

We should have our own mantra to be successful: Tamim

Tamim Iqbal has big shoes to fill after replacing Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as Bangladesh's ODI captain. With the coronavirus pandemic currently halting cricket, Tamim is quietly looking forward to better times. The opener spoke to The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi over phone on his batting role, struggles and his understanding of the challenges going forward. The excerpts of the exclusive interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (TDS): Spending time at home during coronavirus outbreak?

Tamim Iqbal (TI): Truth be told, I am not facing any big issues. I am not getting annoyed, bored or anything else. Normally I do my running in the morning and after that I spend time with the kids. Maybe I'll watch a movie and time passes. If you think about it from the perspective that first you are doing it for yourself as well as the safety of others, life becomes easier.

There is nothing bigger than life and to that end, if I have to spend time at home for one or two months, I should not be upset. I am not thinking about cricket at the moment given the situation that's prevailing. We can see how the situation is in various parts of the world. By Almighty's blessing the situation in Bangladesh is still okay, but if we face something like that, it will be a big disaster. Most important thing is to follow the directives that are coming to us and when it passes, we will have enough time to prepare for our professional life.

TDS: How difficult is it to bat for a side which has seen quite a few batting collapses when top-order doesn't click?

TI: It used to happen regularly four or five years ago, but compared to those times, it's happening lesser now. It was challenging at those times; somebody had to do something differently to stop that. I feel I started playing differently around that time so that we don't lose a flurry of wickets. Before 2015, you would notice that we used to lose two or three more wickets right after a wicket fell.

TDS: Tell us about your anchor role and how much do you enjoy it?

TI: I don't really see it as an anchor role. On days that I get out early, if another one from top three or four stays till the 35th over, it's an added advantage for the side. The thing about the anchor role is, when a set batsman is at the crease, it doesn't matter whether his strike rate is 120 or in the 75-to-80 percentage range. The thing is, with that player at the crease, you can play around him as a team. After all, it is a team sport. If Bangladesh reach 160 to 170 in 30 overs but lose six wickets, you have very little chance of winning the match even though your run rate is close to six. But if you reach 140-145 in 30 overs for only two wickets, you have a very good chance of scoring 280-300 and your chances of winning the match improve. The beauty of ODI cricket is that you will start in one way, build another way in the middle and finish it a different way.

Whether I like my role or not, what's



Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal and his family.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

more important is that someone is staying at the crease. It can be me or Liton Das or someone who bats at number three. Our team's objective is that someone bats till the 40th over.

There are some innings which people won't appreciate. Even in our team, I see it happens a lot with (Mahmudullah) Riyad bhai. Sometimes one might check stats and say that he hasn't scored a ton in three years, for example. But the 30- or 35-run knocks that he plays, while batting at number six, don't get appreciated. Sometimes those 30 runs are as good as 60 or 70 runs, but normally people only appreciate 100s or five-wicket hauls. If you think about it, if someone scores a hundred, the rest still need to score 200 for a good total.

Man-of-the-series in the 2019 World Cup was Kane Williamson and he scored his runs at a 70-odd run-rate because even for that run-rate, the runs he scored were very valuable.

TDS: You took a break after the Sri Lanka series and came back to hit form. Was the break helpful in exploring ways to improve?

TI: What I realise now is that I should have taken a break for the Sri Lanka tour. I didn't do well at the World Cup and I was so desper-

ate to score runs that I started training two days after I returned from that long tournament. I overruled and failed again in the Sri Lanka tour. I needed a break to mentally refresh myself.

During the break I didn't even touch the bat or ball. I decided that I will do things I don't like so I can become stronger mentally. I like to do running for fitness but I don't enjoy the gym. So I started doing gym. I went to Bangkok and hired a trainer and stayed there for 40 days and trained six days a week, two sessions each day, 12 in a week.

TDS: How difficult is it to take over from someone like Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as ODI captain?

TI: (Laughs) It would have been a big challenge not just for me but anyone since you are comparing to the most successful captain in Bangladesh's history. But if I concentrate on it and start comparing then I will not do justice to the team because those are very heavy shoes to fill. But Mashrafe Bin Mortaza did not become what he is in a year. He needed four or five years. To get to his level, I would need a lot of time. I would try my best and if I feel someone else is a better fit after a certain time, I would step down.

TDS: Do you have a vision for the

team culture? What does that entail?

TI: I will take a great dressing room environment and players enjoying each other's success, but not getting results over one dressing room environment that doesn't have those but are enjoying success. With a good culture, I know in time we will get better results but with the latter, the results will eventually stop.

TDS: As possibly the cricketer closest to Mashrafe with lots of adda sessions with him, what are the cultural aspects you want to take from Mashrafe? What are the leadership cues that you picked up?

TI: The biggest lesson I have learnt from Mashrafe bhai is that you can sometimes win the match the night before. If you have the right attitude and know what you have to do, you will have an extra edge. This is what I have learnt from him regarding how to keep everyone happy and positive. It happened in West Indies; we had a poor Test series and when he joined, the whole team's mood transformed in 24 hours.

TDS: What is the significance of the addas with seniors and juniors?

TI: In a team meeting, the environment is serious and intense. During an adda, maybe even at a tea stall, one can open up and say what's in his mind. You have to understand that we Bangladeshis are shy people and maybe we won't say something in front of 20 people but we might be able to do that in front of two people. That's how [through understanding and discussion] a team is built. We have different culture; we think differently and we should have our own mantra to be successful instead of following other teams. In 15 years, I want people to say that 'this is how the Bangladesh team thinks' or 'this is how a Bangladeshi thinks'. Like people do for Australia or current India side, I want people to see Bangladesh like that for our own way of doing things. We need to invest time on how we want to play our cricket.

TDS: During away tours, you are the person who makes most eating-out arrangements and makes sure the team has exposure to local culture, right?

TI: A young player may find himself at sea going to a restaurant in an away tour. Education comes in many forms. If that player can go and order food and know the scenario, he will feel good about himself. It's not going to make them better cricketers but they will get some self-confidence and they can adjust themselves better and go out on their own later. I like to try new cuisines and love grabbing a few people and going out to eat so I just do that normally.

Reminiscence: My first match

In these times of social distancing, we must be safe while remembering that we do not get too used to the world being at a standstill.

We were meant to go watch matches together, agree with a few of our neighbours and disagree with the rest. So, we are taking turns at The Daily Star Sport talking about our first live experience at a sports venue.

Atique Anam from Dhaka, 1988



The first match I watched live from a venue, unless my memory deceives me, was the India v Pakistan cricket match during the 1988 Wills Asia Cup in Dhaka.

It was probably one of the first international cricket tournaments to take place in Dhaka, and the excitement regarding the match and the tournament as a whole, was quite huge.

I have often wondered as to why that match in particular pops up in my memories so often whereas an Abahani v Mohammedan football match, which was as big in those days and would take place much more frequently, could have been my first memories of a match that I watched live.

Finding no logical answer, I have resigned myself to believe that such a high-voltage Dhaka derby might not have been deemed safe for me at that age.

But cricket, too, was a very popular game, and since international cricket was a once-in-a-lifetime sort of thing in those days, attending it was worth

people very early in the morning.

For me it felt like a picnic, except for the fact the weather was truly unforgiving. And except for the fact that there was a battle going on out in the middle -- a battle between men in whites from two neighbouring rivals, with bat and ball in their hands and pads and gloves for armour.

Sat on one of the upper tiers of the general gallery, with a sideways view of the pitch, we watched the game for long hours and immersed ourselves in the Mexican waves that made it round the galleries every now and then.

We were baked in the scorching heat for hours, which was only a small sacrifice for watching live sports in those days. People from that generation would surely remember the lengths they would go to get the grainiest of TV signals for matches played across the border.

There must have been good strokes played, great bowling and fielding efforts made during the course of that game, but I can hardly recall any of those as I was too overwhelmed by the whole atmosphere.

Now when asked about writing for



every penny. Digging memory cells, I realise how excited I was about the prospect of watching the biggest cricket stars of that time.

We had taken full-fledged preparations beforehand, tickets bought days ahead, food prepared for the outing, and last but not least, placards drawn showing our allegiance to a certain team, with one particular placard screaming about a top-order batsman who was in murderous form in those days.

I, along with my father, one elder brother and a cricket-crazy neighbour, made it into the Dhaka Stadium (the present day BNS) through throngs of

the column "Reminiscence: My first match," the first thing I did was look up on Google and go through the scorecard, finding to my amusement that the batsman I had carried a placard about, who had scored heavily throughout the tournament, just happened to have a rare failure on that very day.

I looked for pictures of that match on the internet to invoke memories of any passage of play or any single act -- a huge six, a fast yorker or a brilliant runout -- but in vain. But I do remember I went back home that day very satisfied; probably richer from that experience.

Wimbledon cancelled

AFP, London

Wimbledon chiefs on Wednesday cancelled the Grand Slam for the first time since World War II as the coronavirus wreaks further havoc on the global sporting calendar.

"It is with great regret that the main board of the All England Club (AELTC) and the committee of management have today decided that The Championships 2020 will be cancelled due to public health concerns linked to the coronavirus epidemic," the organisers said in a statement.

The cancellation of the only grasscourt Grand Slam tournament leaves the tennis season in disarray and also prompted the ATP and WTA to cancel the grasscourt swing in the build-up to Wimbledon meaning the tennis season will not now recommence until July 13 at the earliest.

'No chance of resuming BPL before July'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy sees no possibility of resuming the Bangladesh Premier League before July, that too subject to rapid improvement in the coronavirus situation.

Murshedy, also chairman of the professional football league committee, made the comment to The Daily Star yesterday, a day after the deadline of suspension of all types of sports activities following the youth and sports ministry's directives on March 16 ended. Even though there has not been any further directive in this regard from the ministry, it is understood that under the current circumstances the halt in sporting activities is likely to be extended for indefinite period.

"As per news I'm getting from media as a member of parliament and as a businessman involved internationally, I think no football competition can restart by June. The month of Ramadan will start in the latter part of this month with the thus Eid-ul-Fitr on May 25 or 26, which will also follow another seven-day holiday. Then we have to give at least one month's notice to the clubs for their

preparation because all clubs have released their players," Murshedy said while on his way back from a high-level meeting of the government yesterday.

"I think if the situation improves rapidly, the league can resume on the first week of July. If the situation improves slowly, then it won't be easy to get the ball rolling by that time," Murshedy added.

The former footballer even believes resuming the league amid slow improvement of the situation will not be wise. Even in the best-possible scenario, Murshedy wants to judge the situation across the country before allowing teams to go to their home venues to play home-and-away matches of the league, which has only had six out of 25 rounds of matches completed.

Before the postponement of the league, the clubs requested the game's local governing body to find a way about the payment of foreign players, who are supposed to get monthly salaries as per contract. However, Murshedy said that this issue depends primarily on the clubs. "If any club faces any problem and seek our help, then we can come forward to help settle the matter," said the BFF vice-president, who has been at the helm of the league committee for the last 12 years.



Homeless people have been afforded shelter at the Pretoria West Rugby Stadium in South Africa as part of the measures taken under a national lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus. But it is not all gloom there as people were spotted playing cricket on the field yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP