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# A unique precedent

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Bangladesh cricket set a unique example in regards to dealing with a player's mental health. When a player wants to skip an international commitment citing a mental health issue, it deserves utmost attention and the highest levels of sensitivity.

It is not unheard of for players to take breaks to focus on their mental well-being, especially during these times of added pressures compounded by Covid-19. Recently, England all-rounder Ben Stokes, Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka and American gymnast Simone Biles were seen opting out of events to focus on their mental health and how carefully their cases were handled by the concerned authorities.

It is no small matter when a player brings up issues related to mental health and mental fatigue. But when it comes to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and Shakib Al Hasan, there are reasons that may give people some pause.

On March 6, the premier all-rounder said that he was neither mentally nor physically prepared for the upcoming tour of South Africa.

On March 9, the BCB granted him a break from cricket till April 30 after Shakib had reconfirmed his unavailability due to mental health issues the same day. Ideally, the issue should have ended there.

But that was far from the end. Instead, the two parties came together in front of the media at the Sher-e-

## SHAKIB'S RECENT SHENANIGANS

**February 28:** BCB president Nazmul Hassan informs media that Shakib Al Hasan has confirmed his availability for the South Africa tour.

**March 3:** BCB names Shakib in squads for both three-match ODI and two-match Test series against South Africa.

**March 6:** Shakib reveals that he is mentally and physically unfit to play cricket to the media before leaving for Dubai to fulfil his commercial commitment.

**March 7:** Hassan questions whether Shakib would do the same if he had gotten a team

in IPL.

**March 8:** Bangladesh team director Khaled Mahmud says that the board needs to put a 'full stop' to such situations.

**March 9:** BCB allows Shakib a break from all forms of cricket till April 30.

**March 10:** Shakib returns from Dubai.

**March 10:** BCB announces central contract with Shakib in all three formats.

**March 10:** Shakib confesses to Hassan that he is still 'mentally disturbed.' Hassan has a long discussion with Shakib following which the all-rounder informs that he is ready

to be available for all formats including the South Africa series. Hassan, however, asks Shakib to take some time and think it through.

**March 11:** Shakib finally confirms to Hassan that he is willing to tour South Africa. Hassan then asks Shakib to come to BCB for a meeting the day after.

**March 12:** Following a meeting regarding Shakib's future plans, both Hassan and Shakib announce to the media that the all-rounder will be boarding a flight for South Africa the next day.

Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday to reveal that the all-rounder was going to play the series in South Africa after all.

Thus, a 'mental health' issue had been solved. All that was needed was just one day for Shakib to change his mind and the BCB wasted no time making up their minds.

It seems that Shakib's trip to Dubai for a commercial commitment made some wonder about a possible reversal of his decision. In that case, what can a player do if the cynics find other reasons like the barring him from participate in the more lucrative -- in terms of financial package -- Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League.

It could be the case for any athlete that they may reverse a decision about their mental health reason in the quickest timespan. But you still cannot say anything about it when it comes to mental health issues.

However, there were some statements from both the BCB president and Shakib yesterday that cannot be overlooked.

"If he skips a match in this series, please accept it. He wants to play. That is the most important thing. If Shakib wants to stay out of the game in South Africa, if he wants some rest, he is allowed. It should end here. The board has no problem with any player. I want to make that clear," Hassan said.

On the other hand, Shakib said: "Now

I'm in a better situation [mentally]. After going to South Africa, I may get better. That can happen. When you go to a better environment, you feel good."

So Shakib may act at will during a most demanding assignment for the Tigers to take care of his mental health. Is it not a unique initiative in the world of professional sports?

In the whole episode between the BCB and Shakib, the 'Bangladesh Team' seemingly became a simple spectator. Its team management and other players may understand that there is a 'reserve seat' for a very special player, but they may not understand what plan they should actually make: one with or without Shakib?

## Khawaja's special hundred

AGENCIES

Having come within a miscued reverse sweep of a special century near the city of his birth last week, Australia opener Usman Khawaja yesterday embraced destiny with a heart-warming hundred in the place his parents lived and worked before the family moved to Islamabad and – eventually – Australia.

The 35-year-old pushed spinner Sajid Khan for a sharp single towards square leg, punching the air to celebrate his tenth Test hundred, his second against Pakistan in front of a good 10,000 weekend crowd at the National Stadium in Karachi, who applauded Khawaja on his feat during the opening day of the second Test.

Khawaja's extraordinary form since regaining his place in Australia's Test team as a COVID-19 substitute for Travis Head two months ago has brought the left-hander 479 runs with three centuries and the prospect of more tomorrow.

But it's doubtful any of those runs, or the 2887 that preceded them, have carried as much personal significance given the 35-year-old's historic family connection with Karachi where he had never before played cricket until yesterday.

It took Khawaja 273 minutes and 192 balls to reach the three-figure mark, spiced with 12 boundaries and a six. Australia finished the day with 251 for 3.



## 'Was confident from the start'

SPORTS REPORTER

Young Indian golfer Kshitij Naveed Kaul has said he felt confident right from the go about winning the Mujib Borsho Chattogram Open after cruising to a six-shot victory at the Bhatary Golf and Country Club yesterday.

The 21-year-old, the overnight leader by five shots, drove home the advantage scoring eight birdies against two bogeys and a double-bogey in round four to total 19-under (269) at the INR 50 lakh event.

Bangladesh's leading star Siddikur Rahman (71-66 69-69) finished as runner-up at 13-under 275 after his last round of 69.

"I was confident from the start of the week and felt I could win. It's been great to win two titles in such a short span of time. I've had a terrific start to the year and would like to make it count from here on," said Kshitij.

Bangladesh's Badal Hossain and Akbar Hossain finished tied for third at 11-under 277 while Zamal Hossain Mollah took sixth place at nine-under 279.

Sunit Chowrasia was the second Indian to finish inside the top-5 as he claimed fifth place at 10-under 278.

## Sheikh Russel hit rock bottom

SPORTS REPORTER

Former champions Sheikh Russel dropped into the relegation zone following a 3-0 defeat against Muktiyoddha Sangsad at the Kings Arena yesterday.

The treble-winners of 2103 season have had a wretched run in the league of late, following a decent start to the season. Saiful Bari Titu's charges had started the league with draws in their first two matches against Mohammedan and Chittagong Abahani before winning against Saif Sporting Club. However, things have been going south ever since as the big-budget outfit have now lost six matches in a row, joining fellow-strugglers Swadhinata KS at the foot of the table with five points from eight matches.

The hosts conceded the lead in the 22nd minute when goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana failed to block Japanese midfielder Soma Otanj's shot from the edge of the box. Didarul Alam doubled Muktiyoddha's lead seven minutes after the break, smashing home on the rebound after Tetsuaki Misawa's free-kick was parried in front of goal.

Muktiyoddha, who came into this match at the bottom of the table with three points, wrapped up the victory in the 81st minute when Aminur Rahman Sajib profited from a blunder by Ashraful, who had come down the pitch to negotiate a long ball, only to make absolute meal of the clearance.

Meanwhile, Mohammedan Sporting Club played out a goalless draw against Uttar Baridhara at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj yesterday. The draw saw both sides remain in their respective positions as before – Mohammedan in seventh with 10 points and Baridhara a place behind with eight points.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Police moved up to fourth position with 14 points following a 2-1 win over Rahmatganj at Sylhet District Stadium later in the day.



Mohamed Salah celebrates his goal during their Premier League match away at Brighton Hove & Albion on Saturday. The Egyptian forward dispatched a spot kick in the 61st minute following Luis Diaz's opener in the 19th minute as the All Reds moved within three points of league leaders Manchester City.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Archers leave for Phuket today

SPORTS REPORTER

A 16-member Bangladesh archery team will leave for Phuket today to participate in the 2022 Asia Cup World Ranking Tournament, Stage-1.

The team, which will be joined by coach Martin Frederick on the following day, will feature eight male archers and five female archers, according to a press release from Bangladesh Archery Federation.

A total of 115 archers from 12 countries of the continent will take part in the competition. The archers of the Bangladesh team are: Roman Sana, Hakim Ahmed Rubel, Ram Krishna Saha, Sagor Islam, Newaz Ahmed Rakib, Mithu Rahman, Sohel Rana, Himu Bachar, Diya Siddiqui, Nasrin Akter, Fahmida Sultana Nisha, Roksana Akter and Shyamoli Roy.

The Bangladesh players will compete in individual and team events of recurve and compound divisions.