



The first thing is to be patient, which is probably the hardest thing. Don't worry if blokes are whacking you out of the park because you still have the opportunity to get him out next ball, even if it's not the same ball.

SHANE WARNE



‘It is important to realise the importance of leg-spin’

“You need to realise that there are different types of bowlers for specific formats. India’s Chahal only plays the T20 format because he bowls a bit flatter and quicker.”

MAZHAR UDDIN

The impact of leg spinners in modern-day cricket cannot be understated, with teams around the world tending to focus more on this difficult art of bowling.

From the early days, when the likes of BS Chandrasekhar, Bill O'Reilly, and Abdul Qadir would dominate, the legacy of leg-spin continued. Australian spin legend Shane Warne took the art to the next level alongside flag-bearers like Stuart MacGill, Anil Kumble and Mushtaq Ahmed.

In the modern day, the likes of Rashid Khan, Adam Zampa, Adil Rashid, Shadab Khan, Imran Tahir, Yuzvendra Chahal and others have added excitement and become trump cards given their ability to turn things around single-handedly.

Unfortunately, despite the reputation for producing left-arm spinners since earning Test status in 2000, Bangladesh have failed to produce a single quality leg-spinner.

Alok Kapali registered Bangladesh's maiden hat-trick in Test cricket with his leg-spin, but was hardly considered a specialist leg-spinner in the domestic circuit.

A few names popped up from time to time, like Jubair Hossain Likhon. He showed great promise and even made his Test debut for the Tigers at a very early age, but eventually faded away due to lack of nurturing.

Aminul Islam Biplob, a batsman who turned into a specialist leg-spinner is among the latest casualties. Despite a decent T20I debut in 2019, the 22-year-old, nowadays struggles like Likhon to even make the playing eleven in the domestic circuit.

However, according to prominent coach Wahidul Gani, a former national spinner, there is no shortage of leg-spinners in Bangladesh in age-level cricket. He also believes it is important to put more emphasis into setting up a proper structure.

“We do have leg spinners in age-level but they don't get the opportunity to play. It is important to realise the importance of leg-spin. In club cricket, teams want to win games which is the reason they don't want to risk having a leg-spinner in the side because they can be expensive at times,” Wahidul told The Daily Star.

“But the fact is that leg-spinners can also

give you wickets because they are attacking bowlers. It's important for teams to have a back-up in the bowling unit to accommodate a leg-spinner. If we can have special camps for leg-spinners like we have had for the pace-bowling unit, it will certainly help us find more leg-spinners.”

It is widely suggested that aspiring cricketers in different age-level groups are deterred from taking up leg-spin as a serious option due to the difficulties and lack of assurances associated with the craft.

“You need to realise that there are different types of bowlers for specific formats. India's Chahal only plays the T20 format because he bowls a bit flatter and quicker. In Tests you need someone who gives more air to the ball. So we need to pick those talents and make them fit for the specific role.

“I have seen youngsters interested in becoming leg-spinners because they also know there the country needs leg-spinners. We need someone like Imran Khan, who had fought with selectors to include Abdul Qadir in the team. And we all know what he did after that.”

● Jubair Hossain Likhon is the only specialist leg-spinner who has represented Bangladesh across three formats.

● Mentionable leg-spinning all-rounders include Mohammad Ashraful, Alok Kapali and Sabbir Rahman.

● At the moment, Aminul Islam Biplob is the only specialist leg-spinner in the national set-up.

● There is no leg-spinner among the 24 cricketers with central contracts from the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

● When asked if he felt it was fair to force teams to pick a leg-spinner in the playing eleven, national selector Abdur Razzak, a notable left-arm spinner in his day, responded: “Yes, there were instructions to have leg spinners in the side. But if you don't have a quality leg-spinner, you cannot push the team and that's why we don't see them playing in the BPL. We tried a few leg-spinners in the national team even after average performances. But when it comes to franchise cricket,

teams will not pick a player for the sake of providing opportunities. When we picked Jubair Hossain Likhon, he did well in Tests but suddenly has not performed since then. Consequently, he is out of the team.

Aminul Islam Biplob also did reasonably well in India but since then has been unable to perform in domestic leagues. Obviously, it's good to have leg spinners in the side because it adds variety but the national team is not a platform to provide opportunities. If they are not able to perform in domestic leagues, how can they play international cricket?”



The sorry tale of a Bangladeshi leggie

Jubair Hossain Likhon was quick to catch attention when he became Bangladesh's first specialist leg-spinner to play a Test in October 2014. But despite initially impressive performances, he disappeared from the scene almost as swiftly as he arrived. **The Daily Star's Sabbir Hossain** caught up with the leg-spinner, who opened up and discussed various issues. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): Talk us through your journey as a leg-spinner?

Jubair Hossain Likhon (JHL): I started as an opening batter but failed to do well. Then I started leg-spin after advice from my older brother. He told me there was no quality leg-spinner in the country so there was a chance for me to play at the top level.

DS: When did you realise you could master leg-spin?

JHL: Leg-spinners seem to have some natural gifts and I have my fair share. I have strength in my shoulders. I can bowl the googly and generate power from my fingers. When I started, I was getting turn. Then I realised that if I tried, I might do better.

DS: You made your international debut in 2014 but haven't had a chance to play since 2015. How does that feel?

JHL: All the players want to play for the national team. When I played, life was different, fun. I thought that I would provide my services for a long time. But unfortunately, I could not. However, the main obstacle to my return to the national set-up is that I don't get many chances to play in the domestic league.

DS: Can you elaborate?

JHL: An out-of-favour player can only return to the national side through good performances in domestic cricket.

But in my case, I do not get chances at the domestic level. Many have said I am not good at all and discarded me. These sorts of words only damage your confidence and demotivate you. The same thing happened with the rest of our leg-spinners. For a leg-spinner, one or two bad performances means the whole tournament is over for him. That is not case for others.

DS: Where does the problem lie?

JHL: When I was dropped from the national side, the BCB kept me in the A team and HP team. The board has always encouraged leg-spinners,

The main obstacle to my return to the national set-up is that I don't get many chances to play in the domestic league.

but our domestic league officials don't have faith in us.

DS: What are your thoughts on the future of leg-spinners in the country?

JHL: If you look into it, you will find that leg-spinners have not been getting chances to play on a regular basis. We hardly have the opportunities to play two or three games a year. Of course, we need to practice a lot but there is no alternative to playing matches. If we only practice and barely play, it will have no impact. We won't be able to understand match situations. Some might say that I did not do well enough, but what about the rest of the leg-spinners in the country? Is there no one good enough to play regularly? Aminul Islam Biplob is in the national team now, but how many domestic matches has he played so far?

‘You need to bowl 15 to 20 overs every day’

While Bangladesh are still searching for leg-spinners, Afghanistan have made producing world-class leg-spinners their forte. Rashid Khan has established himself among the best in world cricket, but the country has many other quality leg-spinners such as Qais Ahmed, who has become a sensation in franchise cricket worldwide. The 21-year-old, currently playing for Minister Dhaka in the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League spoke to **The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin** and discussed the subtleties to the art of leg-spin. The excerpts of the interview are below:

The Daily Star (DS): How much are you enjoying life as a global T20 cricketer?

Qais Ahmed (QA): I enjoy playing worldwide and sharing dressing rooms with great cricketers around the world. It feels really great to perform among those players and they also share their experience with me. I am learning a lot.

DS: Leg-spinners are dominating across the globe, especially in the shortest format. Can you describe the challenges a modern-day leg-spinner faces?

QA: Obviously leg-spinners have the ability to turn things around. In the shortest formats, batters tend to go after leg-spinners and this gives them an opportunity to outfox the opposition. It's a challenge to bowl a good line and length consistently. But once you adapt to it and bowl consistently, it makes life difficult for batters and then you start getting success.

DS: What is the secret to Afghanistan's production of quality spinners?

QA: There is no secret to producing quality spinners. To become a good leg-spinner, you need to work really hard. You need to do a lot of spot bowling in the nets and you need to bowl at least 15 to 20 overs every day. That helps you assess yourself as a bowler. Leg-spin is a difficult art that you need to master. Without proper training, it's not possible.

DS: How can domestic cricket help leg-spinners grow?

QA: We have at least five-six leg-spinners in all the academies in Afghanistan and the competition is very tough. We have talent hunts, where youngsters come in and give trials. Then we gradually step towards grade 1, 2 and 3 level cricket. And then they can reach club level. The competition is very stiff

DS: How challenging will it be for Afghanistan to play Bangladesh at home in the coming series?

QA: It will be a challenge for Bangladesh at home considering the conditions and wickets. They have got some top-quality batters and bowlers such as Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad. But we have been working hard. We had a training camp in Qatar and preparation-wise, we are ready.

DS: You made your Test debut against Bangladesh in 2019 and that remains the only Test you have played so far. You must want to establish yourself in the longest format as well?

QA: Who doesn't want to play Test cricket for their nation? I made my Test debut against Bangladesh and I am definitely willing to play all formats for Afghanistan. But we have got some world-class spinners in the side like Rashid,

Mujeeb and myself so it's a tough competition. But I am waiting for my opportunity and looking forward to giving my best.

