

Rot at the root



RAMIN TALUKDER

It is very much a cry for help in the desert. Allegations of widespread corruption in the lower-tier circuits of Bangladesh cricket has been a recurring theme over the past few years. It has been spreading like cancer, leaving those involved in grassroots cricket crying out for help from the wilderness. Media outlets have carried reports of this chronic illness in Bangladesh cricket, and stories have spread on social media too. The issue was given more weight when national cricketers talked about it as fact during the three-day players' strike last month. Despite all the noise, there seems to be no end to this disease eating away at the heart of the country's cricket.

At the start of this year, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan had issued a warning. "If I stay with cricket for another three years then I will not give an inch to anything. I will keep after it till its end."

But nothing has changed. Instead, passionate cricket organisers have been losing interest and young, aspiring cricketers have been suffering terrible instances of mysterious dismissals.

The script of manipulated matches was all but the same as the clubs, who allegedly have the blessing from influential board members, used their men behind the stumps to ensure the result in their favour.

One such dramatic episode took place at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah yesterday during a crucial third division league match that stirred an uproar on social media after a club official uploaded a video on his Facebook showing officials chanting 'thief, thief!' at two two 'controversial' umpires -- Jahirul Islam Jewel and Saidur Rahman.

The Dhaka Royal Cricketers official alleged that their batsman Zahid Hasan was about to single-handedly take the team past Kamrangir Char Sporting Club's 148 after many controversial decisions from the umpires. Zahid, along with Taslimuddin, made sure during a 79-run partnership that they would not allow the ball to hit their pads. The scenario changed once Taslim returned to the pavilion as a batsman was adjudged leg before wicket even though he came down the wicket. Then a surprising new low awaited Zahid when the umpire raised his finger in response to the wicketkeeper's run-out appeal even though the batsman was standing inside the crease.

The official added that in sharp

contrast, earlier in the match Kamrangir Char batsman Mortaza Ahmed, on 20, was well out of the crease when the Dhaka Royal wicketkeeper broke the stumps but the umpires ruled in favour of the batsman, who went on to score 51.

"This match was very important as both teams had three points and only a win could stave off relegation for either team. All the decisions went against us. Just ask who runs Kamrangir Char Club, you can then understand why it happened. We were worried once we saw the two umpires. We knew when these two umpires came that it would be impossible for us to win. How can one [Jahirul Islam Jewel] who is a representative of Purbachal Club officiate in the match," said Royals official Sabbir Ahmed Rubel.

Royals lodged a complaint to match referee and former national cricketer Monjurul Islam, who refused to make any comments saying that he communicated his observations to the board.

Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) chairman Kazi Inam Ahmed said: "We will look into it. There were four cameras, so the umpires' committee will check it and then we will try to find out the truth. Regarding an umpire's involvement as a club representative, I am not aware of it... you can ask the umpires' committee."

It was not possible to get any comments from officials of Kamrangir Char Sporting Club as Saiful Islam -- who had taken care of the team in the past -- informed that he left the club while secretary Miraz Hossain Munna said that he was not present at the match as he was busy with the BPL Players' draft. He also informed that Kamrangir Char's owner is Obedi Nizam, who was the CEO of Dhaka Dynamites.

Many club officials however alleged that it all started from the opening game of the third division league when umpires called no-ball whenever Young Pegasus bowlers -- who conceded 14 no balls, including nine by spinners -- got wickets against Dhrubo Sporting Club.

"There is however hardly any hope. Just look at the owners of the clubs and who finances them, who is involved in all the misdeeds, then you can find the answer," said an official on condition of anonymity.

With such episodes seemingly becoming a staple of Bangladesh's lower-tier cricket, it appears that the rot has set in at the root.

The video of the chaos following the incident can be found in the online version of this article.



With the pink-ball Test ahead, Bangladesh will be hoping that stalwart Mushfiquur Rahim remains in the best of shape and mood -- as seen in yesterday's last practice session in Indore -- in order to negotiate the extra swing that the pink ball is said to offer. Meanwhile, Mehedi Hasan Miraz (Bottom) needs to be ready to deal with the potential dew factor when bowling during the upcoming day-night contest.

PHOTO: BCB

Tough initiation awaits Tigers

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI from Indore

Like India, Bangladesh were gearing up for their first ever pink-ball Test for the second and final match of the series in Kolkata. According to off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz, the Tigers were excited about the prospect of playing with the pink ball, but deceptions might await them in Kolkata, where the Tigers will travel to today.

"Everyone is excited since we will play a day-night Test for the first time and with the pink ball. It is a new experience for everyone and they are excited about doing well," Mehedi said while talking to reporters yesterday.

The team was supposed to be playing the fifth day of the first Test here in Indore but with the match ending inside three days, the Tigers have been practising under lights with the pink ball since Sunday. Having been rolled over by India's pace trio, the challenge of facing the moving ball is set to climb up a notch. The pink ball does a lot early and Mehedi, who participated in practice yesterday after sitting out



the session on Sunday, talked about his experience.

"I batted today and the ball is moving a bit. It's also a bit heavy and it travels fast after hitting the bat," Mehedi informed.

The conditions could be different from what they were facing in Indore. Mehedi was unsure about how the ball would behave during

experienced the pink ball in the Duleep Trophy -- played with the Kookaburra and not the SG to be used for the second Test -- but Test players like Ajinkya Rahane, Mohammad Shami and Ravindra Jadeja went to the national cricket academy while Bangladesh were playing the T20I series against the hosts. In that regard, India may have a more definite idea. None of Bangladesh's current Test squad members have participated in competitive pink-ball matches. The preparation for the series has been minimal from Bangladesh's side and the congested scheduling leaves them having to adjust as best as they can.

"We didn't have much time and we are trying to cover as much as we can. We have to struggle at the beginning but if we can adjust early, it will be easier," Mehedi said.

Priyank Panchal, one of India's most successful batsmen in the domestic circuit with the pink ball, told Times of India a day earlier that pink-ball cricket is 'a different ball game, can't compare it with the red ball or the white ball'.

To say the least, Tigers' task in Kolkata is not going to be easy.

More than a change in hue

SPORTS REPORTER

The Eden Gardens Test from November 22 between India and Bangladesh has already created a lot of excitement and buzz for the sole reason that the fixture would see the two sides embracing pink for the first time -- playing a day-night match with a pink SG ball.

While the fans and players are fairly new to the concept of pink-ball cricket, the idea of introducing it is not. The pink ball was first developed by Kookaburra back in 2006 for a cancer charity event.



It was however in January 2008 when the first-ever pink-ball cricket match was played between two Australian women's state teams -- Queensland and Western Australia.

After its development in 2006, over the course of the next nine years, Kookaburra went through 16 different shades of pink during their manufacturing process before finally settling on the shade that was used in the Test between Australia and New Zealand in Adelaide in 2015 -- the first day-night Test in history.

Pink, however, was not the initial choice. Only after yellow and fluorescent orange were rejected for being difficult to pick up, pink was accepted as the preferred colour.

The ball had even gone through changes and innovations since its introduction in international cricket. Initially, the pink ball had the seam combination like that of a traditional white ball -- a green outer seam

DAY-NIGHT TEST RESULTS				
Match	Result	Venue	Date	
Australia v New Zealand	Aus won by 3 wickets	Adelaide	Nov 27-29, 2015	
Pakistan v West Indies	Pak won by 56 runs	Dubai	Oct 13-17, 2016	
Australia v South Africa	Aus won by 7 wickets	Adelaide	Nov 24-27, 2016	
Australia v Pakistan	Aus won by 39 runs	Brisbane	Dec 15-19, 2016	
England v West Indies	Eng won by an innings and 209 runs	Birmingham	Aug 17-19, 2016	
Sri Lanka v Pakistan	SL won by 68 runs	Dubai	Oct 6-10, 2017	
Australia v England	Aus won by 120 runs	Adelaide	Dec 2-6, 2017	
South Africa v Zimbabwe	SA won by an innings and 120 runs	Port Elizabeth	Dec 26-27, 2017	
New Zealand v England	NZ won an innings and 49 runs	Auckland	Mar 22-26, 2018	
Sri Lanka v West Indies	SL won by 4 wickets	Bridgetown	June 23-26, 2018	
Australia v Sri Lanka	Aus won by an innings and 40 runs	Brisbane	Jan 24-26, 2019	

and white inner seam. However, players' feedback -- that the combination was not contrasting with pink and was difficult to pick up -- had prompted the manufacturer to change to a black seam, which is currently used and has received positive reviews from the players.

Pink-ball cricket offers more than just a mere change in colour as its usage can prompt many strategic changes. Aside from the seam color, the pink ball has extra lacquer which is opined by players and experts alike to result in swinging more than a traditional red ball. The ball offers more swing in the initial 10-15 overs but reduces the chances of reverse swing as the extra lacquer takes time to wear off. There is also the added challenge for the batsmen of the pink ball swinging substantially more under lights, especially if the ball is still on the shiny side.

Just like its new features, the pink ball has offered some interesting statistics in Tests so far. The pink ball has now been used in 11 day-night Tests and interestingly, all those matches produced a result.

There is substantial precedent of wrist-spinners being more successful in a pink-ball Test than finger-spinners. West Indies leggie Devendra Bishoo recorded his best figures in an innings when he returned figures of eight for 49 against Pakistan during their 56-run loss in Dubai in October 2016. In the same game, Pakistan leg-spinner Yasir Shah also shone, bagging a fiver in the first innings before taking two more in the second. It would therefore not be surprising to see India fielding Kuldeep Yadav, a left-arm chinaman bowler -- the only wrist-spinner available in either squad -- to get an edge over Bangladesh at the Eden Gardens.

Even though fast bowlers enjoy the initial spells with the pink ball and under lights, the batsmen who can see through those spells can go on to score big. Pakistan's Azhar Ali's unbeaten 302 against West Indies, England opener Alastair Cook's 243 against the same opponents and Sri Lanka opener Dimuth Karunaratne's 196 against Pakistan are proof of how openers can cash in as the game moves on.

Eight of 12 Test playing nations have already familiarised themselves with pink-ball cricket. And it can be said that as much as the spectators, it will offer a totally different experience for the players.

BD romp into semis

Finish as unbeaten group champions

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Bangladesh romped into the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup semifinals by emerging as unbeaten champions of Group-B with a comprehensive eight-wicket win over Nepal at the BKSP-4 ground in Savar yesterday.

Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto struck an unbeaten fifty while opener Naim Sheikh added 45 runs to help the side chase down the small 139-run target with ease.

Earlier, after being asked to bat Nepal struggled right from the get-go thanks to pacer Sumon Khan and leg-spinner Minhajul Abedin Afridi, both of whom bagged three wickets each for Bangladesh.

Sompal Kami top scored for Nepal with 38 runs as the side kept losing wickets at regular intervals and were eventually bundled out for 138.

In the other Group-B fixture at the BKSP-3 ground, India registered a huge 120-run win over Hong Kong to finish second on the points table with two wins and one defeat.

Electing to bat, India posted 322 for five in 50 overs, courtesy of a Chinmay Sutar century while skipper BR Sharath added a 93-ball 90. Off-spinner Kinchit Shah picked up three wickets for the bowling side.

In reply, Hong Kong lost wickets at regular

intervals and were eventually all-out for 202 in 47.3 overs. Shahid Wasif top scored for Hong Kong with 68 while India's Shubham Sharma followed his instrumental 65 not out by bagging four wickets.

From Group-A, Pakistan and Afghanistan also went through to the semifinals by sealing wins over Oman and Sri Lanka respectively in Cox's Bazar.

Asked to bat, Pakistan rode on a magnificent hundred from opener Haider Ali to post a goliath total of 319 for six. In reply, Oman were all-out for 172, succumbing to a devastating 147-run defeat.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan registered a seven-wicket win over Sri Lanka in the other Group-A match as an unbeaten century from opener Shahidullah helped make quick work of the 239-run target.

Shahidullah remained not out on 102 runs off 137 balls, featuring seven fours and three sixes, while Darwish Rasooli added 61 runs as Afghanistan reached their target with 31 balls to spare.

Earlier, despite a century from skipper Charith Asalanka, Sri Lanka could only post a modest total with Azmatullah Omarzai and Abdul Wasi scalping three wickets each for Afghanistan.

India will now take on Group-A champions Pakistan in the first semifinal on Wednesday while Bangladesh will square off against Group-A runners-up Afghanistan the following day.

Both semifinal fixtures along with the final match of the tournament will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.



Pacer Sumon Khan helped Bangladesh register an eight-wicket victory against their Nepalese counterparts in Savar yesterday. The hosts reached the semifinals of the Emerging Teams Asia Cup as unbeaten champions of Group B.

PHOTO: COLLECTED