



## Siddons set for batting coach role

SPORTS REPORTER

With Ashwell Prince resigning on Wednesday from his role as the batting coach of Bangladesh, former national team head coach Jamie Siddons is the primary choice to take over the role.

Although the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is yet to give its official announcement on the matter, local media reported on Wednesday that Siddons was confirmed to be the next batting coach of Bangladesh by the board president Nazmul Hassan.

It is understood that Siddons will be handed responsibility with a long-term view.

Siddons arrived in Dhaka last week after being appointed by the BCB as its batting consultant for the next two years but his role was not specified by the board.

It was also learned that Champaka Ramanayake, BCB's fast-bowling consultant for high performance unit, is likely to work with the 'Tigers' pace-bowling unit for the Afghanistan series with BCB also looking at permanent options after Otis Gibson's departure.

## Opening selection looms large ahead of Afghan series

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

As the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) heads towards the closing stages, the upcoming Afghanistan series, slated to begin with the ODI series on February 23, starts to come into view.

While Bangladesh find ODIs easier to deal with, their T20I skipper Mahmudullah Riyad would have to resist a strong Afghan T20I outfit in the two-match T20 series, slated to be played between March 3-5 at Dhaka's Mirpur. The focus would be on the top-order form, especially the opening batters such as Mohammad Naim, who is lacking in form in the BPL following Bangladesh's T20 World Cup debacle.

Bangladesh's troubles at the top was further defined when Saif Hassan, initially earmarked as a Test opener, was played in the Pakistan T20Is at home. With Afghanistan's strength in the format is of particular concern, the ongoing BPL gives indications of form and what the selectors might be thinking.

"Naim is our regular opener in the T20s. Last year, Naim was the highest run-getter in T20Is [575 runs in 26 innings] for us. He's having a bad patch but this year, his BPL is not going well. However, not much time left," national selector Habibul Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

Naim has come in at number three, number four and number seven so far. In the match against Chattogram, he was pushed back to number eight, almost being shielded during a crucial run-chase with Tamim carrying the side. Then he failed to take advantage of a no-ball against Mritunjay in that last over, only



giving a simple return catch before failing to put away a low full-toss in the final delivery.

"It is unfortunate [that he hasn't been playing at the top for his franchise] that he had to bat deeper, which is not his position. This did not help, and we can't do anything as it is the franchise's decision," Bashar stated.

Is it a negative for Naim? "He's still a

young player. A player can go through a bad season," came Bashar's reply.

When asked whether the selectors would want Naim, being last year's top-scorer, to bat in other positions to increase his power-hitting abilities, Bashar said: "Not at all, he's an opener. When he plays for Bangladesh, he will open."

Liton Das has been amongst the runs since the UAE debacle and has found runs in the BPL with two crafty knocks but consistency is an issue.

"He [Liton] wasn't dropped but rested and that time out worked for him. He's one of our best batsmen and has played well in the other two formats too. He is a bit off-colour in T20s but has the ability. Since Tamim isn't playing, his performance will be crucial at opening slot," Bashar said.

With everything considered, a right-left opening combination would not be mandatory where 'the best two should play', according to Bashar.

Soumya Sarkar, too, has found runs in his last two BPL matches (43 and 82\*). Anamul Haque Bijoy (248 runs in 8 matches) is the fourth-highest run-getter in the tournament. Mahmudul Hasan Joy, looks like he has the head and the shots for the format, have paced himself well with a strike-rate of 132 – the highest among local batters that are among top run-getters. 23-year-old Munim Shahriar appears to have the T20 mindset as well.

"We're thinking of everyone. It's good when top-order batters find runs in domestic cricket since it gives us options."

Head coach Russell Domingo is due to return on 19th of this month. "We will talk over Zoom [with Domingo] when we select the team," Bashar concluded.

## Nafisha lands among stars in Indonesia

SPORTS REPORTER

Shooter Nafisha Tabasum sealed her first-ever international medal with a bronze in the women's 10m Air Rifle event of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Grand Prix in Jakarta yesterday.

Nafisha had stood second in one of the two semi-finals but eventually had to be content with a bronze medal after scoring 37 in 15 shots during the medal-match round. Laura-Georgeta ILIE of Romania ended up winning the gold

while Khairunnisa Salsabela of hosts Indonesia bagged silver.

Nafisha's compatriots Sajida Haque and Atkiya Hasan Disha, however, were eliminated from the semi-

finals and qualification round, respectively, while Shovon Chowdhury and Rabbi Hasan Munna failed to cross the semi-final hurdles in the men's 10m Air Rifle events to finish fifth and seventh, respectively.

Having burst into the scene after acquiring gold medal during the in the 10m Air Rifle event at the Bangladesh Games, Nafisha also went on to grab a bronze in women's 50m Rifle event in the same event.

Prior to that, Nafisha played in the 50m Rifle event in 2015, 2016 and 2017 editions of national shooting championships in which she won five medals, including gold and silver.



## 'Everybody is happy that Romelu scored'

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Romelu Lukaku scored a much-needed goal as Chelsea beat Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal 1-0 on Wednesday to advance to the Club World Cup final against South American champions Palmeiras. The European champions will face Brazilian side Palmeiras on Saturday in the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

Chelsea's club-record signing had failed to score in five games before arriving in Abu Dhabi, and the Blues are looking for the 28-year-old to find his best form in the second half of the season.

"Everybody's very happy that Romelu scored," said Chelsea assistant Zsolt Low, who is helping to fill in for coach Thomas Tuchel after his positive Covid-19 test.

## Mohammedan subdue spirited Swadhinata

SPORTS REPORTER

A second-half strike from Souleymane Diabate was enough for Mohammedan Sporting Club to edge past Swadhinata Krira Sangha in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

The eventual 1-0 score-line might give an impression that the traditional powerhouse had to toil hard against newcomers Swadhinata. However, Mohammedan were arguably the better team on the day despite having squandered several scoring opportunities before sealing the winner from a goal-mouth melee.

Swadhinata, on the other hand, could count themselves unlucky as brave goalkeeping from Mohammedan's Sarwar Jahan in the dying minutes denied the spirited side, who shockingly humbled holders Bashundhara Kings in the league opener.

Midfielder Shahriar Emon, playing freely all over the pitch, rattled the Swadhinata backline time and again, whipping threatening crosses but the Malian striker Diabate wasted a couple of clean chances in the first 25 minutes to disappoint the Black and Whites, who arrived into the match on the back of a 1-1 stalemate against Sheikh Russel KC.

Following resumption, the charges of Sean Lane kept pressing to break the deadlock and eventually Diabate flicked home a back-header assist from the Macedonian Jesmin Mccinnovikj in the 77th minute from close range.

Mohammedan have now gathered four points, after their first victory in two matches, one more than Swadhinata.



Neymar, who has been out of action for more than two months due to an ankle injury, returned to training with Paris Saint-Germain on Thursday but will not be fit for their Ligue 1 match today against Rennes, four days before a Champions League last-16 first leg clash with Real Madrid.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## What to WATCH

T SPORTS & GTV

BPL  
Khulna Tigers vs  
Comilla Victorians  
Live from 01:30 pm  
Fortune Barishal  
vs Minister Group  
Dhaka  
Live from 06:30 pm

T SPORTS

La Liga  
Sevilla vs Elche  
Live from 02:00 am  
(Saturday)

STAR SPORTS 1

India vs West Indies  
3rd ODI  
Live from 02:00 pm

SONY SIX

Australia vs Sri Lanka  
1st T20I  
Live from 02:10 pm