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LOKMAN HOSSAIN, karate coach, Barishal

“You have to provide adequate coaching at grassroots level to properly groom a player in any sport.” We often come across such a statement whenever the topic of limitations in the sports arena is discussed. And there is nothing wrong with that as there are no shortcuts to improving the grassroots of any discipline if a better reflection of our quality in the world’s sports map is intended. With this notion in mind, The Daily Star got in touch with four different local coaches, each from a separate discipline, to know about their stories. And all that came up during these discussions were the long-existing financial constraints, poor infrastructures, the dire need for well-rounded sporting bodies and variety of reasons behind the noticeable dip in the interest of today’s youth regarding sports of any discipline.



Barishal’s karate kids ‘want improved infrastructure’

SUSHANTA GHOSH *from Barishal*

Lokman Hossain has been involved in karate training for more than three long decades now. In the meantime, gold, silver and bronze medals at the national levels have been the result of his hard work and dedication. This resident of Barishal’s Ward No. 19 is currently conducting training at the Shaheed Abdur Rab Serniabat Stadium, where the apparent lack of sustainable infrastructure and adequate facilities has Lokman concerned.

Lokman mentioned there were only 25 students when he began coaching in 1992. Now there the numbers had risen to more than a hundred, with most of the trainees being girls.

“I’m wearing a black belt and I have two such other girls and a boy with me. Our trainee Marjuri Binte Hasi grabbed gold in 2006 while several others also bagged silver and bronze medals,” a proud Lokman told The Daily Star.

“Moreover, Juthi Gomez has snatched

Bangladesh Games bronze as a representative of this organisation.

“At present, I’ve a place at the stadium to conduct my training sessions, courtesy of the support from the Deputy Commissioner.”

Nasren Nahar, a parent of a karate



student here, told The Daily Star that she had brought her daughter here so that she can protect herself. Devyani, another mother of a trainee,

reckons that karate training will make girls confident.

The karate instructor, Lokman, further informed he was working with a lot of difficulties as there was no permanent place with indoor facilities. In 1993, the coach went on to set up a karate academy called Bangladesh Siro Ryu Du Karate Academy, which has a commendable reputation.

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The karate coach put serious emphasis on arranging frequent tournaments to take karate to the desired heights.

“Corona [Covid-19 pandemic] had halted the game for a long time. Now this gap should be filled. In particular, I’d say that this sport is as enjoyable as it is protective.”

“We want improved infrastructure so that Barisal can produce a large number of prizes in the coming days at the National sports.”

Gaibandha sports’ ramshackle state

According to Sanaul Habib Sazzad, a district coach under the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), as many as 200 students had aspired to be cricketers under his guidance around two decades ago when he began training the Gaibandha youths. At present, the number of female students had shrunk from 15-20 to just one and the total to 60. The Daily Star’s Mostafa Shabuj caught up with the veteran coach to know about the reasons behind the deterioration during an interview, the excerpts of which are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): What’s the state of Gaibandha district cricket’s pipeline?

Sanaul Habib Sazzad (SHS): It’s not as good as it used to be as we are losing students gradually.

DS: What are the reasons behind the decline?

SHS: The students and their corresponding guarding had basically lost interest in sports. Over time, students’ interest areas jumbled into drug habits, addiction to cell phones and mostly, hanging out here and there in town. Plus, the ones in town remain occupied with extra private tuition while coaching classes in the afternoon prevents them from coming into the field. Around 10-15 years ago, we used to get students mostly from the town area but the scenario has changed. Now, among my 60 students, around 60 parents accompany them for practice and they come from the Upazila level and from the village areas.

DS: Are the district’s ground facilities sufficient?

SHS: Playing grounds are available in Gaibandha’s Upazila level and district town, and moreover, we also have the district stadium [Shah Abdul Hamid Stadium]. Unfortunately, I can’t afford the Shah Abdul Hamid Stadium every day because it’s occupied by private academy coaches and regularly hosts a lot of sporting activities.

DS: What facilities do you get from BCB?

SHS: 20 years ago, there were few facilities from BCB but the youths’ interest in cricket had compensated things. Now despite BCB improving the facilities, the student crisis is far from being negated. Having said that, the fact that BCB provides 24 cricket balls, one catching bat and some pants and jersey for me, is not enough.

DS: As a BCB coach, what’s your biggest crisis area?

SHS: As I said before, we are losing students day by day. Besides, the salary BCB provides us is quite poor. It’s highly discriminating when I get paid BDT 18,100 per month while the division-level coaches get 54 thousand takas monthly salary. When the BCB has stopped incrementing salaries for a long time, how does a district coach run his family with this little? Even a peon of a government office gets more than us. I feel shy and awkward about revealing my salary to people.

DS: Why are players not coming for the national level from Gaibandha?

SHS: There are some students of mine who are playing in the age-level national teams but the main reason is: youths are losing their willpower. This will affect our country’s sports, mainly in cricket, soon. If the guardians of the students do not motivate their child to engage in sports and if the students divert their enthusiasm to other activities, then how will we get good players for the country?



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Shuttling against the wind

DWOHA CHOWDHURY *from Sylhet*

In 1989, Shibbir Ahmed, then a Class-IV student, was persuaded by his friend Khaled to accompany him into badminton training under coach Sheikh Jahangir.

Being a sports enthusiast himself, Shibbir saw this as a great opportunity to spend time doing what he loved doing most. However, little did he know at that time that the sport of badminton would become an integral part of his life.

Now a national badminton coach, Shibbir recently talked to The Daily Star, recalling his journey with the racquet and the shuttlecock.

“After years of practice under coach Jahangir,

I joined Sylhet district team in 1994 and the divisional team the following year. Around a decade later, I won the district championship title consecutively in 2004 and 2005,” Shibbir recalled.

In 2009, Shibbir brought an end to his playing career, switching to coaching instead.

“My family wanted me to settle in the UK like my brother. But I fled home and stayed out for four days so my family could not force me to apply for a passport,” the 42-year-old coach said.

The following year, Shibbir set up Sylhet Badminton Academy with only one student. He soon realised that girls are being deprived of proper badminton coaching, so he started coaching girls in the academy.

Over the years, the respected coach has trained more than 200 players in his academy, producing national champions like Afrina Islam Mouly, Maibam Mangal, Busra Jahan, Nazia Sharmin Jenny, Akramul Islam Chowdhury Arik, Gourav Singha, Nazrin Tuz Johra and many more.

For the last four years, Shibbir has been working as a coach of the national team, however, he is not

content with the state of affairs of badminton in the country.

“Being a national coach like five others has no special perks, not even a minimum honorarium. This is more like a contractual job where the team is formed for specific international tournaments and payments are made on piecemeal basis,” Shibbir said out of disappointment.

What worries Shibbir most is the lack of professionalism in the sport in Bangladesh.

“Youths come to me with passion for badminton. But as a coach, I cannot show them the vision of a bright future. I know the path is rigid and we are losing a lot of bright players in the process,” he said.

Shibbir said that the federation is not willing to extend its support to players who are doing well while the district sports association never shows interest in badminton.

In Sylhet, there are two indoor badminton grounds — Abul Maal Abdul Muhith Sports Complex and Mohammad Ali Gymnasium. But the indoor ground of the gymnasium has been occupied for indoor cricket for a long time, resulting in a lack of practice venue for shuttlers.

“Our players have potential to win international titles, but they are dropping off due to lack of adequate support from the federation and sponsors,” Shibbir said. “Some sustain by earning little playing on rent in regional level outdoor tournaments.”

Despite all the frustration, Shibbir is sticking with badminton and also wants Thought the future of badminton is still grim in the eyes of the coach, he wants his daughters, 10 and 4, to forge a career in the sport.

“They already like playing badminton and I wish they could someday win prestigious international tournaments,” Shibbir concluded.



Coaches in Mymensingh still struggling to make ends meet

AMINUL ISLAM *from Mymensingh*

Continuing to brave the blows delivered by the Covid-19 pandemic that has lasted over two years, cricket coaching academies in Mymensingh are still struggling to impart their expertise.

The pandemic made their lives increasingly difficult, with coaches and players enduring some bleak moments.

“The situation was beyond imagination. We wondered if we would return to the field again, but since lockdowns have been lifted, we returned to the field with our boys and great hope,” said coach Golam Kibria Tara, who represented Bangladesh Railway and Oriental Club in the Dhaka First Division.

Head coach of Mohammedan Cricket Academy, Tara said he resumed coaching in full swing at the end of last year and that there were now around 200 boys in his academy. Of them, 50 were regulars, mainly competing in different age groups.

The 48-year-old said there was a five-member coaching staff at his academy but it had become difficult to pay the staff on a regular basis.

Tara added that coaching was also disrupted several months due to the rainy season and examinations at educational institutions.

Of the 20 cricket coaches in Mymensingh, a majority lead their lives with constant financial constraints. Given the lack of indoor facilities, coaching ceases when it rains. Fitness sessions are conducted exclusively at



the Zainul Abedin Park in Mymensingh. Regular students pay Tk 300 to Tk 500 each month but many fees remain unpaid for months.

Zakir Hasan, the founding coach of Brothers Cricket Academy who was nominated by the Bangladesh Cricket Board as Mymensingh’s divisional coach, said there were 150 boys in his academy, with 80 regulars.

There are three other members in the coaching staff, and even coming up with their modest wages proves a challenge. Zakir’s academy makes around Tk 40,000 as monthly fees from boys and girls, of which Tk 10,000 is spent behind pitch maintenance, nets and other operating expenses. Each staff member gets between Tk 7000 and Tk 8000 monthly, but it adds up quickly.

Jahid Hossain Emon, the founder of Panditpara Cricket Academy, said he currently coaches about 20 boys regularly and that it had become hard to continue running his academy because he cannot afford another coach.

“We cannot leave because of our

fascination towards the field, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to continue in this profession, especially as the price of daily essentials and other commodities has increased many-fold,” said Emon, who played in the Dhaka League from 2000-2015.

81-year-old veteran Kazi Mohammad Hasan, who has been a coach since 1965, said that the present condition had left coaches in serious dilemma. He added there were around 500 cricketers and cricket-related professionals at district level and club level that needed support to ensure their survival.

Tara provided a glimpse into what keeps them going, beaming as he informed that two boys from his academy were admitted to BKSP this year. But a profession they considered a decent future after their retirement as players has left them frustrated, many said. As the Covid-19 situation has escalated, more optimistic coaches were hopeful that better days would come. For the moment, they continue to brave the blows.