



'I believe we can dream all the way'

"I have only one dream right now," Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal expressed his ambitions and reflected on the Tigers' achievements and failures in the recently-concluded tour of South Africa during an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Bishwajit Roy. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Your return to Test cricket after almost a year. Please share the experience with us.

Tamim Iqbal (TI): It feels really good. Test cricket is something that I've always valued very highly. I've always said, whether you score a century or fifty, the attention you get as a batter in this format is second to none. I'm satisfied about resuming Tests again but not satisfied with the way we performed. We could've done much better considering the team we had.

DS: Any noticeable change in the team after such a gap?

TI: One year may sound like a long time but I've probably missed five to six Tests during this period. Speaking of change, I think it's the willingness to win and keep fighting. Of course, it was there in the past as well but after defeating New Zealand at their own backyard earlier this year, the eagerness to win is more than ever.

DS: Why couldn't the team live up to expectations in Tests despite having the momentum in favour after the ODI series?

TI: We are a very settled team in ODIs since we've been doing well for a long time. I've said in the past and I'll say it again that - in Tests, we were still not up to the mark even after the victory in New Zealand, after which the high expectations became problematic. But the reality is, we are still the same team that we were before the New Zealand series. See, the second Test [against South Africa] wasn't our best, but if you look at the first Test, we did compete for four days; the first time we did so against South Africa on their home soil. We can

continue to talk about the negatives, however, if we keep performing like this, you can expect results in a couple of years.

DS: What was the primary reason behind the aggressive approach in the second Test?

TI: There's always a team plan and each individual has a plan of their own as well. I'll not give any excuse as we definitely have committed some blunders by choosing the wrong options. When we talk about defending and attacking, one thing we have to consider is the wicket we were playing on. There, the ball was turning a lot, and when you always have five or six fielders around the batter and you keep on defending, one ball will inevitably bounce and end up in their hands. I won't say we had an overtly attacking approach, but we could have reached a balance. No matter what I'll say, the ultimate thing is - we didn't bat well.

DS: Why were we struggling against South African spinners?

TI: I think the way the ball was turning on the wicket in the second Test, batting was extremely difficult. Plus, the fact that we had to bat under lights. We need to identify our errors and prepare ourselves to successfully overcome such situations in future.

DS: Taskin Ahmed and Shoriful Islam's absence. How big was the impact?

TI: After a long wait, we now have a good fast bowling unit for Test cricket where we can play at least three seamers in a match. There were times when we used to play with one pacer, and never really

used more than a couple of seamers in overseas conditions. A lot of credit goes to the captain Mominul Haque because this unit has been developing during his tenure. Taskin and Shoriful are one of our main bowlers and their absence was a setback, no doubt, but I'll not say that it was one of the reasons behind our loss since we didn't play well in all the departments.

DS: Is it too early to start envisioning a five bowler plan?

TI: A captain has a lot of options with five bowlers. Now we have [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz, who has started to bat well in the ODIs and now if he regularly performs in the Tests, the team management and the captain would have the option to make him an extra batter and go for another bowler.

DS: What's your take on the reports of senior cricketers' influence on Mominul's decision-making?

TI: Not only is it untrue but I think such a claim is really hilarious! When I'm the captain, I take suggestions from many. Similarly, whenever Mominul comes to me for a suggestion, I talk to him according to the team's best interests. The coach and the captain have the power to make the final decision. I've a very good working relationship with Mominul since we've been playing international cricket for quite a long time together. Anyway, who is writing what doesn't bother me but I think Mominul could answer this question better than I would.

DS: How would the ODI success impact Bangladesh cricket?

TI: To me, it's one of the biggest achievements in Bangladesh cricket.

This series victory will give us the belief that we can win series away from home. However, it's sad that everyone is forgetting about it after our poor showing in Tests.

DS: Can we realistically dream big for the 2023 ODI World Cup?

TI: The way we've been playing this format, I don't see a reason to not dream about it. As a captain, I believe we can dream all the way. I think there are still one or two spots that need fixing. If we can check-mark these spots, I'll be very pleased as a captain.

DS: Your plan regarding T20 cricket?

TI: Everyone, more or less, knows about my stand regarding T20 cricket. I've always been transparent about all my decisions and the board is very clear about my stand as well since I always inform them [BCB] in advance and not at the last moment.

DS: The board often complains about senior players not informing about their absence earlier.

TI: All I have to say is that if a player has plans, it's best for everyone if they inform as early as possible. But there are exceptions when it comes to emergencies, like for instance in Shakib's [Al Hasan] issue during the South Africa series. I'm sure nobody, including Shakib himself, could've predicted that his family members would fall sick.

DS: What is Tamim Iqbal's next dream as a player?

TI: I have no individual desire. The only dream I have right now is to win a trophy for the country.

Workload management on BCB's agenda

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) ongoing negotiations with other international cricket boards regarding the new FTP cycle meant a jam-packed schedule will be in the offing and cricketers' workload management was in the board's agenda.

Bangladesh will want to play the T20 World Cup this year and the 2023 ODI World Cup with their best players available. The discussions yesterday in the cricket board revolved around the workload management of the players, especially pacers.

"Taskin [Ahmed] and Shoriful [Islam] are injured and most of the pacers are injury-prone. We are planning to manage their injuries. The CEO, selectors, team director Khaled Mahmud

Bangladesh will likely have 40-plus Tests, 70-plus ODIs and 76-plus T20Is in the new FTP cycle. A first tour of Australia since 2008 is also being discussed, with Bangladesh eyeing a two-Test series down under in 2027.

and chief physician Dr. Debashish Chowdhury were here and we discussed the pace bowlers' injury maintenance," BCB's cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus told the media yesterday.

Both Taskin and Shoriful are doubtful for the upcoming Test series against Sri Lanka, slated to begin on May 15, with the board set to announce the squad today. Taskin is undergoing conservative treatment for the supraspinatus tendon injury following his shoulder injury in South Africa. "If it takes too long to heal, in that case, we are talking to specialists and if required, he will go abroad for treatment," Jalal informed.

Although Shoriful has recovered from his ankle injury, he will need surgery on a non-sports related issue. Recuperation time is expected to be small, Dr Debashish informed yesterday.

'Not giving up despite lack of evidence'

SPORTS REPORTER

"There is a lack of evidence (of match-fixing), but we are not giving up on the matter. Instead, we are doing cross-interrogative interviews as we are moving forward with a noble cause," Bangladesh Football Federation's fixed match identification committee chairman Humayun Khalid said yesterday.

The game's local governing body, on Saturday, started investigating the allegations of match-fixing, spot-fixing and betting in Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) with six persons, including players, coaching staff and club officials, appearing before the FMIC at BFF headquarters.

Former national footballer Saifur Rahman Moni had earlier brought allegations against BCL outfit Azampur FC over what he thought was match-fixing. Some media outlets then broke the news that some BCL clubs were involved with match-fixing and spot-fixing.

"The hearing will continue. They are providing information in favour of match-fixing as well as against match-fixing. Both parties tried to convince us they are right but none of them could provide any evidence," Khalid, a former director general of Bangladesh Rural Development Board, told The Daily Star.

Jibon aware of what is at stake

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani's Nabib Newaj Jibon is already feeling the heat in Kolkata as the Indian journalists keep calling the striker to enquire about him and his side ahead of the high-stake encounter.

Six-time professional football league champions Abahani reached Kolkata on Saturday morning to play the AFC Cup play-off against hosts ATK Mohun Bagan on Tuesday at the Salt Lake Stadium after getting a walkover from Maldives' Club Valencia in Sylhet.

"I'm hoping for a lot of spectators to turn up to watch our match because three to four employees of our hotel have already requested me to manage tickets for them," Jibon told The Daily Star over phone from Kolkata just before heading for training yesterday afternoon.

"Indian journalists are calling me to know about Abahani and what will happen when Mohun Bagan captain Pritam Kotal and I take to the ground," said Jibon.

"Pritam helped me during my knee surgery and he is my friend and well-wisher but he will definitely be my opponent when he plays against Abahani," was his reply to the Indian journalists.

Pritam was there for the Bangladesh national

player when he went through a knee surgery in Kolkata last year. And while Pritam had to be busy with his club commitment, Pritam's fiance Sonela Paul, a sports reporter, also took care of Jibon during his short stay in Kolkata and later had accompanied him on the way back to West-Bengal border-district Petrapole before entering Bangladesh through Benapole.

Jibon did not forget Pritam and Sonela's help. As they reunited this time, Jibon presented a Bangladesh jersey to Sonela, whose grandparent once lived in Bangladesh.

The 31-year-old forward, nonetheless, is very focused ahead of Tuesday's fixture with the sole objective of returning home with a victory.

"Everyone is fit and well at the moment as we eagerly wait to play and win the match against Mohun Bagan, a strong side of course," said Jibon.

After reaching Kolkata on Saturday morning, the charges of Portuguese coach Mario Lemos could only undergo a gym and a swimming session before engaging in the first practice session at the Salt Lake training ground.

Manager Satyajit Das Rupu informed that Abahani will have their one-hour training session today at the main venue at 7:00pm, which is also the kick-off time of Tuesday's tie between two cross-border rivals.



Abahani's Portuguese coach Mario Lemos instructs his charges during a training session at the Salt Lake training ground in Kolkata yesterday ahead of tomorrow's crucial AFC Cup play-off match against ATK Mohun Bagan.

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