

“I am a sports enthusiast, and if given an opportunity, I want to be a sportsman, even today. I want to promote the sport that is indigenous to India. Kabaddi is a matter of national pride. Why can’t cricket, hockey, football and kabaddi be given equal platforms and co-exist? I believe that can happen.”

ABHISHEK BACHCHAN
owner of Jaipur Pink Panthers in Pro-Kabaddi League in India.



Can Bangabandhu Cup spark a kabaddi revival?

Success is a wonderful thing. It can build confidence, rejuvenate the system and create enthusiasm and a positive environment which often lead to more success.

ATIQUE ANAM

The Shaheed Noor Hossain Volleyball Stadium in Paltan recently staged the Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi Tournament for the second time.

It was a successful event: professionally organised and well-orchestrated, with a decent amount of media coverage, guests taken good care of, with the hosts keeping hold of the trophy – all reasons for the organisers to look forward to next year with more anticipation and optimism.

Yet, as the dust settles on the mat of Shaheed Noor Hossain, there are a couple of questions which need to be looked into, with a certain amount of introspection, too.

These are questions that need to be answered if one wants to judge the real state of the country’s national sport.

The first question that springs to mind is why on earth would an international kabaddi tournament be held at a volleyball stadium, especially when there is a kabaddi stadium nearby?

The kabaddi stadium may not be in a very good shape currently, but with a bit of financing and renovation, it could be turned into an international-standard one. Kabaddi, after all, is our national sport and that national sport at least deserves a home of its own.

The second question strikes once one

goes through the list of the participating teams – England, Kenya, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh. The second edition added three more teams to the first, yet all the seven other teams are below Bangladesh (5) in world ranking, like it was in the first edition when Bangladesh were the top-ranked among the five teams. It is certainly not by chance that the top four teams in the world – India, Iran, Pakistan and South Korea – have been conspicuously absent from both editions of the meet, leaving the hosts as happy hunters in their own backyard.

Success is a wonderful thing. It can build confidence, rejuvenate the system and create enthusiasm and a positive environment which often lead to more success. Looking from this perspective, the Bangabandhu Cup was a success on and off the field.

But will that success be translated to success on a bigger platform, like when our team meets the higher-ranked teams in the next Asian Games or even the South Asian Games? Won’t this annual ritual of glitzy opening and ticker-tape closing turn into an exercise in futility unless the game is strengthened from the root and the players allowed a decent living?

Bangladesh used to be the second-best in the sport when it was introduced in South Asian Games in mid-’80s and in the Asian Games in the ’90s, meaning a silver medal was a certainty in those days. But with the turn of the century, as the sport started to gain footing in countries beyond South Asia, our standing began to weaken. Our men’s

team have not won an Asian Games medal in a decade and a half while the women’s team failed to retain their bronze medal in the last edition.

These failures at the international stage can be squarely blamed on decades of apathy and inertial tendencies of the kabaddi officials of the country. For decades, the sport was left to decay in the shadow of more glamorous and money-earning sports in the pretext of a lack of funds while the coffers of Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation reportedly became subject of misappropriation. The only reason some athletes even stayed back with kabaddi was the lure of a job in the defence services, namely, Ansar, BGB, Police, Navy, Army, Air Force, etc.

Fortunately, things have started to change since the new committee took over the reins around five years ago. The national meets have started to take place regularly while the IGP Youth Cup, a youth kabaddi tournament aimed at unearthing and training young talents from across the country, got good momentum.

This is definitely a good start, but the activities need to be widened and sustained to reap long-term rewards. Organising international meets can be a starting point to create a buzz, but to sustain and translate that to international success, the sport needs to be groomed from bottom-up and kabaddi players need to be ensured a sustainable income source from the game. Only then will the Bangabandhu Cup and such events fetch their desired outcome.

BANGLADESH’S INTERNATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS IN KABADDI

MEN

Asian Games

Silver Medals: 3 (Beijing 1990, Hiroshima 1994, Busan 2002)

Bronze Medals: 2 (Bangkok 1998, Doha 2006)

Kabaddi World Cup

Bronze: 2 (India 2004, 2007)

Asian Beach Games

Bronze: 1 (Bali 2008)

Asian Indoor Games

Bronze: 1 (Macau 2007)

South Asian Games

Silver: 3 (Dhaka 1985, Kolkata 1987, Madras 1995)

Bronze: 2 (Islamabad 1989, Dhaka 1993)

International Gold Cup Kabaddi

Silver: 1 (India 2003)

Junior Kabaddi World Cup

Bronze: 1 (Iran 2019)

WOMEN



Asian Games

Bronze: 2 (Guangzhou 2010, South Korea 2014)

South Asian Games

Silver: 2 (Dhaka 2010, Gauhati 2016)

Bronze: 2 (Colombo 2006, Nepal 2019)

South Asian Beach Games

Bronze: 1 (Sri Lanka 2011)

Asian Beach Games

Bronze: 2 (Oman 2010, China 2012)

Furthermore, the Bangladesh Women Kabaddi team finished fifth among 17 countries in the first Women’s Kabaddi World Cup in India in 2012.



Tuhin laments lack of international exposure

Tuhin Tarafder has been representing the national kabaddi team for six long years and has taken on the captaincy. The 36-year-old, who also has experience in the Indian Pro-Kabaddi League, spoke to The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman about the problems and prospects of Bangladesh’s national sport.

The Daily Star (DS): What is the present condition of kabaddi in Bangladesh?

Tuhin Tarafder (TT): When I started in 2015, there were a lot of problems. But right now the facilities have been enhanced. If we got the current facilities in 2015, we might not be lagging behind that much in international kabaddi. There was a time when South Korea could not compete against Bangladesh, but now it’s the reverse. India were our main rivals, but now we can’t compete against South Korea, Iran or Pakistan. A lack of patronisation is the main reason for the setback.

DS: Are there any other reasons behind the downturn?

TT: Apart from a lack of patronisation, poor management and planning are the reasons. Interestingly, we don’t have a shortage of talented players. There are a lot of players across the country, but there is no system in place that can bring them to the mainstream. Another thing is that we have to create opportunities to give players international exposure and only then can we bring back those glory days. Cricket has

reached its current position because of international exposure. Kabaddi is confined to service teams, but the federation should focus on private clubs. Our domestic infrastructure also does not support the development of kabaddi although the federation has taken some initiatives to change the scenario.

DS: What initiatives has the existing committee implemented?

TT: The national team is getting the opportunity to train at home and abroad under a foreign coach. I think top federation officials are very busy due to professional engagements but the rest, who have been given the responsibility to ensure kabaddi’s progress, cannot carry out their responsibilities properly. If the players benefit financially, then kabaddi will draw the attention of others. But that is not happening.

DS: Bangladesh used to get silver medals at the Asian Games and South Asian Games, but now they struggle to even win bronze. Why?

TT: As I said before, the lack of international exposure is the main reason for the failure. We have enough talented players. Razib Ahmed, Rabiul Islam, Monirul and Al Amin are considered promising players but they need proper guidance and training to shine at the international level.

READ FULL STORY ONLINE

‘Enthusiasm has dwindled due to mobile phones’

As general secretary of the Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation, Habibur Rahman has been playing a key role in reviving the sport in the country. Habibur, also Deputy Inspector General of Dhaka range police and senior vice-president of World Kabaddi Federation, spoke to The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman about the federation’s initiatives and the limitations.

The Daily Star (DS): You are also in a vital post in Bangladesh Police. How do you carry out both responsibilities?

Habibur Rahman (HR): Policing is my occupation but kabaddi, our national sport, is my passion. Kabaddi was chosen as the national sport by the Father of the Nation. According to experts, kabaddi originated in Faridpur and Tamil Nadu. After staging international kabaddi events in Bangladesh, the world knows that kabaddi is Bangladesh’s game. The World Kabaddi Federation is also happy with our initiative. Although over 200 countries play kabaddi, only Bangladesh has designated kabaddi as its national sport.

DS: What changes have you made since becoming general secretary in 2017?

HR: Bangladesh once used to be in a good position, becoming runners-up behind India at the international level. However, Bangladesh lost their position while India kept theirs intact. Others like Iran, South Korea and Pakistan also came forward and surpassed Bangladesh as we were stuck in limbo. We have been trying to rebuild kabaddi although I am not completely satisfied with the progress made over the past five years. If I consider the ability of our committee, then I will say it is the third-most vibrant federation after cricket and football. But we could not progress as expected because kabaddi regressed a lot before we took over.

DS: What do you plan to achieve?

HR: Our goal is to build the image of the country at the international stage by making the kabaddi team strong. Although it has been a long process, we want Bangladesh to always fight for first place in international competitions.

DS: What have been your findings in the past five years, negative and positive?

HR: I want to share a different problem. The enthusiasm and interest in sports has reduced among the general populace due to mobile phones. Now you can’t see enthusiastic gatherings at playgrounds in the afternoon, which was a common sight in the past. The situation was heated when Abahani and Mohammedan played, but there is hardly any interest among people regarding the two traditional archrivals now. For these reasons, the number of athletes has also reduced. At the same time, the number of organisers has also come down. When numbers fall, quality deteriorates.

DS: What things do you think need to be done to recapture past glories?

HR: Kabaddi is a combination of strength,



stamina and technique but we have problems regarding our physical strength due to geographic and weather conditions. There is also a concept among people that kabaddi is a dangerous game that injures players, so guardians are less interested in sending their children. Apart from those two problems, there is a comparative lack of patronisation from the government. So, we have to overcome these hurdles and the kabaddi federation must have a long-term plan and implement it accordingly. We are about to frame a long-term plan.

DS: The IGP Cup youth kabaddi tournament had a huge impact on upcoming players. Do you have any long-term plan to keep those youths involved in kabaddi?

HR: We have already picked up some talented male and female players from

the IGP Cup and provided them with improved training to groom them for the national team. We also have plans to work with players who weren’t selected from talent-hunt programmes. Another area of progress was making the government and BKSP understand that BKSP should also focus on kabaddi. Now, kabaddi has been included in BKSP. In terms of infrastructure, we are taking initiatives to build a kabaddi institute near Dhaka. We have already made two private kabaddi stadiums in Moulvibazar and Bagerhat.

DS: How are Bangladesh benefiting from the Bangabandhu Cup without Bangladesh’s main rivals: India, Iran, Korea and Pakistan?

HR: The tournament of course has an impact on those Bangladeshi players who can’t take part in the Indian Pro-Kabaddi. Many players, who play in the Indian Pro-Kabaddi, feature in different teams and our players get the chance to play against them. I think Bangladesh is also contributing to developing kabaddi worldwide by hosting the Bangabandhu Cup. We hope to stage the next edition with 12 teams.

DS: Do you have any plans to introduce a money-spinning league that can attract the younger generation?

HR: We want to introduce a franchise-based Bangladesh Kabaddi League with the participation of six teams. Many corporate houses have shown interest and we have all but confirmed six teams and completed initial discussions.

DS: Do you have any plans to introduce a salary structure for national kabaddi players?

HR: Most national players are from service teams and are paid by their respective teams. Those national players also get incentives if they perform well for the national team. It is true that national players outside service teams do not get much financial benefit. Hopefully, we will make a positive decision about the salary structure of the national players within a short period.