

SPORT

'Bangabandhu assured us there's nothing to worry about'

As the nation celebrates its 50th year of independence today, Bangladesh can look back on the strides they have made across sectors, including sport. In that time, cricket has overtaken football as the most popular sport in the country and Roquibul Hassan, an instrumental force in reconstructing the sport after independence and the first captain of the national team, spoke to The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin about cricket's journey in the country and its current state. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): Looking back on it 50 years after independence, how did cricket's journey in Bangladesh start?

Roquibul Hassan (RH): We have come a long way in the fifty years of our independence and ahead of the 100th birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. However, I would like to mention that it has actually been 48 years for Bangladesh cricket because we had to fight to establish cricket in the two years following independence. There were rumours back then that cricket was an expensive game and we should not endorse the sport.

We were waiting after independence with high hopes that cricket would start because we had our own country. Obviously everything was dilapidated after the liberation war and at the same time, there was a 25 per cent duty tax imposed on sporting goods.

Then we realised there was no other way, so I took initiative and took Tanvir Mazhar Tanna and Sheikh Kamal to meet Bangabandhu.

Before that, around fifty cricketers gathered and, in protest, burned our equipment before going to Bangabandhu's office with a memorandum. While we were approaching the press club, a few men came and spoke to Sheikh Kamal. They informed us that Bangabandhu had heard everything and assured us there would be nothing to worry about.

I feel extremely happy to recall that Bangabandhu solved the issue within 72 hours and then formed



the Bangladesh Cricket Control Board two years after independence. And here we are now.

DS: Where is Bangladesh cricket after fifty years?

RH: There was district level cricket all across the country after independence. Pitches were sporting and had true bounce and club-level cricket was very competitive. Our cricket has come a long way and now we have to compete internationally so it is important to match international standards.

Obviously, pitches play a big role but you see fast bowlers dominating around the world while our bowlers struggle to pose any threat. We need to improve the standard of pitches across the country.

Instead of trying to cover up the actual problems and only think about rankings and short-term glories, it is important to address the actual issue.

DS: What are the biggest achievements for Bangladesh cricket according to you?

RH: I don't know what others think but we tend to forget the contributions of our forefathers. Bangladesh cricket would never have reached such a position without the struggles after independence. After that, the ICC Trophy victory in 1997 and wins against Pakistan and Scotland in the maiden World Cup in 1999 should surely feature around the top. Then there are the wins in 2007, reaching the quarterfinal of the 2015 World Cup and Test wins against Australia and England. Women's cricket has also come a long way and they won the Asia Cup and who can forget the youths winning the Under-19 World Cup?

DS: Where do you want to see Bangladesh cricket in the next 50 years?

RH: I want to see Bangladesh cricket as a powerhouse in world cricket, in the top three in all formats. I would like to quote Indian president APJ Abdul Kalam, who said: "A dream is not that which you see while sleeping, it is something that does not let you sleep." So Bangladesh cricket needs to set specific goals for the future, prepare a roadmap and work accordingly.



'Want to see a Shakib in every discipline'

Pratap Sankar Hazra -- a versatile athlete who played football, hockey, cricket, table tennis and volleyball at the top level -- was the vice-captain of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team, which played a tremendous role bridging opinions during the Liberation War by playing matches in different parts of India. To mark the nation's 50th year of independence, Hazra told The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman new tales about the country's sport. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): December 16, 2021 is the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence. How do you feel as a freedom fighter?

Pratap Sankar Hazra (PSH): As a freedom fighter, everything from my burnt home to the bloody situation of 1971 is still vivid in my memory. The more important thing is that I believe those who fought, sacrificed and suffered during the war are now happy to see the way the country is developing. On behalf of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team, I want to thank to our government.

TDS: You fought a different battle, one with football, under the banner of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team. What was the thinking behind such a battle, through football on foreign soil?

PSH: Shamsul Haque [MP] called and asked me to form a football team after explaining the reason behind the formation of such a team. I agreed to his proposal because a lot of footballers crossed the border to take shelter in Agartala.

Later, the formation of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team gathered steam after an announcement from the Swadhin Bangla Beter Kendro. We were also successful in our endeavor.

TDS: We have learnt that the Bangladesh Krira Samiti was behind the formation of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team and that the Krira Samiti recently asked the sports ministry to recognise them.

PSH: After the meeting with Mr Shamsul, I went to a meeting at the Bangladesh Krira Samiti the next day but none of the committee members were involved in sport. Then they included me, Jakaria Pintu and Nani Basak as members of the committee. Then, Mr Lutfur, Mr Mohsin and I went to Agartala to assemble footballers under the banner of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team.

I don't know who is demanding further recognition. Maybe they want to prove themselves as freedom fighters after 50 years. That committee was changed several times, with only three members -- ex-deputy prime minister Shah Moazzem, Jakaria Pintu and I -- alive. The rest are no more as far as I know. It would be contradictory to the statement of the government to make a list of true freedom fighters if new ones are enlisted after 50 years.

TDS: How much has sport changed and progressed in Bangladesh after liberation?

PSH: We have progressed a lot but we can't hold onto success because of a lack of genuine organisers at the grassroots, upazilla and district levels. A lot of money is being spent but we can't get the expected results. We got success in women's football, women's cricket and men's cricket, in which Shakib Al Hasan was recognised as the world's number one all-rounder. Makeshift organisers are at helms despite their failure and they even made big promises like taking Bangladesh to the World Cup.

TDS: You once played a lot of sports, including football and hockey, for the national team. How much have both disciplines progressed after the Liberation War?

PSH: I don't know about football but I want to say something about hockey. It once showed a lot of progress but could not hold sustain that due to irregular competitions. The federation officials are more interested in holding onto their posts than making hockey functional on the ground.

TDS: What is your satisfaction and dissatisfaction 50 years after the Liberation War?

PSH: The big satisfaction is that the country is developing fast. I now travel my village three to four times in a week within half-an-hour whereas it took seven to eight hours reach Munshiganj from Dhaka before. I don't have any regrets.

TDS: Where do you want to see the country's sport in the future?

PSH: Such thoughts can lead to delusions of grandeur, but we should all make the effort to find a Shakib Al Hasan in every discipline.



Covid-positive Herath spreads concern

SPORTS REPORTER

A bout of panic spread across the Bangladesh national team players and members of team management after spin bowling coach Ranga Herath returned Covid-19 positive in New Zealand yesterday.

The Tigers, who reached Christchurch on December 10, underwent three-day mandatory room quarantine before they were allowed to begin gym sessions from December 14. The players were set to mix and roam freely in New Zealand after a total of seven days in managed isolation, however, Herath's test outcome has hindered their plans.

The players underwent another Covid-19 test yesterday after which only Herath returned a positive result but no other player or staff showed any symptom related to the virus.

According to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) sources, Herath and eight other members of the Bangladesh contingent have been isolated as they boarded the same flight to New Zealand alongside a person who had tested positive for the virus.

The concern right now for the Bangladesh team is how long the quarantine period will be extended and whether any more members return positive for the virus.

"We're maintaining the existing protocol," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury informed The Daily Star yesterday.

"We will get a clear picture tomorrow as they have taken a few samples today and the results are due tomorrow. Since the players are isolated, hopefully no other complications will arise. This is part of the new reality," he added.

New Zealand are one of the countries that have shown the most proactivity in curbing coronavirus' spread. However, the New Zealand Cricket Board (NZC) are waiting for the briefing from concerned health authorities before revealing measures that will be taken in the coming days.

With players continuing to tackle the harsh realities of pandemic inside bio-bubble isolation, now an extended quarantine period amidst the panic of a positive result in their ranks might escalate the mental toll.

'Swing not granted at temperamental Adelaide'

REUTERS

England's James Anderson enjoys playing at Adelaide Oval so much he calls it his "favourite ground outside the UK" but the veteran seamer said swing is not a given at the "temperamental" venue, which is set to host the pink ball second Ashes Test.

Anderson, who along with fellow seamer Stuart Broad was included in the tourists' 12-man squad for the match starting Thursday, claimed six wickets last time out at Adelaide, though England lost that 2017 contest.

Smarting from their nine-wicket loss to Australia in the opener in Brisbane, England have recalled the seam duo while sacrificing the express speed of Mark Wood in their bid to level the five-Test series.

"I had success with it last time here. But obviously, it is quite temperamental," the 39-year-old told a news conference on the eve of the day-night match.

"It's not a given that it's going to swing around corners or seam or anything like that. It's generally a good pitch here. When the pitch is good, if the sun's out, then it won't do a great deal."

"There might be times during the game with twilight or when it gets

dark under lights, it might do a little bit more. It's trying to take advantage of those times when it does do a little bit."

Anderson said he always enjoyed coming to Adelaide and the ground was one of his favourites.

"I've always enjoyed it, whether with a one-day side or the test side. The atmosphere is great," he added. "People love their cricket in Adelaide. And the sort of stuff they've done to the ground I think is fantastic. It's now an amazing stadium."

England's decision to omit

"I came here wanting to be available for five and that doesn't change now, I want to be available for the next four," he said.

Pace, however, is not the be-all and end-all at Adelaide Oval. Spin also has a role, as Nathan Lyon's six wickets in 2017 showed.

Adelaide Oval curator Damian Hough said England would be missing a trick if they did not pick a specialist spinner.

"History says that the pitch will spin," Hough told



Anderson and Broad, who have shared a combined 1,156 Test wickets, out of the squad in Brisbane surprised many.

Anderson, test cricket's most successful pace bowler with 632 wickets, said he did not want to miss any of the remaining four tests though he understood the need to manage his workload.

reporters on the eve of the Test on Wednesday.

"Nathan's always played a role out there. So from our end we believe that spin at Adelaide needs to play a part."

This leaves England's selectors with a conundrum after spinner Jack Leach conceded 1-102 at nearly eight runs an over in Brisbane.

