

# SPORT



**DUAL PREPARATION:** Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was tuning up for the ODI series against West Indies at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium gym yesterday, but his hand-raising gestures may be in preparation for his potential future political career. PHOTO: BCB

## 'Hopefully next year'

The very next day after whitewashing West Indies in the two-match Test series, one of the architects behind Bangladesh's success, left-arm spinner Taijul Islam was busy with the routine task of taking his mother for a regular health check-up. Taijul, who has taken himself to the next level and finished as the fourth highest wicket-taker in Test cricket this year, spoke to *The Daily Star's* Mazhar Uddin in an exclusive, wide-ranging interview after completing his familial duties. The following are excerpts from the conversation:

**The Daily Star (TDS):** Obviously you had a fantastic 2018. Was there any specific preparation for the year?

**Taijul Islam (TI):** Obviously you have to set a benchmark whenever you start a season. Bangladesh cricket has now reached a stage where the competition is severe and if you are not able to perform in two or three matches there is always someone to replace you. It's a positive thing as it urges you to give your best. There was a phase in the middle when I did not pick many wickets or bag five-wicket hauls. My target was to do something extraordinary and, Alhamdulillah, this year was good for me. I have bowled a lot and done the hard work, which paid dividends.

**TDS:** You are still in the race for the fastest to pick 100 Test wickets by a Bangladeshi. How would you see this achievement?

**TI:** I am yet to pick 100 wickets and I am looking forward to it. Obviously we all want to pick as many wickets as we can. It's important to have the thirst in you as a player and I try to do that.

**TDS:** Before the second Test against West Indies you were just seven wickets shy of becoming the highest wicket-taker in 2018. You ended up with three. Any regrets for not achieving the feat?

**TI:** Nothing like that, but yes, who wouldn't want to be the highest wicket-taker of the year in the world? I was not aware of it till I started taking wickets in the Zimbabwe series. Anyone would feel that but I did not feel that bad because we won the series. But yes, there was a desire as you don't get such opportunities often. Maybe next year I will be able to achieve it.

**TDS:** How do you cope with Shakib Al

Hasan playing the role of the lead left-arm spinner?

**TI:** Shakib bhai's bowling style and mine are different and we always enjoy bowling in pairs. I always try to concentrate on my economy and line and length. Shakib bhai has huge experience; whenever I don't understand anything I go to him and he always gives me the right advice.

**TDS:** Spinners get more assistance in home conditions. What are the areas you think the spinners can work on when they play in seam-friendly conditions abroad?

**TI:** It's natural that wickets at home will be a lot different from those abroad. There will be more turn when bowling at a specific pace, which you won't get abroad. I played in New Zealand [Bangladesh's next tour in February 2019] before and I know what areas to work on. For instance, in Bangladesh we get side spin but when playing abroad it's important to get extra bounce from the pitch and you have to put extra effort behind the ball so that it takes edges and goes to silly point or short leg. I will start working on it and keep the upcoming series in mind during the Bangladesh Cricket League.

**TDS:** How do you keep yourself away from all the limelight and continue your job?

**TI:** I am just like any other male of my age. But I feel shy in front of the camera or even with the media. You know everyone does not feel comfortable with such things and I am one of them.

**TDS:** Is there any regret at not being part of the limited-overs side despite taking a hat-trick on your ODI debut? Is there a desire to play limited-overs cricket for Bangladesh?

**TI:** I don't know who gave me the tag of a Test bowler... I just want to play cricket no matter which format I am playing. I believe I have the ability to play in any format. Sometimes it's annoying to hear such things being a cricketer.



## 'I'm happy with spin tactics'

SPORTS REPORTER



The Tigers' success in the two-Test series against West Indies is being celebrated with gusto but one cannot blame the pace bowlers in the squad if their celebration has a bittersweet tinge to it. They had no role to speak of and were mere spectators along with their celebrated pace bowling coach Courtney Walsh, especially in the second Test in Mirpur. In a cricketing culture that offers scant encouragement for the country's pacers, the sight of a lineup in the second Test without a single pacer only made the picture gloomier. The fast bowlers must still be primed for Test action as the Tigers are going to play their next Test series in the pace-friendly environs of New Zealand in February next year.

Walsh, however, did not find anything wrong with Bangladesh's spin tactics at home and during a conversation with reporters at the team hotel yesterday, the West Indies legend offered some logic in his defence.

"We are here to win Test matches. Whatever surface we play

to be fast bowler friendly. We thought the spinners would have a bigger role and that has proven to be the case," Walsh said when asked about the playing eleven in the second Test.

"Tactically we wanted to play more spinners to win a Test and the series. It was achieved. The ultimate

they visit New Zealand.

"Hopefully when we go to New Zealand, the seamers might get a better opportunity. We might get different types of wickets, and they should want to grab those opportunities as well. We haven't grabbed it in any overseas tour, and that to me is a bigger concern. No one has put their hands up and said 'okay, when I am in Bangladesh, I might not play but when I am away, I want to be the first name on the list'," he suggested, adding: "I think they [pacers] should be disappointed at not playing, but it is not the end of the world or end of the road."

As a professional, Walsh was satisfied with Bangladesh's success but as a West Indian he had reason to be saddened after the innings and 184-run loss in the second Test sealed a whitewash for Bangladesh. "As a West Indian, you are going to be disappointed in the performance, and saddened by the margin of defeat in India and here. You hope that after Bangladesh win all the series here and the West Indies leave, they will improve in those performances."



"[We have to pick] whichever combination is the best to get Bangladesh to win Tests. Back in the day when West Indies used to dominate, they had four fast bowlers. Now Bangladesh is dominating with four spinners."

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on, [we have to pick] whichever combination is the best to get Bangladesh to win Tests. I am always happy with it. Back in the day when West Indies used to dominate, they had four fast bowlers. Now Bangladesh is dominating with four spinners, so it is just a trend. The surface was never going

goal was set out. The boys played well. It might be the first time [for Bangladesh] that one [pacer] hasn't played, but the result matters. It is a tremendous feeling to have a series win," he opined.

The West Indian also asked his pace bowlers to get mentally prepared to grab the opportunity when

## Concern over Neymar again

AFP, Paris



Paris Saint-Germain are again sweating on Neymar's fitness on Sunday after the superstar attacker left the field at Bordeaux clutching his groin before Andreas Cornelius' late header ended the French champions perfect start to the Ligue 1 season.

Brazilian Neymar was substituted 57 minutes into the hugely entertaining 2-2 draw the Matmut Atlantique stadium, in which he had opened the scoring and had looked in great form before having to head to the dressing room with what looks to be an injury to the same adductor muscle that nearly stopped him from scoring the decisive goal in Wednesday's huge 2-1 win over Liverpool.

"I don't know at all (what his injury is). We have to be careful, he said it was not a problem to play tonight but the pitch was hard and I hope he will be in good shape after Strasbourg," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel, referring to his side's must-win final Champions League group game at Red Star Belgrade in nine days' time.

"We spoke with 'Ney', all the physios, and they all told me, 'No, no, there's nothing serious', but unfortunately he is still in pain now. What I think is that he got out at the right time, he didn't push it too hard. He will rest against Strasbourg on Wednesday and will be ready for Montpellier next weekend."

The Ligue 1 leaders had won all 14 of their league matches going into Sunday's pulsating clash but Jimmy Briand and Cornelius ensured that Bordeaux became the first French team to stop the runaway leaders this season.

However the result is unlikely to slow down PSG's march to the title, as they still stand 14 points ahead of nearest challengers Montpellier.

Neymar's opener for PSG came after a spell of concerted Bordeaux pressure and at the end of a superb exchange with countryman Dani Alves, who on his first start of the season flashed in a powerful cross that was crashed home first-time by number 10.



Paris Saint-Germain superstar Neymar leaves the field after picking up a knock during a Ligue 1 game against Bordeaux on Sunday night. PHOTO: AFP



## Gayle awarded \$221k in libel suit

AFP, Sydney

West Indies cricket star Chris Gayle Monday won a US\$221,000 payout from an Australian media group which claimed he exposed his genitals to a massage therapist.

The all-rounder was accused by Fairfax Media, publisher of The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, in a series of stories in the newspapers in 2016.

They alleged he exposed his penis and indecently propositioned the woman in a dressing room at the 2015 World Cup in Sydney.

Gayle strenuously denied the allegations, claiming at the time that the journalists behind the story wanted to "destroy him".

He won his defamation case in October last year, with jurors finding Fairfax was motivated by malice and had failed to establish a defence of truth.

Fairfax said it planned to lodge an immediate appeal.

## Spinners put Pak on top

AFP, Abu Dhabi



New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson hit a fighting half century while BJ Watling batted with patience to delay leg-spinner Yasir Shah's bid to become the fastest to 200 wickets on the first day of the third and final Test in Abu Dhabi on Monday.

Williamson missed out on a 19th Test century but Watling was unbeaten on 42 as New Zealand closed on 229 for 7, a measured recovery after being reduced to 72 for 4 by a triple strike from Yasir in the first session.

Yasir began his 33rd Test needing five wickets to become the fastest man to reach the milestone of 200 Test wickets. The

record is currently 36 Tests, set 82 years ago by Australian leg-spinner Clarrie Grimmett.

Yasir managed 3 for 62 but was then thwarted by the fifth wicket stand of 104 in 249 balls between Williamson and Watling.

He failed to take any more wickets in the last two sessions and still needs another two wickets to hit the 200-mark and claim the record.

Williamson struck seven boundaries but these were the bright points in a day when defence came first.

Off-spinner Bilal Asif took over from Yasir, claiming Colin de Grandhomme for 20 and Tim Southee for two to finish with 2-57.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 229 for 7 (Raval 45, Williamson 89, Watling 42 not out; Yasir 3-62, Asif 2-57)



Bangladesh U-23 squad members take a commemorative team selfie ahead of their departure for Karachi, where they will face the UAE in the first round of the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup to be jointly held by Pakistan and Sri Lanka. PHOTO: COLLECTIVE