

## Archers turn focus to domestic circuit

SPORTS REPORTER

Having succeeded in the Stage I of the Asia Cup Archery event, Bangladesh's national archers are set to face off against their local rivals in the 13th Teer National Archery Championships, beginning on Sunday at the Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi. It has often been the case that archers who succeeded abroad would fail to enhance their performances in the domestic circuit as new faces emerged on the front lines. However, national archers are expected to carry the momentum from the Asia Cup into the championships, which will have approximately 50 more competitors than the last edition in Cox's Bazar.

196 archers, including 81 women, will compete across 10 events with 45 clubs, districts and services team taking part in the three-day championships.

Bangladesh Archery Federation president Lt General (Rtd) Mainul Islam informed that they were mulling whether to decentralise archery in order to raise its popularity among fans.

"We are planning to hold the different archery competitions at the district level by establishing an archery training center in order to patronise more clubs and players," Islam said, adding that if they could do so then archery would be decentralised.

## Japan, Saudi Arabia qualify for WC

REUTERS, SYDNEY

Substitute Kaoru Mitoma scored twice in the final few minutes to give Japan a 2-0 win over Australia at a rain-soaked Olympic Stadium on Thursday and send his country through to seventh successive edition of the FIFA World Cup finals.

Japan's first victory over the Socceroos in Australia since 1998 also secured Saudi Arabia's passage to Qatar and condemned Australia to a tricky path through two playoffs if they are to make the finals for the fifth time in a row.

"I feel really happy for the players, for the people back in Japan and for everyone who supports Japan," said Mitoma.



## LITON'S turnaround was on the cards

SAMEED QASEEM

Diehard fans of Bangladeshi cricket often suffer from a certain form of starvation since a huge void remains in the quantity of cricket played between the Tigers and the relatively established cricket teams with vast history. However, the scenario keeps improving, albeit slowly.

For me though, the aforementioned starvation had channeled my attention to the domestic circuit, where I could gladly keep track of the players I care about. This is far more enjoyable than, for instance, seeing Virat Kohli perform in his 300th ODI.

Speaking of enjoyment, following this unknown chap from Dinajpur in the 2013-2014 season became my obsession. He was plundering runs in volumes and at levels of consistency previously unheard of in Bangladeshi domestic cricket history. Despite seeing briefly, I was hooked; I had become a Liton Das believer way before his breakthrough into The Tigers in 2015.

And like many of his predecessors, Liton struggled to translate his domestic form into the international arena. Still, there were vivid glimpses of a supremely talented cricketer. It was only a matter of time, I believed, as I was well aware of his appetite for runs.

And it was Tamim Iqbal had who reinforced my faith in Liton's potential when we dined together during our Test tour in Hyderabad in 2017 when he said that 'it is not even a matter of an innings, it could be one shot he plays that turns Liton around into the player we know he can be'.

To hear that from Tamim was enough for me. I was ready to back Liton as a future mainstay of the Bangladesh batting, irrespective of the number of years it takes.

Unfortunately, much like Soumya Sarkar's case, another sharing a common minority background, Liton's initial sub-par performances and inconsistency had triggered negative attention from certain vocal sections among the Tigers fandom.

Up to the end of 2018, Liton was averaging a paltry 25 from his first 13 Tests and worse, a 22 from his first 24 ODIs.

Thus, patience amongst fans, especially on social media, was waning.

When new players, especially batters, come into the national ranks, fans tend to compare them to our gold standards set by the likes of Tamim, Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim.

However, the international arena invariably is a baptism of fire for an average newbie and for our big three, the roads at the start of their national career were no less than a mean obstacle course, as verified by statistics that follows.

Until 2012 since making their respective

flourish, they did come in with talent and determination to eventually come good; and they had passed with flying colours.

This average-based comparison sheds light back to my focal subject, Liton Das, since the stylish batter is apparently turning things around four times faster than the rate with which Tamim, Mushfiqur and, to a lesser extent, Shakib did themselves.

Since January 2019, Liton is averaging a stellar 43 from 29 ODIs and 42 in Tests, and that too while adapting to contrasting batting roles in the different formats.



debut, Mushfiqur averaged 25 from his first 104 matches, while Tamim and Shakib averaged 29 and 35 from their first 99 and 122 matches, respectively.

Over a decade since 2012 has witnessed staggering growth from the three stalwarts. Tamim notched up his average to 45 from 116 matches in that exclusive period, while Mushfiqur and Shakib boasted 45 and 41 from 129 and 99 ODIs, respectively.

While these players did not arrive at the centre stage with the skills required to

The mental strength Liton had shown to prevail, despite being on the receiving end of atrocious level of criticism, has been nothing short of extraordinary. It is something the likes of Soumya, Shabbir Rahman and Mohammad Mithun can take inspiration from.

It is his self-belief especially, more than his improved batting records, that convinces me that Liton Das has not only arrived, but he is here to stay.

\*The writer is a freelancer for The Daily Star.

## 'The coach had tremendous belief'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal heaped praise on head coach Russell Domingo while talking a day after the Tigers' historic ODI series win in South Africa.

Before the series began, Bangladesh had not won a single match in any format in South Africa but Tamim mentioned that Domingo had the belief they were going to South Africa to win a series. The coach prompted the rest of the side to think along the same line.

"Obviously, the belief varies. When I was coming here from the country, I believed that we could win. Difficult to say whether we believed we could win the series but we believed that we could win a match," Tamim said in a press conference yesterday.

"At the same time, it needs to be mentioned that the coach had tremendous belief that Bangladesh would win the series. He kept on talking about it and he tried to transfer that belief to the players as well.

"Secondly, after we won the first game, our belief increased. We knew that we had a great chance to win a series. I think it was before the last match that the coach told us that some of us have been playing for 10-15 years and if we can win the series, it will be the biggest achievement in some of our careers," Tamim added.

Domingo's tenure with Bangladesh did not get off to the best of starts, losing at home to Afghanistan in a one-off Test. They did significantly better in the T20I tri-series involving Zimbabwe at home but poor performances in Tests and T20Is against India and Pakistan away, followed by the Test series defeats against West Indies at home and Sri Lanka saw his role questioned.

In fact, the T20 World Cup debacle saw the Tigers' management go on the hunt for a new coach. However, the Test win at Mount Maunganui and the recent ODI series win have put some faith in Domingo. For Tamim, it was Domingo who was inspiring the Tigers ahead of important assignments.

"Domingo said something very important after the game. He said that if we can't believe that we will not be able to win the World Cup after such a series win, then we shouldn't believe in anything else. I think that was a very good message from him. Overseas series wins were always lacking but I hope this is just the start and we will continue to grow as a team in overseas conditions," Tamim concluded.

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Tamim Iqbal



## Lahore Test poised for a thrilling final day

REUTERS

Pakistan openers Imam-ul-Haq and Abdullah Shafique made a solid start on Thursday to set up a thrilling final day in the deciding third Test in Lahore, keeping the hosts in the hunt for a series-clinching win against Australia.

Australia captain Pat Cummins made a sporting declaration in the final session of the fourth day at the Gaddafi Stadium, calling his side's second innings closed on 227-3 and setting Pakistan a target of 351 to chase.

On a wicket offering turn for the spinners and some deliveries keeping low after pitching, Imam and Shafique denied Australia any success to take Pakistan to 73 without loss at stumps with the hosts needing 278 more for victory. Imam was unbeaten on 42 with Shafique 27 not out.

Steve Smith, who has had a tough time in the series with his catching, dropped an edge from Shafique off part-time leg-spinner Marnus Labuschagne in the final over of the day's play.

The first two Tests -- the first between the sides in Pakistan since 1998 -- were drawn.





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