

'Go and check the stats'

Despite being the most prolific performer for the Tigers over the last decade, Tamim Iqbal has perhaps more often than others been on the receiving end of brutal criticism whenever he fails. The 32-year-old again showed his class in the two-match Test series in Sri Lanka and although Bangladesh lost the series, Tamim remained the most consistent batsman for the Tigers. The Bangladesh ODI captain opened up and spoke about his game along with few other topics during an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin. The excerpts of the interview are given below:

The Daily Star (DS): Has there been a change of attitude overall in terms of playing shots or is that just in the Test format as we witnessed during the last Sri Lanka series?

Tamim Iqbal (TI): I always like to play my shots no matter which format I am playing. But in Test cricket when you play shots you get great value out of it considering the fielding positions because you get a lot of gaps. In ODIs or T20s, you will find a lot of players in the circle. Normally my mindset is always the same but at the same time, you have to realise which format and which role I am playing. Normally I set that by judging the pitch. Whenever I see there is grass or movement on the surface, I try to attack. I know there will be one good ball where a batsman can get out so I always try to be positive and if I am able to score a few boundaries, the opposition is forced into the back seat. Before the series, I spoke to the coach and said that I wanted to play positive because I anticipated what sort of pitch they might prepare. But it can also happen that I might get out early with that approach and when it works out, it helps me and my team. I think I should have scored more runs but whatever I did I enjoyed my batting.

DS: It must have been a horrible feeling being dismissed in the nineties in two consecutive Test matches in Sri Lanka...

TI: I was more disappointed in the first Test, which I thought was a very good wicket. I had done all the hard work in the first hour or so and after that there was hardly anything for the bowlers. It wasn't just about missing the hundred, what was even more disappointing is that if I kept on batting I could have scored more runs for my



team. The 90 in the second Test was a bit different because the moment I went to the pitch, the ball started spinning. But what I always like to point out is the best batsman of the opposition scored somewhere near 430 runs and the best Bangladesh batsman of that series scored 280 runs. In my opinion that 150 run difference between the two batsmen made a huge difference, this is what I feel.

DS: You went past 50 six times in your last 14 Test innings but were unable to convert one into a hundred. It's similar in ODIs, where you scored three fifties in your last six innings without converting any into a hundred. Do you regret it or that your tally of hundreds could have gone past 15?

TI: Maybe even more than 15 (smiles). If you combine both Tests and ODIs, I think I missed a lot of chances. But I have to admit it was

my fault in the majority of the cases while there were some where I got out to good balls. As I said, I can't do anything apart from regretting. But if I keep on thinking about it, that's not good for me. Maybe by the end of my career, I will regret missing out on those hundreds but the good thing is I am still playing and if the opportunity comes I will try to get that next time. This is not a record I am proud of.

DS: Despite being around for a while, the likes of Soumya Sarkar, Liton Das and Najmul Hossain are yet to find consistency. Being a senior player, how do you assess their mental attributes?

TI: To be honest I have seen very positive things from Liton, Shanto and others. They try to do better and they come up to me and other senior players and learn. Shanto batted brilliantly in the first test and he did get 160. Yes, he

forgot after that but we all tend to forget that hundred and we should appreciate that rather than putting players in the firing line all the time. Once they get appreciated, they will get confidence. I am sure if you go and ask them even they have high hopes.

DS: As the ODI captain, what is your plan for the upcoming home series against Sri Lanka?

TI: We are not going to play many matches of the ODI Super League before the World Cup. We are probably only going to play two home series. So we definitely want to take the home advantage and gain as many points as possible because it is always difficult playing abroad. We believe we are strong in ODIs, especially at home, so its a great chance to gain confidence as well.

DS: Are you going to change your batting approach in the ODI format?

TI: Alhamdulillah I have been very successful the way I have been batting in ODIs; not just in the last year but in the past five-six years. I am very happy with the way I have been batting in ODIs and I don't think I have to change much. Yes, there is always room for improvement and you have to keep on working hard. Normally when I get a big score it definitely helps the team win. I have a set plan and I would like to continue in that manner.

DS: Does it irk you when people question your strike rate or technique?

TI: I cannot please everyone. My team, players and coaches know what value I add to the team with the way I bat. For those who research and criticise, the only thing I can tell them is to go and see the stats. I don't need to answer much.



birthday boy Mushfiqur Rahim, who turned 34 yesterday, was in jovial mood during a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Mushfiqur, Liton Das and the ones who returned from Sri Lanka joined the training along with the foreign coaching staff after completion of their institutional quarantine. The training camp will take a one-week break before resuming after the Eid for the three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Kings players at Day's disposal

SPORTS REPORTER



Jamie Day will have all the 33 players of the preliminary squad for World Cup Qualifiers at his disposal for a week-long training camp in Dhaka including the 10 Bashundhara Kings players, thanks to the postponement of the AFC Cup.

The English coach will arrive from England in Dhaka tonight along with assistant coach Stuart Watkiss and goalkeeping coach Les Cleveley, and following a brief quarantine period, will likely start the training camp from May 15.

The players, meanwhile, will start checking in at the team hotel from today and now along with the others, the 10 selected Bashundhara Kings players will be there too. The players will stay at the hotel and undergo Covid tests before starting ground training from the middle of the month.

The Kings players were all prepared to board the Male-bound flight on Sunday evening, but were told to stay back at the

eleventh hour by the game's local governing body. The Asian football body, AFC, later released a statement in the afternoon saying that the AFC Cup group fixtures were postponed indefinitely.

"The AFC Cup (South) Group Stage matches are now postponed until further notice with more information to be announced in due course," the AFC statement said.

Maldives had previously wanted to postpone the event, but their request was rejected by the AFC. However, it is believed that the travel restrictions imposed on people from South Asian countries on Saturday morning and the alleged breach of Covid protocol by members of the Bengaluru FC team, who were in Male for a playoff fixture, prompted the Maldivian government to force AFC into postponing the group stage matches.

The group stages were supposed to feature Bashundhara Kings, Maziya SR&C, ATK Mohun Bagan and the winner of the playoff between Club Eagles and Bengaluru FC.



Chelsea high on confidence, says Tuchel

REUTERS

Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel praised his team's performance and said they were high on confidence following Saturday's dramatic 2-1 Premier League win at Manchester City which delayed the Etihad club's title celebrations.

It was Chelsea's second victory over City in three weeks following last month's FA Cup semi-final win. The London club are unbeaten in their last seven games in all competitions. "It's best to have consecutive good performances that lead to results," said Tuchel whose side are third in the league on 64 points after 35 games, three points behind second-placed Manchester United who have two games in hand.

"The group and the players do everything to force the luck on our side, and we caught the momentum to have another big win."

"It increases our self-confidence in a natural and healthy way because everybody knows we have to restart on Wednesday (against Arsenal in the league)."

Tuchel will face Pep Guardiola's side again later this month when they play the Champions League final on May 29.

Delicate negotiations are going on between the British government, European soccer's governing body UEFA and others about where the Champions League final should be played, senior British minister Michael Gove said on Sunday.

It was due to be played in Istanbul but that was thrown into doubt after the British government placed Turkey on its travel red list. "The final is a very unique game and you cannot predict what will happen," Tuchel added. "You need to be well prepared, we will have some changes again, they will have some changes again, but we will arrive with the knowledge we are capable of beating City."

Bayern consistency pays off with ninth title in a row

REUTERS, Munich



Bayern Munich on Saturday earned their ninth consecutive Bundesliga title after RB Leipzig's 3-2 loss at Borussia Dortmund and their own later 6-0 demolition of Borussia Moenchengladbach that put them 10 points clear with two games left to play.

While the Bavarians claimed their 31st German league title and their 30th Bundesliga crown since the introduction of the top division in 1963, they had to work harder for it than in past seasons.

Their six-title haul in 2019-2020 came amid interruptions in play due to the coronavirus pandemic, meaning Bayern have had to dig much deeper this term to stay so dominant in Germany.

By the time the Bundesliga campaign got under way in September they had won five of



Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski, who is within touching distance of Gerd Mueller's all-time record of 40 league goals in one season, celebrates his side's ninth consecutive Bundesliga title along with Thomas Mueller and Manuel Neuer.

PHOTO: TWITTER

competitions and a much lighter schedule.

Bayern's fatigue started to show after the first few months and a run of eight consecutive league games when they fell behind by at least a goal.

But despite a far from solid backbone, the Bavarians lost none of those eight matches, winning five and drawing three.

Their winning cards up front remained top striker Robert Lewandowski who, after taking the top player award for last season, picked up where he left off, and a rejuvenated Thomas Mueller.

Lewandowski has scored 39 times in their 32 league games so far and is within touching distance of Gerd Mueller's all-time record of 40 league goals in one season, set in the 1971/72 campaign. "To break this record would be something amazing for me..." said Lewandowski.

For Mueller, who together with David Alaba became the first

Bundesliga player to win 10 league crowns, it was a season that could see him earn a Germany callup for the Euros after more than two years, having scored 10 goals and set up another 17.

That consistency proved decisive as title rivals Borussia Dortmund's rollercoaster season eventually put them out of contention, leaving Leipzig as the only real threat to Bayern's enduring domestic dominance.

But a strong finish kept Bayern in front as Leipzig wobbled.

The eventual champions have now won eight of their last 10 league games, while Leipzig managed just five wins in the same period.

As Flick departs after less than two full seasons in charge, to be succeeded by Leipzig's Julian Nagelsmann, he will leave knowing that Bayern have now won more than half of the 58 Bundesliga titles since 1963 - including two under his own short leadership.

Pakistan one wicket shy of series win

AGENCIES



Pakistan enforced the follow on after bowling hosts Zimbabwe out for 132 on the third day of the second and final Test at Harare Sports Club on Sunday.

After Hasan Ali's five-for in the first innings, Nauman Ali claimed five wickets and Shaheen Afridi took four wickets as Zimbabwe scored 220 for nine in the second innings before stumps were drawn for the day.

Pakistan, seeking to complete a sweep of the two-match series, had a first-innings led by 378. Fast bowler Hasan Ali continued his mastery over Zimbabwe's batsmen with a career-best five for 27 as Zimbabwe lost six wickets for 80 runs in an extended morning's play.

The lunch interval was delayed because Zimbabwe were nine down at the scheduled break. Last-wicket pair Richard Ngarava and Blessing Muzarabani added 22 runs before Muzarabani was run out.

Hasan, man of the match after taking nine for 89 as Pakistan won the first Test by an innings and 116 runs at the same venue, gave another impeccable display of controlled fast bowling.



Aryna Sabalenka was in ominous form as the Belarusian overpowered world number one Ash Barty 6-0, 3-6, 6-4 to win the Madrid Open on Saturday and gained revenge after being beaten by the Australian in the Stuttgart Open final a fortnight ago.

PHOTO: REUTERS