



There is no denying that consistent success in Test cricket cannot be achieved without a capable fast-bowling unit and Bangladesh's maiden win in New Zealand only served to underline that notion. But despite Ebadot Hossain and Co leading the Tigers to a momentous Test win, there is still concern whether the pace-bowling unit can continue in that vein, especially given the lack of exposure that they are given coupled with a lack of seam-friendly conditions and pitches at home. High Performance Unit bowling coach Champaka Ramanayake, local bowling coach Imran Sarwar and Robiul Islam, a pacer who was burgeoning with promise before falling by the wayside, all offered their opinions on what it would take to sustain such performances.

23 pacers played
126 Tests at home combined, scalping a total of 209 wickets.

26 pacers played
158 away Tests and took a total of 284 wickets.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, having played his last Test in 2009, still holds the record for taking the most number of wickets (78) amongst pacers in this format for Bangladesh.

In the 21 years since Bangladesh's Test debut, only five seamers have picked up a five-wicket haul in an innings. Shahadat Hossain achieved the feat four times.

Sarwar Imran who has worked as the head coach for Bangladesh in the inaugural Test match back in 2000 has witnessed the progress of the Tigers in the longest format very closely. The prominent fast bowling coach spoke to The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin, sharing his views on various aspects of fast bowling in an interview.

The Daily Star (DS): There has been discussion about providing seamers with suitable conditions at home to help prepare them. What sort of pitch do you think would genuinely help them improve?

Sarwar Imran (SI): The first and most important thing you have to have is bounce on the surface. If there is no bounce or a lack of bounce, there is nothing for swing bowlers because it won't swing without bouncing tracks. Batters tend to play easily on such pitches, but when we travel abroad it's different and that's when our pacers struggle to adjust.

DS: How can we improve pitches at home?

SI: Many talk about weather or conditions here not being conducive to pace-friendly pitches but I think it's very possible to have ideal pitches in Bangladesh if we take some time. Once there is heavy and frequent rolling on the surface, the bounce starts to disappear as the pitch does not get enough rest. That happens due to the load of arranging a lot of matches at the same



venue. If we talk about Bogura, it's a very good pitch but we don't have matches there. If the curator wants, I think it's possible. At the same time, those on the board are mostly batters so they also want pitches that favor batters and produce high-scoring games. But ultimately that will not help pacers. Once you have sporting tracks, it's even for bowlers and batters.

DS: The pacers were instrumental in Bangladesh's historic win in New Zealand. What message does that send and how can Bangladesh cricket build on this success?

SI: I think nobody ever thought we would go on to beat New Zealand at their home in a Test match, barring the players. I think this win should be the first step towards preparing a genuine cricketing culture in the country. At the same time, it's just the start. They have just won one game and there is still a long way to go. We need to keep the process right on a consistent basis and only then can we think of better outcomes frequently in the longest format.

DS: How important is it to have a big pool of fast bowlers for a Test-playing team?

India has prioritized developing a crop of fast bowlers and they are now dominating worldwide.

SI: Apart from 2-3 local coaches who are involved with the national set-up, how many pace-bowling coaches do we have across the country? We don't have a single fast-bowling academy despite getting Test status more than twenty years ago. We need to have a pool of at least 15-20 pacers who train all year long. If there is any injury, they can fill in accordingly. We don't have enough facilities in the divisions and districts. The players mostly rely on Dhaka for training facilities. I think if you provide enough support at the root level it will help you to get results in the long run.



he didn't perform that well before. I'm delighted because he was my student and was with me for a long time. Other bowlers – Shoriful, Taskin and Mehedi – maintained consistency as well, right throughout the game.

DS: In the first ten Tests, Ebadot had taken only 11 wickets and so everyone was actually surprised at his six-for. Did you also feel the same?

CR: Yes, it was really unbelievable, and that too on the fourth and fifth day! Having been a fast bowler myself, I know it's not easy. I hope now he'll be a very confident guy since he knows that he can take wickets. That belief is there.

DS: What would your advice

be so that Ebadot and company can frequently repeat this sort of form?

CR: In Bangladesh, the condition favours the spinners. But away, the presence of a lot of grass on the pitch assists the fast bowlers. If you hit the right channels consistently, you will be rewarded. But for that you require patience. Ebadot has accomplished that, and it's huge. He will definitely be a great bowler in the next couple of years.

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‘Lack of exposure can affect mental health’

It took more than eight years for someone to take on the mantle and become just the second Bangladeshi after Robiul Islam to pick up a five-wicket haul away from home in Test cricket, but the former national team pacer can also serve as a cautionary tale. After scalping the nation's first five-wicket haul against Zimbabwe in 2013, Robiul got lost in the shuffle and failed to prolong his career.

Currently a coach in the domestic circuit, the 35-year-old spoke to The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin about the obstacles and challenges that a pacer encounters in Bangladesh. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): It took almost eight years for Ebadot Hossain to become the second pacer to claim a five-wicket haul in Tests abroad. How did that feel?

Robiul Islam (RI): Records are meant to be broken. I am happy Ebadot broke my record because it feels good when a pacer from Bangladesh does well. When a fast bowler does well, there is always a higher chance for his team to win a Test. I think Ebadot bowled really well, especially in the last session of the fourth day and the first session of the fifth day. Not just him, I think Taskin Ahmed also bowled really well alongside Shoriful Islam. I hope all the fast bowlers will be encouraged after Ebadot's performance.

DS: Why did it take so many years for a Bangladeshi fast bowler to get a five-wicket haul abroad?

RI: Maybe it took a long time for them to do it

since my feat but I wouldn't say our pacers have bowled badly overseas over the years. Luck is also needed to get a five-wicket haul, regardless of bowling well. Abu Jayed picked up four wickets in India not so long ago and Taskin bagged four in Zimbabwe. It's not just about getting five wickets, it's more important how you apply yourself as a fast bowler in the team. We can see pacers playing immense roles in their teams' successes worldwide and I think it's also about having faith in the seamers, which I think has been missing over the years. But I hope this win will encourage fast bowlers in the coming days.

DS: Despite showing a lot of promise, a number of fast bowlers have faded away over the years. Why do fast bowlers lose their way in Bangladesh cricket?

RI: If I talk about my career, I can say I tried my best to serve our country longer. But I think many may already know that I was initially dropped from the team because of [then head coach] Chandika Hathurusingha before injury eventually finished my career. If I talk about why pacers in general fade away in Bangladesh, I think the biggest reason is a lack of suitable conditions compared to what we see abroad because a lack of exposure can affect the mental health of a fast bowler. Fitness and injury are also big reasons. Often we see pacers not go through the rehabilitation process. A lack of strength also causes long-lasting injuries to pacers. If I talk about salary, there is also a huge gap between the pacers compared to batters or spinners in the domestic circuit. As professionals, everyone wants to support their families and I think pacers suffer the most in this aspect in Bangladesh. A lack of financial security can at times force fast bowlers to quit the game.

DS: What aspects do you think should be provided to encourage pacers more in the coming days?

RI: It's true that the pitches in the domestic circuit are not suitable for the seamers but they are the same pitches that previous generations of fast bowlers had when they went to represent the country. I think a fast bowler also needs to have that hunger, courage and game sense. Things have started to change. I am also in the coaching profession now and I can tell you that the standard of our first-class cricket is improving. But there is always room for improvement when it comes to pitches.