium, which is also known as the divisional stadium, is the only venue in the region with proper facilities for cricketers to practise, but it is only available to national age-level cricketers and divisional players.

The District Stadium is the other major ground in Sylhet but it is also not accessible for certain periods of the year as football has taken precedence over cricket in recent times.

There were three more grounds in Sylhet where cricket was the main sport -- the Alia Madrasa ground, the Eidgah ground and Abul Mal Abdul Muhit Sports Complex, all of which are now not accessible.

Alia Madrasa is now used for waz mahfil and other religious programmes while the Eidgah ground is now mostly used for trade fairs and even as a cattle market.

On the brighter side, however, there are also a few cricket academies which have been providing young cricketers the opportunity to learn the game.

Clemon Surma Cricket Academy in Sylhet -- founded by former Bangladesh captain and local boy Rajin with the aim of returning the region to its cricketing golden days and producing players for the national team -- is one of the prominent academies in the city.

"To be honest, there was only one cricket academy in Sylhet in the past and I thought about how young children who want to play this game can prepare themselves. At the same time there were not much players from Sylhet who represented Bangladesh after our batch. I started this academy back in 2008 from that mindset. This will be my last season as a professional cricketer and I think I will be able to give more time to the academy in the future," Rajin told The Daily Star yesterday.

Despite the lack of grounds in Sylhet, the academy is continuing to teach the youngsters the art of the game. They played a practice game among themselves at the MC College ground yesterday, each nurturing the dream to become the next Alok, Rajin or maybe even take the next step and become a household name.



The picturesque Sylhet International Stadium that will host the first Test between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe from Saturday. It is the only stadium in the country with a green gallery. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SIS decked out for the special day

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet



The most scenic of all the country's stadiums, with tea gardens and hillocks

surrounding it, the Sylhet International Stadium (SIS) is set to host its inaugural Test match on November 3 when Bangladesh will take on Zimbabwe in the first match of a two-Test series.

After its construction in 2007, Sylhet will become Bangladesh's eighth Test venue. The picturesque stadium hosted its first international game in 2014 -- the ICC World Twenty20 qualifying match between Ireland and Zimbabwe -- before hosting six more T20Is, including the one in February this year between

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The stadium currently has a capacity of 18,000. New floodlights have been installed to go with state-of-theart facilities, with the players' dressing room now situated on the second floor of the grand stand in the north-

ern part of the stadium. The outfield is equipped with a modern drainage system that is

capable of preparing the ground for play within thirty minutes of cessation of rainfall. A total of seven pitches, all maintained throughout the year, have proved fruitful for batsmen during the National Cricket League first-class competition.

The most eye-catching part of the stadium is the 'Green Gallery' -which has however turned brownish

Sylhet's inaugural Test will start by the ringing of a bell much like at England's historic Lord's Cricket Ground, which started the tradition back in 2007

in the approaching winter -- situated in the western part of the ground.

The organisers are willing to make the inaugural Test match a memorable one as there are quite a few initiatives taken. One highlight promises to be the traditional way to start a Test match by ringing a bell much like at England's historic Lord's Cricket Ground, which started the

tradition back in 2007.

"We want to return to the historic tradition of Test match and for that reason we are going to place a bell where the match referee will ring the bell to announce the start of the inaugural Test in Sylhet. We already brought the bell from Dhaka.

"There was a question about the clock, which has also traditionally been placed in the past, but due to some technical errors we may not be able to fix that but we will try to bring another clock as replacement," said Shafiul Alam Chowdhury Nadel, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director and the general secretary of Sylhet Divisional Sports Association, during a press conference yesterday.

He also informed that there will be a special coin as a souvenir for the toss and that they have also invited former national players from Sylhet

for the inaugural Test match. Despite all the positives, there were still some concerns about whether the authorities will be able to maintain all aspects of the stadium or if it will lose its charm due to a lack of maintenance, which has been the case for the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura and Khulna's Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium.

Shakib granted NOC for UAE T20X

STAR SPORT DESK

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, currently recuperating from a finger injury, has been granted no objection certificate (NOC) by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to play in the inaugural Emirates T20 league known as the 'UAE T20X' tournament, scheduled to start from December 19.

The tournament, which Shakib will reportedly join on December 23 -- two days after the end of Bangladesh's series against the West Indies, will also feature international stars such as Steve Smith and Shahid Afridi.

BCB media committee chairman Jalal Younus informed yesterday that Shakib's participation in the T20 league is subject to getting a medical clearance. "Shakib will have to get clearance from the medical team before he leaves [for the UAE], " he said.

The all-rounder is currently in rehabilitation following an emergency surgery for extracting pus from his injured finger.

Damp draw in Chattogram

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The three-day practice match between Zimbabwe and BCB XI ended, as expected, in a draw at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday as persistent rain interruptions only allowed 66 overs to be played.

The visitors and two Bangladeshi players --Nazmul Hossain Shanto and Ariful Haque -- will travel to Sylhet today to play the first Test starting at the Sylhet International Stadium from November 3.

The first day was washed out and only nine overs were possible on the second day. Resuming the third day on 12 for one, Zimbabwe declared their innings at 145 for five in 48 overs.

BCB XI made 56 for two in 18 overs before stumps were drawn on the final day.