



Intellectually-challenged eighth-grader Afia Tasnim Tushin competes in the ongoing National Table Tennis Championships. She won the first round of the women's singles and mixed doubles events at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Winning without keeping score

ANISUR RAHMAN

At first glance, she looks an able athlete competing against opponents on equal footing on the table tennis board, but 18-year-old Afia Tasnim Tushin is an intellectually-challenged player taking part in the 38th National Table Tennis Championships being held at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium.

It is not unheard of for disabled or intellectually-challenged athletes to participate in such competitions but the grade eight student of a special-needs school from Rangpur drew the media's attention with her first-round performances yesterday.

Winning the first round in the women's singles and mixed double's events was a big achievement for Tushin, who beat Gungun of Tangail 3-2 in the first round of the women's singles before suffering a 0-3 defeat at the hands of Oishi of Bangladesh Army.

Pairing with Ruhul Amin Raju, she also notched a first-round win in mixed doubles with a 3-0 victory over Masud Parvez Babu and Shahnaz Parvin Sweety of Rajshahi but lost 0-3 to Akash and Tammana of Bangladesh Army in the second round.

"I feel very good," said a smiling Tushin. "I knew I would win the match [against Gungun]

because I was confident. Oishi is a top player and I could have beaten her. But today [Tuesday] I felt sick, so I could not fight with her."

Despite the challenges that Tushin faces, she has a clear idea of how to become a champion in the next tournament.

"I know a player can become the champion by winning six matches. If I can win at least five matches, that will be a big achievement for me," said the teenager, who started playing table tennis at the age of 11 under the guidance of her father AKM Jahangir Alam, a level-2 table tennis coach.

However, Tushin cannot remember the score during games and banks on her father's expressions to realise how she is doing. A smile helps her understand that she is playing well.

"She has strong points, such as her forehand and backhand, but she can't remember how many points she earns and what next step she needs to take. Then she looks at my face and tries to understand her position in the match. After winning the first game on Monday, she ran around the court which other athletes generally don't do," said a proud Alam, who was very pleased seeing his daughter's happiness.

"I also represented Rangpur at the junior and national level from 1979 to 1988 and my elder daughter -- Turbina Rukaiya -- is also a national

team player. So, we have brought Tushin into table tennis. However, the main reason for bringing her into the sport was to engage her in physical movements and attempt to increase her level of intelligence," her father said, adding that Tushin studied with general students up to grade seven before being admitted to a special-needs school -- Proyas -- in grade eight this year.

"I'm proud of my daughter because she is representing Rangpur after being selected from the qualifying test. She has not been given the opportunity as a mentally-challenged athlete. Rather, she became first among 10 participants during her first trial in 2017 and this time around she became third among six players to secure her place in the Rangpur team."

However, Alam admitted that there were challenges to caring for his daughter every day.

"What we generally do is that we always keep her in our sights because she doesn't know what is going on or whom she is speaking with. It is a big task to watch her round the clock every day," said Alam.

Tushin narrowly missed being part of the Bangladesh contingent in the just-concluded Special Olympics in Abu Dhabi last month but Alam added that he was expecting his daughter to one day represent Bangladesh in the event.

'Not thinking of the World Cup yet'

SPORTS REPORTER



Keeping in mind the seam-friendly conditions in the United Kingdom this summer for the ICC World Cup, the Bangladesh team management has been looking for a pace bowling all-rounder who can provide quick runs down the order.

Mohammad Saifuddin showed a glimpse of his talent in the home series against Zimbabwe last year and on the tour of New Zealand this year and the 22-year-old is among the first choice for selectors as the seam-bowling all-rounder in the mega event starting on May 30.

The team management is considering playing Saifuddin as the fourth seamer and hoping to utilise his batting ability in the lower middle order. According to head coach Steve Rhodes, the cricketer can play a crucial role for the Tigers.

Saifuddin, however, has been suffering from tennis elbow since the third and final ODI in Dunedin against New Zealand but the cricketer is continuing to play for Abahani Limited in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL).

There has been a lot of talk about the players who could make it into the Tigers' final 15-member World Cup squad and the selectors are set to announce the World Cup squad and the squad for the tri-nation ODI series in Ireland on April 18.

Saifuddin, however, was reluctant to think about the World Cup and informed that he was more focused on the DPL and will only start planning for the mega event after getting a ticket to the flagship event.

"To be honest I am not thinking of such things [finding a place in the world cup squad]. At the moment I am only focused on the DPL matches as I will only think about the World Cup when I get the final ticket for the event," Saifuddin told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The youngster, however, did express his desire to play in the World Cup and saw the mega event as a great platform to show his skills, not one that would burden him with expectations.

"Actually, there is no reason to take pressure as [ODI skipper] Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] bhai always says that the more confident you are the better it is for you. We may not be able to bowl 150 km/h like Kagiso Rabada but if we are able to bowl in the right areas at 130 km/h then certainly we could do better," he said.



Having partially recovered from recent injury scares, pacers Mohammad Saifuddin (L) and Taskin Ahmed are strong candidates for the Bangladesh World Cup squad. PHOTO: COLLECTED

UAE-Zim first ODI today

ICC

United Arab Emirates' new one-day international captain Mohammad Naveed is hoping for another electric crowd when their ODI series against Zimbabwe kicks off at the Harare Sports Club on Wednesday.

UAE are all set to take on Zimbabwe in a four-match ODI series at the Harare Sports Club, the same venue where they registered their first-ever win in the 50-over format against a Test-playing nation.

Although UAE couldn't qualify for the main tournament that is taking place this year in England and Wales, but their memorable win over Zimbabwe in the qualifier still gives "goosebumps" to the new UAE captain.

"It is great to be back in Harare as we have some great memories, and I have goosebumps remembering that last match," said Mohammad Naveed ahead of the first ODI.

Naveed played a vital role in taking his side across the line during the last encounter with Zimbabwe. He was adjudged player of the match for his fiery 10-ball 22* and returns of 3/40 as well as for holding his nerve while defending 15 runs in the final over, which powered UAE to a thrilling three-run win by DLS method.



Hopefully my name will be there: Curran

ICC

England all-rounder Sam Curran is hoping to use this year's Indian Premier League (IPL) as a launching pad towards staking a claim for an ICC World Cup spot.

"[The World Cup] is the greatest tournament and hopefully my name will be there," he told PTI.

Curran made a splash even before making his debut in the IPL for Kings XI Punjab, becoming the most expensive buy in this year's auction. However, he says the hefty fee hasn't heaped too much pressure on his shoulders, with the left-hander instead choosing to view the competition as a learning opportunity.

"I don't need to worry about that [price tag]," he said. "I've just got to keep performing and take one game at a time. I am really enjoying playing in India. The crowd gives you so much energy here, they really enjoy the game and that brings out the best out of players."

"It has been a very good experience so far, playing in Indian conditions and in front of massive crowds. There is so much to learn from established names and even the ones who have not played international cricket."

"I spoke to a few guys before coming here and they were clear about



how good the tournament was and I can see for myself that the standard is very high. I am getting to pick the brains of Shami. He is obviously a top class bowler and I am learning lots from him, especially how to bowl in Indian conditions and I am sure I will be an improved bowler at the end of the tournament."

That's not to say he hasn't held up his end of the bargain however, with the left-armer claiming a hat-trick in his second appearance to cap off a dramatic victory against Delhi Capitals. "It was a great moment," he said. "At that time I was not focussed on the hat-trick, I was focussed on defending the runs for the team. Luckily I was able to do that day and hat-trick was just a bonus."

No Khawaja in Warne's squad

ICC

If it were up to Shane Warne, Usman Khawaja wouldn't be selected in Australia's 15-man squad for the ICC World Cup 2019.

Khawaja is the leading run-scorer in one-day internationals in 2019, with 769 runs in 13 matches, at an average of 59.15. But despite that, Warne, tweeting out his selection of 15, left out the left-handed top-order batsman.

Warne instead picked D'Arcy Short, who has played just four ODIs, and hasn't played one since November 2018. Short was picked to open alongside David Warner. Aaron Finch,

the ODI captain, was shifted down to No.3, with Steve Smith at two-drop.

Peter Handscomb, another in-form player, was also left out, as was Josh Hazlewood. Shaun Marsh made the squad, but found no spot in the XI.

Glenn Maxwell, Marcus Stoinis and Alex Carey made up Warne's middle order, with Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Jhye Richardson and Adam Zampa completing the XI.

Before announcing his pick, Warne stated that the conditions in England and Wales must be kept in mind while considering any squad.

Warm-up tickets on sale today

AGENCIES, Undated

The tickets for the official warm-up fixtures of the upcoming ICC Cricket World Cup, scheduled to begin from May 30, will go on sale from today -- 50 days ahead of the big event. Fans will be able to purchase tickets from the 'Official CWC19 Ticketing Site'.

Each of the 10 participating teams will play two warm-up fixtures between May 24-28 with Bangladesh set to play against Pakistan on May 26 and against India on May 28 in Cardiff.

The ticket prices for the fixtures start from as low as 15 pounds for adults and 1 pound for children under 16. The tickets for Bangladesh's warm-up fixtures are priced at 15 pounds for each game.

The tickets will also be available at specific venues on the days of the matches but prices will be 5 pounds higher than the pre-booked ticket prices.

The 50-over warm-up fixtures will not have official ODI status as the teams can field all 15 members of their squads during the matches.

CA unveils new jersey

AGENCIES, Sydney

Cricket Australia unveiled World Cup uniform on Tuesday. The uniform is predominantly yellow, with a lime-green collar, while a thin green stripe runs down the sides of the pants.

The kit color scheme is similar to the retro uniforms worn by Australia in this year's ODI series against India which was played in Australia.

The team, will yet again wear the retro uniforms after a fan-voted competition led to the 1999 World Cup kit being selected ahead of seven other uniforms.

Australia are the defending champions of the World Cup, as they won the tournament in 2015. It was their fifth title win (1987, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2015).

The team will go into the World Cup on the back of series victories against India and Pakistan. Australia defeated India 3-2 in India and they clean swept the series against Pakistan (5-0).

CSK claim top spot

AGENCIES, Chennai

Chennai Super Kings beat Kolkata Knight Riders by seven wickets to maintain an unbeaten run at home and claim the top spot in the IPL points table at M A Chidambaram Stadium on Tuesday.

The defending champions took it easy and slow in their 109-run chase. After losing two wickets in the powerchase, Faf du Plessis and Suresh Raina kept the runs coming to beat the Dinesh Karthik-led side with 16 balls to spare.

CSK's underrated medium-pacer Deepak Chahar returned with outstanding figures of 3/20 in four overs and played a pivotal role in restricting high-flying KKR to just 108/9 in 20 overs.

KKR never recovered from the early loss of wickets and found the going tough to finish with a below par score despite an unbeaten 50 off 44 balls from Andre Russell.

SCORES IN BRIEF
KOLKATA: 108 for 9 in 20 overs (Karthik 19, Russell 50 not out; Chahar 3-20, Harbhajan 2-15, Tahir 2-21)
CHENNAI: 111 for 3 in 17.2 overs (Watson 17, du Plessis 43 not out, Rayudu 21; Narine 2-24)
Result: Chennai Super Kings won by 7 wickets.