Star SPORT
e-mail: sports@thedailystar.net
DHAKA FRIDAY DECEMBER 20, 2019, *POUSH 5, 1426 BS*

Khulna Tigers skipper Mushfiqur Rahim, who struck a match-winning 51-ball 96 against Rajshahi Royals in their last game, looked lively during yesterday's practice session ahead of their match against Rangpur Rangers today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

A spark of pace promise

SPORTS REPORTER *from Chattogram*

There is a relative lack of star power in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL), for which the tournament is yet to create the buzz seen in previous editions, but the emergence of a few young local fast bowlers has been a breath of fresh air for Bangladesh cricket.

The likes of Mehedi Hasan Rana, Hasan Mahmud and Mukidul Islam are the fresh faces in the BBPL who have caught the eyes of many because of their potential and pace at a relatively young age.

Left-arm seamer Mehedi is leading the wicket-takers charts so far in the tournament for Chattogram Challengers, with eight wickets in three games at an economy rate of 6.58. The 22-year-old has been come up through the age-level system and has had an impressive start to the tournament, showing his ability in the death overs particularly.

Another young pacer, Mukidul, made his T20 debut on Wednesday for Rangpur Rangers and the right-arm seamer ended with the figures of one for 26 from four overs against Cumilla Warriors. More importantly, Mukidul, who has a smooth and long run-up, also generated pace and bowled consistently in the 135kmph range.

Dhaka Platoon's 20-year-old right-arm pacer Hasan has so far had a mixed bag in the BBPL. He had a tough day in the last game against Chattogram Challengers as he was smashed for 55 runs from his four overs while picking up two wickets in a game that saw over 400 runs scored.

According to the Bangladesh's successful fast bowler, Bangladesh ODI skipper Masharfe Bin Mortaza, it is important for these upcoming young pacers to get the proper guidance. He also thought Bangladesh;s future in the pace department was bright.

"I think the challenges the wickets in the BPL so far have offered will come of use for bowlers in international cricket. In the World T20, which will take place in Australia, it will be difficult if you don't have enough options in bowling as the wickets there will be flat. So, the more we can increase options, the greater the chance of our bowlers doing well there.

"Talking about pace bowlers, I think it's their grooming period. I have seen a new bowler, Mugdho (Mukidul), and a few others who have very good potential, bowling at 135 kmph. I think it's their grooming time now and it will important to have good plans for them, but it's not that they will be picked to the national team now and then prepare.

"Not just in T20s, why not in Tests as well and think on a larger scale rather than just picking them in the national team right away and dropping them if they are not able to play well in two-three matches. If these young players are kept under proper guidance, I think they will be able to give long-term service," Mashrafe told the media on Wednesday when asked about his assessment of the young pacers.

It is still early days for these youngsters, but it will be important for them to improve their skills before being tested in the top flight.

MEHEDI HASAN RANA

HASAN MAHMUD

Domingo wants Riyad to lead in T20 WC

EKUSH TAPADER

Bangladesh are currently going through a leadership vacuum in all three formats of the game. With the ban handed to Test and T20 skipper Shakib Al Hasan on October 29th this year, the management had to announce two new captains in Mominul Haque and Mahmudullah Riyad for Tests and T20Is respectively just a day prior to the team's departure for the India tour. While the ODI captaincy position had been set in stone since 2014, with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza now ambling towards the end of his career, that position is also uncertain. With no ODIs scheduled until May next year, the ODI captain said on Wednesday that 'he doesn't know much about the national team at the moment'.

Mahmudullah did a commendable job in India after being thrust into the hot seat, showing good leadership skills at a difficult period following Shakib's ban, losing the T20 series 2-1, but not without a fight.

The Test series would end in disarray as Bangladesh lost both Tests by an innings, each inside three days under first-time captain Mominul. While speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Bangladesh coach Russell Domingo spoke about plans going forward in terms of leadership.

Domingo reiterated that Mashrafe did not have much involvement with the side due to the lack of ODIs but for him, Mahmudullah and Mominul were the ones who should guide the side.

"He [Mashrafe] is the ODI captain. There is not much ODI cricket in the next few months, and he is not playing other formats, so it is understandable that he is not aware of the current situation," the coach replied when asked about the ODI captaincy going forward.

He confirmed that he had submitted his long-term plan to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and believed that Mahmudullah should be the one to lead in the T20 World Cup in Australia in October next year. The BCB is yet to confirm if Mahmudullah would continue his role in the shortest format, after his stint in India.

"Mahmudullah did his job very well in India; his captaincy is very good. The T20 World cup is only eight or nine months away, it's not the time to give the captaincy to someone who hasn't done it before. I need to talk to the board first before the final decision is made but I will be very surprised if Mahmudullah doesn't captain at the World Cup," he said of Mahmudullah, who has led Chattogram Challengers to the top of the ongoing BBPL with four wins in five matches so far.

Questions remain on Mominul's ability to inspire the side. Domingo stated that Mominul would need time. "Mominul is a fantastic player. To judge him on two Test matches against the best team in the world is very unfair. I have got a lot of faith and belief in the way he goes about things and I think he can be a great leader going forward."

Domingo had reiterated during the India tour that he was ready to restructure the side with new faces. The likes of Afif Hossain, Aminul Islam and Mohammad Naim have shown promise in the shortest format and Domingo was keen to give these players more time ahead of the T20 World Cup.

"It is only eight to 10 months away and we have to ensure that we give those players the opportunity to play as many games as possible."

Well there are quite a few new faces already. [Aminul Islam] Biplob is there and [Mohammad] Naim has come in. There are quite a lot of young players coming into the side. Afif [Hossain] is a young player. Look, it [T20 World Cup] is only eight to 10 months away and we have to ensure that we give those players the opportunity to play as many games as possible.

RUSSELL DOMINGO
BANGLADESH HEAD COACH

Kings toil for 1-0 win

Saif hold Rahmatganj to a draw

SPORTS REPORTER

A wasteful Bashundhara Kings laboured to a single-goal victory against Brothers Union in their opening match of the TVS Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Bashundhara, studded with national players, dominated from the onset as they created some good scoring opportunities with Costa Rican world cupper Daniel Colindres playing a key role in the attacking third, which included Lebanon's Jalal Kdouh, Tajikistan's Akhtam Nazarov and local lad Mahbubur Rahman Sufil.

Bashundhara, who kicked off last season's Federation Cup with a convincing 5-2 win over Mohammedan SC, initially toiled hard to expose Brothers Union's compact backline, splitting it time and again until they ultimately took the lead in the 23rd minute.

On a counterattack, Colindres released a through pass for Kdouh, who nicely controlled the ball inside the box before placing it to the left side of the onrushing Brothers goalkeeper Titumir Chowdhury.

Two minutes later, Colindres whipped in a measured corner for Argentinian defensive midfielder Nicolas Delmonte, who headed wide from handshaking distance while Kdouh headed another Colindress cross wide in the 32nd minute. A minute after that, Khdouh rattled the crossbar while Delmonte against headed a Colindres cross wide in the 38th minute. Two minutes later, Matin Mia also hit the crossbar.

After resumption, Brothers had a good chance to level the margin but Nigerian marksman Kingsley Chigozie shot wide off Vali Jonov Otabek's free-kick in the 68th minute while Brothers goalkeeper Titumir bravely thwarted a close-range shot from Colindres in the 78th minute.

"We played accordingly in the first half but the opponents played physically in the second half. I am happy with the performance of the boys though there were some problems in finishing and we have been working on it. Hope this problem will be solved as the tournament progresses," said Bashundhara Kings' Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon.

In the day's first match, Saif SC escaped defeat by playing out a goalless draw against minnows Rahmatganj MFS in the opening match of Group C.

Saif, featuring five national players, could hardly create any scoring chances against the Old Dhaka outfit, who adopted a defensive strategy which yielded more opportunities than Saif SC, but they were unlucky to have left the field without the full three points, thanks some braves saves from Saif SC goalkeeper Pappu Hossain, who thwarted at least three attempts from Rahmatganj.

Rahmatganj were also deprived of a certain goal in the second half when Gambia's Momodou Bah rattled the post while Tajik forward Jahangir Egrashev and Rwandan Emery Bayisenge frustrated Saif SC, driving miles off target on either side of the break.

BASHUNDHARA	**1**	**– 0 BROTHERS**
Jalal Kdouh- 23'		
SAIF SC	**0**	**– 0 RAHMATGANJ**

"I am happy with a draw against the strong Saif SC but could have been more happy had we secured full three points," Rahmatganj MFS coach Syed Golam Jilani said. "The players got only three weeks to prepare and things could have been better had we more time for preparation."

"It is just the beginning and the first match of the season. The result is not good for us because Rahmatganj achieved what they wanted," said Saif SC's Maldivian coach Mohammad Nizam, who is however confident of getting out of the group stage.

Bashundhara Kings Lebanese forward Jalal Kdouh celebrates his 23rd minute strike which turned out to be a decisive one in his side's 1-0 victory over Brothers Union in yesterday's opening match of the TVS Federation Cup at Bangabandhu National Stadium.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'THE GAME IS TOUGHER FOR BOWLERS'

Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Amir's career can be clearly divided into two parts -- his rise in the international circuit as a teenage sensation and then his comeback from a five-year ban for the 2010 spot-fixing scandal. Since making a comeback to the Pakistan team in 2016, the left-arm fast bowler has matured both on and off the field. Amir has been a regular feature in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and is playing for Khulna Tigers in the special edition of the T20 tournament. In an exclusive interview with ***The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin****, the fast bowler spoke about his bowling and shared the experiences that can help the fast bowlers of Bangladesh.*

Weekend WINDOW

The following are the excerpts of the interview:

THE DAILY STAR (TDS): You started as a young express bowler and are now vastly experienced. What is the difference in mindset between now and then?

MOHAMMAD AMIR (MA): When I started in 2009, cricket was different. The game was slow compared to now and the conditions used to suit the bowlers. But now it is mostly batting friendly. Cricket is tough for a bowler now. I think a bowler has to learn new things to survive. Variations with the white ball are important. You cannot depend just depend on your stock delivery. In one-day cricket you have two balls being used in a game and the balls do not get old, which makes things easy for the batsman. The ball doesn't reverse, the slower ball doesn't grip. So, you need to have variations… cricket is tough with the white ball now.

TDS: How do you tackle such batting-friendly pitches?

MA: I simplify my plans in such situations. You have to know your strengths in tense situations. For example, if I am bowling in the death overs I need to know the condition and demands of the wicket. If I think I will bowl two or three yorkers then I have to stick to that plan. When you stick to your strengths, it releases a lot of pressure.

TDS: Have you ever felt helpless, not knowing what to do after being heavily punished in a game?

MA: Sometimes that happens

under pressure. Mostly, 99 per cent of the time, I do my planning about what to do in the next over when the other bowler is bowling at the opposite end. But if you start thinking about what to do in the middle of an over, it will put you under tremendous pressure. When I am not bowling, I try to think about what can I do. Ultimately, I know what I am going to do when I will have the ball in my hand in the next over.

TDS: When did you realise that variation is important?

MA: It was when I made my comeback in 2016, because by that time franchise T20 leagues had become popular. The games are high-scoring now. So, I had thought on my return that I have to learn new things. It can be a slower, a wide yorker or a slower bouncer. If you are predictable as a bowler in current cricket, then you are giving away 10 to 12 runs in an over. You will only be safe if you have variation. Like Wasim [Akram] bhai says, he is still learning cricket. You need to learn new skills regularly if you want to sustain for long in cricket.

TDS: Have any young local pacers in the BPL caught your eye?

MA: Yes. There is one bowler, Ebadot [Hossain] playing for Sylhet. Then we have Shahidul playing for our team, he is a very skillful bowler. He bowls at a hard length and then bowls the slower. Then there is Mehedi [Hasan] Rana, he looked very good last night [Wednesday].

TDS: It is often said that the culture of producing fast bowlers for longer-version has not developed in Bangladesh. Why do you think that is?

MA: I was discussing this with someone a while ago and I was told that the ball doesn't go above your knee from the first day of a four-day match in Bangladesh. That means the fast bowler is not bowling that much. Unless the bowlers are bowling long spells, he will not develop. The wickets should be such that a pacer can bowl 12 to 14 overs a day. Here, I am told spinners come into the attack form the fifth over. Now if you are not making your pacers bowl, then how are you going to develop them?