

Repeated failures compounded mental frailties

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh cricket is going through its toughest period in a while and suffering one defeat after another across the formats has definitely taken a toll on the player's mental preparations while intense criticism on social media platforms has served only to reinforce the negative vibe around the national team.

After a debacle in the ICC T20 World Cup, the Tigers were whitewashed by Pakistan in a three-match T20I series as



well as a two-match Test series at home. With their backs against the wall, the demoralised Bangladesh team travelled to New Zealand for yet another challenging series.

According to Ali Khan, a Bangladesh-born Canadian psychologist who worked on the Tigers' mental fitness in 2014, continuous failures have hurt the team's confidence.

"The nature of the human mind is such that once emotions, be they positive or negative, start piling up, their burden reduces the confidence, self-belief and trust that one has on their own performances and abilities. Since results have been poor consistently, pressure from social media, mainstream media, the authorities and

other external forces have been piling up. So insecurity and a lack of confidence denies them from maintaining optimal performance," Ali told The Daily Star yesterday, adding that the effects were compounded by a lack of help from experts. "The players continuously face challenges but I think the team lacks psychological training. It is absent from their daily routine. Obviously, we have left it to destiny, hoping their psychological fitness remains intact. You can see the drain on their performance whenever they face continuous defeats or face challenges."

Ali prescribed that the Tigers should focus on the task at hand when they are out in the middle instead of overthinking and analysing other probable results, which could lead to lapses in concentration.

"When the players are going through a tough period, it creates a huge interference in the brain. Due to that, they are unable to give their best. Their minds are engaged on better results, but while performing your mind should be engaged on the present task. Once you have full focus on the task, the players can reach their optimal levels of performance," he said.

Ali, who has worked as a 'life coach' with golfer Siddikur Rahman, also opined that all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's consistent performances over the years owes to his mental toughness, a characteristic that sets him apart from others.

"In 2014, when I worked with the national team for the first time, I was discussing the characteristics of a champion's mind. After that discussion, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza stood up and said there was one man who had all the attributes. When I asked who that was, Mashrafe replied: 'Shakib Al Hasan, the number one all-rounder in the world'.

"The greater the competition, the greater the mental pressure. A majority of players are unable to stay calm and that hampers their performance. Those who can maintain such focus for a longer period of time, only those few are able to maintain their performance," Ali added.

Life inside bio-secure bubbles has also had a psychological impact on players, with Ali opining that there should be an expert with the team to help players to overcome mental barriers and adjust.



Nathan Lyon, in his **101**st Test, became just the 16th player worldwide to achieve the feat of **400** Test wickets, and only the third Australian after Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath.

Lyon the 'GOAT' claims 400th wicket

REUTERS



It took nearly a year longer than Australia hoped but Nathan Lyon ended his agonising wait for a 400th Test victim in style on Saturday during a match-winning four-wicket haul that sent England crashing to a stinging Ashes defeat at the Gabba.

The shaven-headed 34-year-old had denied the milestone at the same venue in January where Australia lost the series-decider to India.

He then failed to grab a wicket during England's first innings 147 on day one and toiled fruitlessly through a big shift on day three, seeing edges drop short and balls whistle past the stumps.

Then, finally, the rush of relief. Luring Dawid Malan forward in his second over on Saturday, Lyon deceived the England number three with a sharply dipping ball and produced a bat-pad catch for Marnus Labuschagne.

Pandemonium erupted in the terraces while Lyon was mobbed by his team mates as he became only his country's third bowler to join the 400-club after legspinner Shane Warne (708) and paceman Glenn McGrath (563).

"That was a big message. I think Australia play their best cricket when we're calm and we're playing with smiles on our faces and we're enjoying it. And I think Pat [Cummins] really hit that home. Let's be calm. Let's go do the basics really well and when our chance comes let's be ruthless. That's what Australian cricket teams do, and we want to become a great Australian cricket team."

NATHAN LYON

Though not one for personal milestones, Lyon admitted it was a big relief to tick it off. "I've got a lot of my best mates in that change room. They tend to remind me enough, (ask) if I intend to have 400 on my

shoes like Pidge (McGrath) or run around like Warne, so I had a lot of banter going on," he told reporters.

"It's something that I'm very proud of, there's no doubt about that. It's been some hard toil to get it but it's very rewarding."

Far and away his country's most prolific off-spinner, Lyon has been known as the 'GOAT' for years, as well as 'Garry' or 'Gazza' by team mates after a retired champion Australian footballer.

His rapid transformation from Adelaide Oval groundskeeper to Test spinner in a year is etched in Australian cricket folklore.

The words 'Nice, Garry!' or 'Bowling, Gaz,' by wicketkeepers and team mates in the slips have become part of the fabric of the Australian summer.

Not content with wicket number 400, Lyon continued to punish England by grabbing another three to finish with 4-91 and help Australia wrap up a thumping nine-wicket win.

It came after Warne, now a TV pundit, had said Lyon was bowling for his future against England after a disappointing series against India. Captain Pat Cummins never had any such doubts.

"He came out today and showed why he's one of the greatest of all time," he said.

Alhamdulillah, we reached New Zealand yesterday [Friday] after a long flight.

We arrived at the hotel directly from the airport and here we are undergoing a strict three-day quarantine. All our activities are limited within the rooms and our food is also provided to us in the room. Hopefully, we will be doing some freehand exercises from tomorrow [Sunday]. We have been provided [exercise] bike and TheraBand so that we can exercise inside our rooms. After three days [of quarantine], we will be able to go outside the room and walk around the hotel premises for a while. We will also be able to use the practice facilities here.

MEHEDI HASAN MIRAZ
BANGLADESH ALL-ROUNDER



India's hockey team coach Graham Reid (L) discusses a few points with his charges during their training session at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday, having arrived in Dhaka the day before, ahead of their encounter with South Korea in the AHF Asian Champions Trophy opener on December 14.

PHOTO: STAR

BCL begins with hopes of increased competitiveness

SPORTS REPORTER



The ninth edition of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) begins today with hopes of achieving a level of competitiveness that has been missing from the domestic arena over the years.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) previously mentioned that it has certain plans to ensure grassy tops and bouncy tracks at all venues for the league, and to make 'four-day cricket attractive again in the country' as far as players are concerned. However, this edition of the

BCL will not feature national Test team's players as Mominul Haque and Co are already touring New Zealand for a two-match Test series, scheduled to begin on January 1 next year.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal, who got ruled out of the New Zealand tour after missing the entire series against Pakistan due to a thumb injury, would only be able to participate in the one-day format of the league once the four-dayers end.

"Still nothing is certain. I will just start gripping the bat after the 20th of this month. If I can do that, I have the eagerness to play a few matches when

the one-day format matches in the league begins. But that too depends on the medical team's clearance," Tamim told The Daily Star yesterday.

The usual four-day matches will be played first in a single-league format with the top two sides playing in a five-day final, scheduled to begin on January 2 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The opening day of the league will see BCB South Zone taking on Islami Bank East Zone at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi while Walton Central Zone will lock horns with BCB North Zone at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram.

'Feels like 1968 after Enayetur's return'

SPORTS REPORTER

After exiting his vehicle, legendary footballer Enayetur Rahman Khan took a few steps towards another versatile athlete, Pratap Shankar Hazra, hugging him in a soundless embrace for a couple of minutes until Pratap broke the silence by asking: "Have you forgotten how to speak?"

Enayetur, who returned home three weeks ago after spending 27 years in Canada, perhaps did lose his voice in the haze of emotions brought on by seeing his Swadhin Bangladesh teammate. His eyes momentarily welled with tears, which were quickly replaced by a big smile after he released Pratap.

Pratap and Enayetur's presence at a Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA)-organised programme, titled "With Legends", made plenty of footballers emotional as they revisited the golden days of Bangladesh football in the 1980s and 1990s.

The BSJA took the opportunity to arrange a homely get-together featuring members of the Swadhin Bangla football team such as Jakaria Pintu, Sheikh Ashraf Ali, Pratap and Enayetur alongside former football star Golam Sarwar Tipu, Hasanuzzaman Bablu, Sheikh Mohammad Aslam, Ashraf Hossain Chunnun, Wasim Iqbal, Khurshid Alam Babul, Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury and Imitaz Sultana Jonny. Conducting the programme was journalist Dilu Khandokar while organisers and prominent sports journalists who covered those footballers' exploits, lined the seats.

Bangladesh's best footballers were generous in praise of their predecessors, especially for the inspiration they provided.

"Today I am talking to a footballer who was ahead of the others in every aspect. To be honest, I would stop playing and admire his performances," Pratap said. "But his 'problem' was

speaking out against injustice."

Golam Sarwar Tipu added: "Today footballers may have good running and passing ability, but they are brainless. Enayetur was a brave footballer with a brain. A footballer's retirement is akin to death, but that was something we learned after he left the country. But today, it feels like it's 1968 after Enayetur's return."

Hazanuzzaman said: "I had good relations with Enayetur bhai because he always trained with Brothers Union but played for BJMC. He has not been in the country for 27 years but our relationship is intact even today."

"Enayetur Rahman is one of the best footballers produced in Bangladesh. He was a brilliant ball player who could shoot powerfully with either leg. He was a different ilk of forward and I feel really good to see him again," veteran journalist Kamruzzaman said.

Enayetur himself remained modest, rating himself behind others before praising Chunnun, Sheikh Mohammad Aslam, Khurshid Babul, Wasim Iqbal, Abdul Gaffar, Rakibul Islam and others.

"Pintu bhai, Pratap Da and Shantu bhai were the big stars of Bangladesh football. Compared to them, I was really nothing. Those footballers were my idols and I tried to absorb their technique and skill," Enayetur said. "Aslam was a striker who struck many winning goals. Khurshid was a laborious winger and better than European players. Chunnun and Wasim were such brilliant and intelligent players."

"Our country produced a lot of illustrious players but most of them left the country after getting no respect and zero evaluation. Ask me whether a father will inspire his son to be a footballer. Never. You have to evaluate all former footballers socially, then I believe football will regain its prestige," ended Enayetur.

