

'I WANT A TROPHY'

Real Madrid's Karim Benzema said he's targeting a trophy with France after he was recalled to their provisional Euro 2020 squad following a controversial, six-year international exile. The prolific star, sidelined by Les Bleus since 2015 over his alleged role in a blackmail plot, missed out on France's 2018 World Cup win and their run to the Euro 2016 final on home soil. Benzema, 33, told L'Equipe he was "proud" of his call-up, which followed talks with France coach Didier Deschamps earlier this month. "I want to win a trophy with the French team," he said, adding that he hoped to "bring a little bit extra" to the World Cup-winners. Benzema, who has 27 goals in 81 international appearances, was last week named as this season's best French foreign-based player by the country's players' association. --- AFP



Who will take the baton from the Fab Four?

NABID YEASIN



Bangladesh on Tuesday prevailed through a looming threat of cyclone and registered a thumping 103-run victory over Sri Lanka in Mirpur.

The victory sealed the Tigers' first-ever bilateral series win over the Lankans and with it, Bangladesh also segued from a gloomy period into a state of steadiness, for the time being, in their cricketing adventure.

Bangladesh are now at the summit of the ICC ODI Super League table with 50 points in eight matches, and that ought to lift the Tigers' spirit as they achieved all this coming on the back of nine losses out of 10



out of vulnerable situations through their performances. Fifties from Tamim, Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur in the first ODI and a century from Mushfiqur in the second game coasted Tigers to easy victories.

Time and again, selectors sidestep admitting the harsh reality of Bangladesh not possessing a single consistent performer aside from the said quartet by boasting about the 'rich pipeline' they have to lean into at any time.

Head coach Russell Domingo stressed the urgency of preparing for life after Tamim, Shakib, Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur, all of whom are in their 30s, just ahead of the ongoing series. Why did he do so? Perhaps, being part

of the team management and having scrutinised Bangladesh from close quarters in the past few years, Domingo could sense the necessity of the issue he raised in order to formulate a long-term plan, something that the team management often talks about but clearly lacks.

In the last three years, Bangladesh played a total of 44 ODIs, winning 25 of them. Unsurprisingly, during this period the bulk of the runs were scored by the aforementioned four seniors. Out of the 10,798 runs scored by Bangladesh, these four players accounted for 51.42 per cent or 5,552 runs.

The fact that any one or all four of them featured in every ODIs played in the past three years prove

these players' consistency, but it also points out the team's over-dependency on the said cricketers. These players missed any game during this period only due to injuries, suspensions or when they took a leave from national duty as Bangladesh, even after all these years of international cricket, do not possess the luxury of resting any senior player and send a youthful, yet capable, squad to any major tournament or series like India, Australia or England often do.

It obviously augurs well for Bangladesh that the senior players have almost consistently performed over the years, but it could also be a scary thing when considering what Domingo said -- life after the quartet.

Mushfiqur spoke after his match-winning 125 in the second ODI against Sri Lanka, saying: "Would be very happy and hope that the likes of Liton [Das], Afif [Hossain] and Mosaddek [Hossain] start contributing in the near future as it becomes difficult for only the seniors to tackle all the pressure in a game." Was there a hint of concern and frustration in the voice of the senior campaigner? If yes, was his concern not a valid one?

It has been almost six years since the likes of Liton or Soumya Sarkar have been playing almost regularly for Bangladesh with 'potential' and 'talented' tags preceding their names. But unfortunately, they are still fighting to be consistent in the team. At times, there were a number of other players who broke into the squad with significant hype only to fade away after a brief period. While some players have been the victim of the selectors' nonsensical and untimely chop-and-change policy, the others, like Liton and Soumya, have failed after repeated opportunities.

This may be a time for a reality check for Bangladesh. Who is to be blamed here? Should the blame be pinned on the team management for their lack of planning, vision and their process of operating or should the players be faulted for not grabbing opportunities when presented?

The answer needs to be found soon if life after the quartet and Bangladesh's cricketing future is to be secured.



'Always tried to focus on little details'

SPORTS REPORTER

Off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz has become only the third bowler from Bangladesh to be ranked among the top two of the MRF Tyres ICC Men's ODI Player Rankings after a fine showing in the first two matches of the three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka. Mehedi has advanced three places to reach the second position after returning figures of four for 30 and three for 28 bowling with the new ball. All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan had grabbed the number one position in 2009 for the first time while left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak is the other Bangladesh bowler to have been in the top two, reaching the second position in 2010.

"When I started playing for the national team, I only played Test matches. I didn't get chances to play ODIs initially. I got a proper chance to play ODI in 2018 during the West Indies tour and we won the series. Since then I've been playing ODI regularly. Playing the World Cup has increased my confidence as I faced world-class players at that time. My goal was not to let the batsmen dominate me. I have always tried to focus on the little details," said the 23-year-old Miraz.

In the last 44 matches over past three years, the quartet of Tamim, Shakib, Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah accounted for 51.42 per cent or 5,552 runs out of a total of 10,798 runs scored by Bangladesh.

matches across formats.

But even after these accomplishments, there still remains a major concern considering the future of Bangladesh cricket. Despite playing in their favourite format and against a rather inexperienced Sri Lanka side, it was once again players from the senior quartet of Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad and Shakib Al Hasan who pulled Bangladesh



Stardom to obscurity and back again

ANISUR RAHMAN

After displaying her potential in her inaugural tournament by grabbing a gold medal, archer Diya Siddique went AWOL in both domestic and international meets over the past two years before again bursting into the limelight by winning a silver medal from the Archery World Cup in Switzerland along with Bangladesh's top archer, Ruman Sana.

Although Ruman was instrumental in the recurve mixed event, Diya also played a tremendous role as Bangladesh reached their first final on the big stage as well as helping herself break out of a two-year funk, which started in Spain during the 2019 World Archery Youth Championships in Madrid.

Now, on the back of her success in Lausanne, the 11th-grade BKSP student is aiming high in the same event ahead of the Archery World Cup (stage-3) and another competition that will act as a qualifier for the Tokyo Olympics, both in Paris next month.

"After winning a gold medal in the ISSF International Solidarity Championships, I was really dreaming big of going further at the international level but I could not perform in the next two international tournaments the same year. I produced poor scores which were below my expectation during the World Youth Championships in Madrid, lost my momentum and dropped out of sight," Diya told The Daily Star yesterday.

In those World Youth Championships, Diya finished 70th out of 83 competitors with a score of 585 in the qualification round. Her countrywoman Ity Khatun made 637 to finish 28th in the Recurve Junior Cadet event before being ousted 1-7 by Aiko Rolando of Italy in the elimination round.

"Then my confidence really hit a nadir as coaches and I could not figure out the problems that I was facing even though everyone was guessing there might be a problem with shooting. I often missed the target once every six shots. I burst into

tears many times because of the problem and went into depression," the 17-year-old said. "Finally, they found that the problem related to finger power and trigger. Then I changed my basics and started shooting faster than before and gradually overcame the issue."

Diya, unearthed through the NSC's 2017 talent-hunt programme, recorded her best-ever score during the Archery World Cup in Switzerland, 634 out of 720, although her overall best score of 649 was made during a trial session. However, the Nilphamari native is inconsistent in the elimination round as established by her average score of 8.74 out of 10. She needs to work that up to an average above nine if she wants to come out of the shadows and firmly establish herself.

"I am still far away from world-class archers. I think I am now a bit behind the world's middle-class archers. I really need to toil hard to get to their level. I have to improve my qualification total to 650-660, which I think is achievable. I also need to gather international experience," said Diya, who is now ranked 216th in the world's women's recurve ranking. "I also have to focus my concentration more during shooting and shrug off the pressure."

Although the teenager initially dreamt of becoming a doctor, she gave up that dream due to archery's demanding training load, which hindered her studies. Diya is now shifting her focus and trying to become an army officer or pursue higher education alongside her archery career.

"My father wants to see me in the Bangladesh Army and if I get selected in the ISSB exam in future then I will think about whether to continue with archery. But, my wish is to study in Dhaka University or Jahangirnagar University and pursue a career in teaching or another profession and continue as an archer."

Only time will tell what is in store. Diya is now concentrating on next month's events in Paris and has set her sights on the semifinal of the Recurve mixed event alongside Ruman with hopes that she can also book a direct seat for the Tokyo Olympics.

Potential leadership void looms large

MAZHAR UDDIN



The process of preparing a future captain starts by grooming the relatively younger players into leadership roles, often as vice-captains, and train them to share responsibilities side by side with the experienced, senior cricketers so that they may evolve into future leaders.

Interestingly, over the past few years now, the Bangladesh team does not have a vice-captain in any of the three formats which raises the question of who are the future leaders for the Tigers when the transition period finally arrives.

It is those five familiar faces -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib AL Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, and Mahmudullah Riyad -- among whom the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) revolved

around when it came to giving leadership roles over the last decade.

Mominul Haque was an exception although he was appointed as the Tigers' Test skipper only after regular skipper Shakib was banned from international cricket in 2019. His lack of exposure in the role prior to that appointment certainly made things difficult for him.

Captain of the Tigers' inaugural Test side, Naimur Rahman, thinks that captaincy is something that comes through a process and having a young vice-captain facilitates effective communication between the seniors and juniors in the side.

"We have actually discussed this issue unofficially and I have raised the topic in the past. It's very important for a captain to discuss various issues of the team with someone and the vice-captain is the ideal candidate," Naimur told

The Daily Star.

"With the absence of younger players in such a platform the team discussion gets limited only between the senior players. Having a young vice-captain actually creates a bridge between the seniors and the younger players, who at times shy away from leadership responsibilities," the former national team captain added.

However, considering the current context of the Bangladesh team, the inconsistent display from the likes of Soumya Sarkar, Liton Das or Mohammad Mithun -- all of whom have played over five years already, has remained one of the biggest reasons for selectors of not entrusting them to follow the process.

Despite the setbacks, BCB did attempt to groom Najmul Hossain Shanto as a future captain through the high-performance unit but the left-hander failed to seize the

opportunity.

Mehedi Hasan Miraz was also deemed as another prospect who showed potential when he led the Bangladesh Under-19 team to the semifinal of the ICC Under-19 World Cup in 2016, but he too failed to live up to expectations since making his international debut, although his recent form could make him the most suitable candidate.

"Ideally there should be a vice-captain in the team but the fact is they have to be consistent performers, regular members at first. Disappointingly, we haven't got any despite trying a few players in the past," former captain and current selector Habibul Bashar said.

"We are still thinking about this and at the moment Miraz can be a good prospect. But from my experience you won't realise who can be a good captain until given the responsibility," Bashar added.



While the Bangladesh players were enjoying a rest day after having confirmed the series, the Sri Lankans players and coaching staff were in training yesterday with the aim of salvaging some pride in the third match of the ODI series on Friday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Pistol coach Young reappointed

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Shooting Sport Federation (BSSF) yesterday appointed South Korean coach Kim Il Young as the pistol coach of the national shooters for up to 2024 Paris Olympics at a programme at the BSSF Shooting Complex in Gulshan.

Young, who had earlier trained the Bangladeshi shooters twice -- for three months in 2016 and for 17 months in 2018-2019 period -- has been given

responsibility for three more years to hone the skills of pistol shooters.

Young signed the contract in presence of BSSF president Major General Ataul Hakim Sarwar Hasan and BSSF secretary general Entekhabul Hamid Apu following seven-day quarantine upon his arrival on May 14.

The veteran coach will conduct training for only Shakil Ahmed for Tokyo Olympics and then he will start fresh training programme for selected pistol shooters.

Cured of cancer, Navarro heads to Roland Garros

REUTERS



Former world number six Carla Suarez Navarro has confirmed her participation at the French Open, which starts on Sunday, a month after she said she had been cured of cancer.

The 32-year-old Spaniard said in September that she was diagnosed with early-stage Hodgkin's lymphoma and would need to go through six months of chemotherapy.

"It makes me tremendously excited to be able to participate in Roland Garros," she said on the website of the Spanish tennis federation.

"I have been working these last few months to give myself the opportunity to compete one last time in Paris."

"I am looking forward to jumping on to the court and feeling again how special this tournament has always been for me."

The two-time French Open quarter-finalist, known for one of the best backhands in the women's circuit, had planned to compete at last year's U.S. Open but withdrew a week before the Grand Slam was to begin.

She revealed her diagnosis a week later, saying doctors told her she had a small, curable lymphoma that was detected at an early stage.

"Tennis has given me many things and I have always wanted to say goodbye on a court," she said.

