

**“If you make the national team a platform for learning everything, poor results are unavoidable. A player’s upbringing is crucial because all those important traits are absorbed during that budding phase. You may continue to hire the world’s best faces to guide the national side, but you will not get results until or unless you understand that you need to look at the grassroots.”**

Coach Mohammad Salahuddin



## Coach Aftab moving towards elite level

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During his playing days, Aftab Ahmed had been one of Bangladesh’s more courageous batters while the team were still finding their feet in the international Stage. Following his playing career, the former national batter ventured into coaching and had established his own academy before serving as a batting coach for Bangla Tigers currently. As one who enjoys coaching, Aftab divulged on the Level 2 coaching course and of late had undergone a program initiated by the BCB’s coach education and game development department. The popular player turned coach shared his experiences with **The Daily Star’s Abdullah Al Mehdi**.

**The Daily Star (DS):** Tell us about the Level 2 coaching program.  
**Aftab Ahmed (AA):** Here, all coaches have completed level-one coaching. There’s a lot to learn from level two and we have come to understand there is no limit to learning. When we finish the six-day session and take the knowledge back to work for one to one-and-a-half years, our quality will definitely rise.

**DS:** What about the environment in the camp?  
**AA:** When I went through level one, I learned a lot. You see, playing-career and coaching-career is completely different. Playing career is for yourself and coaching career is for everything. You have to know how to handle 15 players or 50 players and you have to possess the ability. Suppose someone isn’t scoring runs and since batting is a sensitive aspect, if you can’t tell properly what’s happening, it can destroy one’s career but

if you can do it properly, it will help a player move up. If I have to work at the elite level, these coaching levels would assist a lot.

**DS:** What is it like working with coaches like Rangana Herath?

**AA:** I used to understand spin pretty well since I was a batter. I haven’t bowled spin so when I arrived here, of course I had to know about spin. Suppose, I’m working in club cricket and there aren’t specialist spin coaches there working in an academy, four-day cricket or BPL, I have to know those things.

Herath made us aware of many aspects of spin. For example, one important aspect was how to bowl in Tests, what your variations will be and the loop of the deliveries. He added insights to bowling on flat tracks and how to get wickets on such surfaces, that kind of thing. He covered most of the things and it’s not possible to cover everything in a day but he tried to do as much as possible.

**DS:** Would it be possible to develop a structure?

**AA:** Not every coach can go through the levels. We have 30 coaches in the camp but there are at least 400 to 500 coaches out there and it’s not possible for them to go through the coaching levels. If it was possible to give the opportunity to do level one coaching for various coaches, it would be better.

Jamie Siddons was telling me the other day that ‘in a way that our coaching job at national level becomes easier.’ At times someone’s foot goes across and it becomes difficult to change at elite level. There are so many academies but if the coaches had

some idea of what level one or two coaching was about, their matrix will change since the players from the root level are having to learn anew when they get to a different level.

For instance, from doing level one, I came to know how to tell spinners how to begin their skill training. Level 2 and 3 are advanced but even knowing the basics of level 1 would help the basics of a lot of people.

I have a dream to take all coaches from Chattogram and work with the likes of [Nazmul Abedeen] Fahim sir and others. Maybe they won’t get a certificate but they will at least get an idea of level one coaching.

**DS:** What comes next?

**AA:** After Level 2 we have to submit an assignment of six months and then they will provide a certificate. After Level 2 comes Level 3 and that is the last one.

**DS:** Could you share the interesting fielding exercise with Shane McDermott?

**AA:** It was about getting everyone’s involvement in line. At times catches come suddenly. Suppose a left-arm spinner is bowling and most often the ball goes to cover or point but the fielder at square-leg doesn’t always have the mental readiness and hence there are chances of the catch being dropped. So, it was about the involvement and the walk towards the ball and the timing of your feet movements.

**DS:** Does the program cover all aspects?

**AA:** Yes, physio, medicine, everything. Bayzid bhai took a class and Nick Lee was there too. Now we can talk about the various grades of [injury] tears and if I will be able to play a player after a certain period.

## ‘I don’t think we understand the real value of a coach’

BISHWAJIT ROY

Proper grooming is crucial because all basic traits are absorbed during that budding phase, cricket experts remind, especially after national players miserably fail in terms of decision-making on the field. Bangladesh’s poor first-class cricket structure has often been identified as the main culprit behind the country’s struggles in five-day matches since its elevation to Test cricket in 2000.

But when it comes to preparing a player during that budding phase, a modern coach can play a huge role by helping a player in the initial stages of their career understand how to handle pressure, stay focused and be mentally tough.

“Like grooming a player, grooming coaches is also crucial for a good cricketing culture in a country,” said Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, veteran coach and coach educator.

With the changing demands of the format, growth in infrastructure, competitive landscape, technological innovation, and the overall business of cricket, coaching systems have evolved over the years. So, no way Bangladesh cricket can undervalue this area for the betterment of the country’s overall cricket.

But how much priority or importance is given to this area?

“It’s the most neglected, I would say. There is no point if someone attends a level-2 course after a six or seven-year gap. If you want to update your coaches, you need to arrange workshops and symposiums on a regular basis. But unfortunately, that is not a case in our country,” said Fahim.

“You need a knowledge-based system. There are two parts. One is theoretical knowledge and another is practical knowledge. Whatever knowledge our coaches gain from theoretical



courses, they can hardly use it practically due to very unhealthy practices in the domestic circuit, where, on most occasions, our coaches have very little chance to make decisions,” he continued.

Fahim said that there was hardly any structure in the country to produce quality coaches.

“It’s very encouraging that former cricketers are showing interest in coaching. But a lack of proper structure is hindering their progress. We need to set a target and make a comprehensive plan in line with demand and supply. We need to identify the demand for coaches at different levels and then the most important thing is to evaluate a coach’s performance.

“We are crying for off-spinners and leg-spinners. If we can produce some good coaches, they may scout some boys at the grassroots level and prepare them accordingly. The Bangladesh Cricket Board has to invest in this sector.

“We are now talking much more about a player’s mentality or mental strength, especially after failures on the international stage. In most of these cases, a coach could have solved such problems at an earlier stage. A coach can look at cricket values and ethical issues. There is a big role for a coach in modern cricket, especially as technological innovations have made their job more important than before. But I don’t know whether the concerned people understand the real value of a coach, one who can set a philosophy for a player” ended Fahim.

One of the main weaknesses of our national cricketers is that they learn many things after entering into the international stage which they should be learned from the initial stage.

And according to Fahim, a “well-equipped” coach can solve big part of it during a cricketer’s growing age.

## Former stars’ interest the ‘most positive’ sign

MAZHAR UDDIN

With the intention to enhance and improve the skills of the local coaches, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) conducted a six-day Level 2 coaching course at the home of cricket in Mirpur last week.

Bangladesh cricket has come a long way since getting Test status two decades ago, but local coaches are unfortunately yet to get exposure or trust from the BCB.

There is also a huge difference when the handful of international coaches are compared to local coaches, who hunt talents from the grassroots level. There are a total of 15 High Performance senior coaches, twelve divisional coaches and 63 district coaches under the BCB’s game development programme.

There are mainly three categories in coaching – Level 1, 2 and 3 – while there is the Level A coaching course for those who have not played Premier League or first-class cricket.

The BCB conducts Level 1 and 2 coaching courses while the Level 3 course needs to be done under the supervision of the Asian Cricket Council. Level 3 is the highest level of coaching qualification in cricket, but only a handful of Bangladeshi coaches have competed it.

There is huge interest among former national cricketers to take coaching up as a profession, with former cricketers making up half of the 30 participants this time. Female coach Dolly Rani Sarkar also took part this time.

“The most positive aspect of this course is the participation of former national cricketers. Apart from them, we have age-level and district-level coaches and coaches who were engaged in the Dhaka Premier League,” BCB game development manager Abu Emam Mohammad Kawsar told **The Daily Star**.

“We had over a hundred candidates for the course, but we focused on the potential candidates for this programme. At the



same time, former national cricketers are required to complete the Level 2 course. The intention of this course is to provide proper knowledge to coaches so that they can teach young cricketers in the correct manner.”

There is also a huge vacuum when it

comes to producing coaching educators, who can help coaches from lower tiers develop the skills.

Following a long gap since the last Level 2 coaching course took place in 2015, the BCB’s plans to initiate training programmes was halted by the onset of the