

# ‘Liton can be a top 10 batsman in the world’

Bangladesh batting consultant Ashwell Prince, who has been with the Tigers since their series against Zimbabwe in July this year, spoke to The Daily Star's Ekush Tapader in an exclusive interview, discussing the Tigers' consistency problems in the opening positions and their overall plans going into the T20 World Cup in Oman and the UAE next month. The excerpts are given below:



The Daily Star (DS): Bangladesh won the series against Australia and New Zealand comfortably but the batsmen struggled to score runs. Do you think there are concerns in the batting department going into the T20 World Cup?

Ashwell Prince (AP): World-class batsmen with a lot of experience in franchise T20 tournaments and international matches from all three teams (Australia, New Zealand and Bangladesh) struggled to score runs fluently during those series. Those pitches were very tough to bat on for everyone.

DS: There was a lot of discussion about the wicket prepared for the past two series. Do you think the Mirpur surface helped in terms of World Cup preparation?

AP: The Mirpur pitches were really difficult. They were very slow and spun a lot. It was obviously really difficult for the groundstaff to get them much firmer during the rainy season. Having said that, the IPL is about to restart in the UAE and by the time the WC starts, those pitches might also be a little tired and start spinning. If things turn out that way, one could argue that these matches versus Australia and New Zealand could be very good preparation. Having said that, if the pitches are better, I think it's easier for batters to adapt to conditions where the ball comes on better and spin less.

DS: What should the batsmen's main focus be in the Oman camp ahead of the World Cup?

AP: Their main focus will be to find their rhythm and have clear game plans going into camp in Oman. It was very hard for the batters to find rhythm in Bangladesh.

DS: Considering the inconsistency in the opening position, especially in the T20 format, what sort of approach do you want to see from the two openers at the T20 World Cup?

AP: As coaching staff, we know what our openers are capable of. They showed glimpses of it on those tough conditions. I'm confident we'll see the best of them on better surfaces.

DS: Liton Das has been impressive in streaks since the start



of his career but consistency is one of the problems he faces. What are your expectations of Liton at the T20 World Cup?

AP: The one thing I'd like to see from Liton is for him to believe more in himself. From what I have seen in terms of his natural ability, I think he can be a top 10 batter in the world in all formats. If he believes that and embraces everything that comes with it, I think he'll be more consistent.

DS: We saw Soumya Sarkar play impressively on the Zimbabwe tour but he looks a lot less confident

after the two recent series at home. Did you identify where his problems may lie?

AP: We had a couple of conversations and we identified one or two technical issues in terms of his batting. We worked on it extensively during the New Zealand series while he wasn't playing. He feels much better now.

DS: Naim Sheikh got some runs but struggled to rotate the strike, sometimes spiking the number of dot balls in some crucial situations. How can he improve his game and combat those issues?

AP: Once again, the number of dot balls were high for all batters. However, for any young batsman making their way into the international game, whether T20 or 50-over cricket, it makes life a lot easier if you can reduce dot balls. It makes life a lot easier. He might just need a little clarity in his game plan in terms of his best options to keep the scoreboard ticking over.

DS: How should Bangladesh best take advantage of their depth in the lower middle order at the T20 World Cup?

AP: I don't want to give away too many secrets (smiles).

DS: How crucial is the number three spot in T20? What are the team's demands from a number three in this format?

AP: Every batting position from 1-8 is important because these are the guys ultimately responsible for getting the runs. If we're depending on No. 9, 10, or 11, then we're in a bit of trouble. In terms of roles, the top four obviously require more adaptability because you may come to the crease in a range of different scenarios. 5-8 generally have to come in and be aggressive almost immediately.

DS: Despite Shakib's success at the number three position in ODIs, he has not always featured at that position in T20s? Do you feel Shakib needs a fixed position at the T20 World Cup?

AP: With his all-around skills, Shakib will always be a very important player for Bangladesh and I'm sure he will play a massive role with bat and ball at the T20 World Cup. However, for me there always has to be flexibility in the line-up. Hypothetically speaking, if we have a left-right opening partnership and the right-handed batsman is out first, do we want two lefties at the crease or do we want to continue with left-right? These are minor details that go into planning where the flexibility of the group comes in.

DS: Do you see Afif coming in to bat earlier in T20Is?

AP: Introducing the right guys into the match at the right time is always a balancing act. Afif will play a massive role at this tournament. He is still young, but another that I think can become a big player on the international stage.

## Lower-tier leagues set to begin in November

SPORTS REPORTER



The lower-tier cricketers of Bangladesh receive some good news at last, long after the coronavirus outbreak last year, as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director and the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) chairman Kazi Inam Ahmed informed the lower-division leagues are set to begin in November this year.

Although the top-level cricket involving the national team returned gradually alongside the Dhaka Premier League, however, the lower-division cricket was kept to a standstill, where the players had spent anxious time over the past two years.

The financial struggle has even forced many cricketers to seek alternate means of livelihood and thus, the announcement will arrive as a huge source of relief to the lower-tier cricketers of Bangladesh.

"We [CCDM] have been able to complete the Dhaka Premier League successfully and at this moment it has become important for us to get the lower-division leagues back to the field. We already had a discussion on this issue and at the moment, we're working on coordinating so that we can start the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd division cricket in November-December this year.

"We've already planned to sit with all the clubs of all the divisions soon, like we do every year. We need to set the dates to play the tournament within the cricket season, which is November, December, January, and February," Inam told the media at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Inam informed that the authorities will follow the Covid-19 guidelines set by the government and as per suggestions of the board and CCDM.

"Now the country is slowly resuming normality. There is no lockdown and every

sector is open, including even schools and colleges. But there is a guideline given by the government so we'll see and follow those in the lower-division leagues and also take suggestions from the BCB and CCDM," added Inam.

The CCDM chairman further added that they are willing to return to the usual 50-over format of the Dhaka Premier League for the upcoming season, set to begin in March-April.

"Last year we had a tiny window in which we had to complete the tournament by resorting to the T20 format. Since Dhaka Premier League, one of the most popular leagues of the country, is an A-list tournament and one-day international being our strongest format, the Dhaka League will be played in its traditional 50-over format," Inam concluded.



## IPL TO RESUME IN FRONT OF FANS

Sunrisers Hyderabad batsman Kane Williamson practises as the Indian Premier League is set to return to action in the UAE on September 19, four months after the world's richest T20 league was halted midway by the coronavirus pandemic in India. After the first leg of the tournament was held behind closed doors, the organisers on Wednesday announced that the fans will be back at the venues when the Twenty20 extravaganza resumes in the United Arab Emirates.

PHOTO: TWITTER

## T20 WORLD CUP BLAST

### 'Hard for anyone to stop us'



"Whatever the conditions, we have to execute our plans. If cutters don't work, the execution of yorkers and length deliveries will be very important. Of course, it's an ICC event, so we have to keep in mind that tracks will be flat or sporting. It will be challenging for the bowlers but at the same time if execution is good, there will be opportunities to do well. I am very excited and at the same time I want to gift something good to win matches."

TASKIN AHMED

ICC

It has been a tough year for Australia's men's team in T20I cricket but despite their lean run, there is a sense of optimism around the group heading into the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

It's been eight months since any of Steve Smith, David Warner or Pat Cummins played for Australia and six months since Glenn Maxwell, Marcus Stoinis or Kane Richardson featured. All six will be involved in Australia's quest for a maiden Men's T20 World Cup Trophy, as will captain Aaron Finch, who missed the series loss against Bangladesh through injury.

Maxwell is confident they'll hit the ground running. "I think they're very good," Maxwell told icc-cricket.com of Australia's hopes at the T20 World Cup. "When this team comes together, I think we'll slip straight back into us being in a great position. We're all looking forward to it."

With one of T20I cricket's most intimidating opening pairs in Finch and Warner, a flexible and talented middle-order featuring himself and Steve Smith, and an all-star attack, Maxwell is confident that Australia's best is good enough to take them all the way.

"You look through our line-up, we've got a team full of match winners and guys that on their day can take the game away from the opposition. I think that's what it's going to take. Any day when it's one of our players' chance to go and win us a game – if we can take that (chance) it's going to be hard for anyone to stop us."



## JOY FOR LEWY, LUKAKU; AGONY FOR RONALDO

Tuesday night Champions League clashes offered varied emotions to the fans. While a brace from Robert Lewandowski saw Bayern Munich stretch their record unbeaten away run in the Champions League to 19 games by sweeping aside Barcelona with a 3-0 win in the first meeting between the clubs since the Germans triumphed 8-2 last year, at Stamford Bridge, Romelu Lukaku enlivened an otherwise flat performance from Chelsea with the only goal to beat Zenit St Petersburg 1-0 as the Blues got the defence of their European crown off to a winning start. However, for Cristiano Ronaldo, in particular, it was a night to forget as even though the Portuguese put Manchester United ahead in the 13th minute, the Red Devils were still handed a shock 2-1 defeat by Young Boys in Bern.

PHOTO: TWITTER

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### BNS press box to be named after Badal Roy

The press box at the Bangabandhu National Stadium will be named after late footballer Badal Roy, state minister for youth and sports, Zahid Ahsan Raseel, said yesterday. "Badal Roy was a famous footballer and to preserve his contribution to country's sports, we want to name the press box or the media box at the Bangabandhu National Stadium after him. We have already discussed the matter with journalists and others," Raseel said, after disbursing Tk 1.10 crore among seven sportspersons, organisers and their families on behalf of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the National Sports Council.

### BFF waiting for AFC's decision on Eleta

A Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) official has said that they are waiting for a response from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) regarding the clearance of Eleta Kingsley to participate in next month's SAFF Championship. "FIFA has already referred the matter to the AFC. We are now waiting for clearance from AFC," BFF executive Mahmudul Hasan said yesterday.