

Ashrafal blasts 'pathetic' domestic pitches

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh skipper Mohammed Ashrafal did not subscribe to the theory that Bangladesh lacked power-hitters due to physique or muscles, opining that such abilities could only be honed through a proper process.

"It's true that we don't have power hitters but I don't buy that it a problem we cannot solve. I think we have players, but we don't have the right process to produce quality T20 players.

"You have to clearly give someone the role of power-hitter. Otherwise, we cannot overcome this situation. We have been playing T20s for the past 15 years but we have unfortunately not improved much. Our players also hardly get chances to play T20s."

Ashrafal also lamented the state the domestic T20 circuit, labeling the nature of pitches found during those fleeting events 'pathetic'.

"Where is our T20 domestic structure? How many matches do our players play in a season? The most pathetic thing is that we play T20 matches on a pitch where a score of 115 and 120 is good enough to win. After all that, we are crying about not having a power hitter. You have to provide wickets where teams can easily score 200 runs. I don't think power-hitting always depends on muscles or physique. It is a skill you have to develop through a process," Ashrafal elaborated.

He also believed that Bangladesh's philosophy of team performances would not bring success in T20 cricket, where individuals can change the course of games.

"Do we have a game-changer in our team? Unfortunately, we don't. A T20 can change in two or three overs. A single player can change the complexion of the whole game in two-three overs. But we have a philosophy of team performance and I think the problem lies with that," Ashrafal explained.



On the left, West Indies batter Rovman Powell playing one away with ease straight over long off against Shakib Al Hasan during his unbeaten 28-ball 61 which further turned the momentum in his side's favour. (Right) Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib struck a 52-ball 68 but could not quite avenge Powell hitting 23 in his final over with the ball.

PHOTO: AFP

T20 approach still the biggest concern

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"We are trying, but things are not happening for us," were the words uttered by a timid Nasum Ahmed after Bangladesh's eight-wicket thumping at the hands of England in the 2021 World Cup in Abu Dhabi.

After exiting the last T20 World Cup with six defeats from eight encounters, the promise from the Bangladesh team management was that at least initial steps towards building a structure for the T20 squad would be taken before the next T20 extravaganza, which is scheduled for October-November later this year.

However, it is clear from every vantage point that not only has that promise not materialised, but Bangladesh are still in a similarly sorry situation in the shortest format as they were a year ago.

The way Bangladesh played during their 35-run defeat to the West Indies in the second T20I of the ongoing three-match series -- which was considered the first step in preparations for the upcoming T20 World Cup in Australia -- characterised the truth that Nasum blurted out during that presser.

Bangladesh are unable to make things happen.

In fact, things did not even change in terms of how Bangladesh view themselves

in the format. Last time, Bangladesh went into the T20 World Cup with a false sense of achievement, having registered 'historic series wins' over Australia and New Zealand in favourable home conditions.

As it stands, a similar bubble surrounds the players this time. Skipper

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Mahmudullah Riyad talked boldly about the 'settled T20 eleven' that the Tigers now possess before leaving for the West Indies.

Having a settled playing eleven essentially means that players are aware of their roles. That did not seem to be the case when, chasing a challenging 194-run target in the second T20I, the

likes of Anamul Haque, Liton Das and Mahmudullah returned to the pavilion in a hurry, leaving the middle-order with the job of saving face.

Looking at the way the hosts structured their innings, it can be observed that it took more than just Rovman Powell's muscles to reach the daunting total. Before Powell overwhelmed the Tigers with an unbeaten 61 off just 28 deliveries, opener Brandon King somewhat bided his time after the West Indies lost two early wickets. That effort saw him score a fifty but also set the stage for Powell's carnage.

No discernible approach could be gauged from the Tigers' camp. Even Shakib Al Hasan's unbeaten 68 was more an attempt to help Bangladesh reduce the margin of defeat to something less embarrassing.

With the hosts leading the series 1-0, the Bangladesh team moved from Dominica to Guyana, where the final and series-deciding T20I is set to be staged on July 7.

Bangladesh could spring a surprise and end up winning the final game to level the series. But that would in no way solve the problems that have persisted in the Tigers' camp, chief among them, their questionable approach in T20s.

England off to flying start in record chase

REUTERS, Birmingham

England rode Alex Lees's fifty to cruise to 136-3 in pursuit of a record chase on day four of the rearranged fifth Test against India at Edgbaston on Monday.

India were all out for 245 half an hour into the day's second session, setting England a victory target of 378.

Lees (56) combined with Zak Crawley (46) to give the hosts a rollicking start before Jasprit Bumrah ended the century partnership just before the Tea break.

Ollie Pope was yet to open his account at the other end.

Lees and Crawley championed the attacking brand of cricket which is becoming the hallmark of the England test team since Brendon McCullum took over as the head coach and Ben Stokes assumed the captaincy.

They reached the 100 mark inside 20 overs with Lees racing to a 44-ball fifty.

Crawley missed out on a half-century after deciding to leave a Bumrah delivery which jagged back to hit the top of his off-stump.

England's highest successful run chase came in 2019 when they reached a 359-run target in an Ashes Test against Australia on the back of Stokes's brilliant unbeaten century.



Rybakina reaches quarter-finals for the first time

AFP, London



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina reached the Wimbledon quarter-finals for the first time on Monday with a straight-sets win over Petra Martic.

The Russian-born 17th seed won 7-5, 6-3 and will face either Alize Cornet of France or Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic for a place in the semi-finals.

Rybakina, who switched nationality in 2018, has made the last eight without dropping a set.

The 23-year-old will be playing in her second Grand Slam quarter-final, having also reached the last eight at the French Open in 2021.

Rahmatganj get biggest BPL win

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Rahmatganj notched their biggest victory in the professional football league with a massive 7-1 win over Muktiyoddha Sangsad in a crucial Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Birshreshtha Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

The triumph saw Rahmatganj leap out of the relegation zone and into ninth place in the 12-team table, with 14 points from 18 matches. Muktiyoddha Sangsad, meanwhile, slipped to 11th place with 11 points from 18 matches.

Interestingly, Rahmatganj's previous biggest win also came against Muktiyoddha Sangsad in the 2009/10 season, when they won 5-1. That four-goal margin was also replicated by Rahmatganj against Brothers Union in a 4-0 win in the 2012/13 season.

However, Rahmatganj still face the threat of relegation despite being ahead of Uttar Baridhara, Muktiyoddha Sangsad and Swadhinata KS. Two of the teams will go down and Rahmatganj still have clashes against Mohammedan, Sheikh Russel, Swadhinata KS and Bangladesh Police.

In yesterday's match, Rahmatganj endured a tough test but went into half-time with a 2-1 lead. The second-half was simply one-way, as they added five more goals.

Nigeria's Sunday Chizoba and Ghana's Philp Adjah struck two goals each while Al Amin, Ashrafal Islam and Toure Lancine netted one goal apiece. Obaidur Rahman Nawbab scored the consolation for Muktiyoddha Sangsad.

In the day's other match, Afghan forward Amiruddin Sharifi struck a goal to give Bangladesh Police a 1-0 win over Swadhinata KS at the Muktiyoddha Smriti Stadium in Rajshahi.

BFF gets 20-acre land in Cox's Bazar for Centre of Excellence

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation on Monday received a 20-acre land in Khuniapalong under Ramu upazila of Cox's Bazar to build a residential training facility to be funded by FIFA.

A programme was held at the site, currently an undeveloped hilly area covered in forests some 17 kilometres south of Cox's Bazar city, in presence of various stakeholders.

The ownership of the land was handed over to representative of Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS) by representative of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Ministry with BFF being the chief beneficiary of the land.

When completed, subject to a final approval from FIFA, the facility will feature two standard-sized football pitches -- one artificial and one of grass -- apart from a four-storey dormitory and medical facilities, among other things.

BFF will get a minimum of 3.6 million dollars from FIFA to complete constructing the facility, the groundwork on which will start after getting the approval from world football's governing body.

The authorities concerned, however, could not provide a specific timeframe for completion of the project.



"There are a few similar facilities in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka in this region, some of which are small-scale while some full-fledged," FIFA's development officer for South Asia region, Prince Rufus, informed reporters after the land-ownership handover programme.

"FIFA will receive the documents and after analysis, with its approval, there will be tenders and consultancy firms

appointed by the local authorities to develop the land and build the facility. FIFA will sanction the fund in phases depending on the progress and demand of work," the Delhi-based official said.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag explained the reason behind choosing this specific location.

"This will not be a round-the-year academy. There will be 40-50 students residing here while we can use this

facility as a retreat for national teams ahead of international tournaments.

"FIFA prefers such centres to be away from the hustle and bustle. The specific location was chosen, after some survey, due to the nature of the land and the proximity to the sea and the under-construction marine drive," Shohag said.

When asked where BFF will arrange funds to operate such a facility once the construction is completed, Shohag claimed that they will manage sponsors, emphasising on the experience from running the Elite Academy in Kamalapur.

The land-ownership handover took place in presence of Divisional forest officer Sarwar Alam, who claimed that BFF will use the land under the conditions that the project should harm as less amount of forest as possible and that this land should not be used in any purpose other than the one explicitly mentioned in the agreement.

The programme was attended, among others, by local MP Shaimum Sarwar Kamal, Cox's Bazar DC Mamunur Rashid, BFF's development committee chairman Ataur Rahman Manik, MOYS joint secretary KM Ali Reza, Cox's Bazar DFA president Fazlul Karim Sayedee and BFF executive member Bijon Barua.