



The history of the bow and arrow is the history of mankind.
FRED BEAR, American bowhunter.



Aiming for the bullseye

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There are around 50-odd sporting federations in Bangladesh, some of which have already existed for over five decades. Apart from cricket, football, hockey, shooting and chess, most of the federations suffer from a lack of spotlight due to a lack of activities and interest from sponsors.

Archery, in this regard, can be an example for smaller federations to follow. It is a relatively young federation and the sport is not a widely popular one in the country, yet the federation has managed to hog the spotlight in recent times due to its aggressive publicity matched by the performance of its athletes in the international arena. Not many sports federations in Bangladesh can boast the number of world-class achievements that archery has managed after coming into existence around two decades ago.

The sport has given us only the second athlete to earn a qualification into the Summer Olympics and has fetched us gold and silver in events such as the World Cup, the Asia Cup and the Grand Prix. Bangladesh Archery Federation’s general secretary Kazi Razibuddin Ahmed Chapol, the man credited with taking this sport from obscurity to the position of a frontrunner in sporting achievements, proudly says that their success is an example to follow for others.

“On different platforms, the World Archery Federation says, ‘if you want rapid improvement in this sport, follow Bangladesh’. Bangladesh is regarded as a role model in archery,” Chapol claimed while talking to The Daily Star.

The sport took nascent steps, according

to Chapol, when former president of World Archery, James Easton, visited Bangladesh in 2002 following a meeting with him two years earlier during the Sydney Olympic Games.

While the initial idea was to focus on the young population of indigenous communities who have better physical ability and have some historical association with bows and arrows, the federation realised, upon insistence of Easton, that young people from all over the country, especially the ones going to schools and colleges, needed to be involved to get positive results.

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The talent hunt programmes were widened across the country, finding and grooming raw talents who later earned accolades in regional and global events.

Emdadul Haque Milon, Ruman Sana, Iti Akter, Diya Siddique, Shyamoly Roy, and Ram Krishna Saha are a few names who have made Bangladesh proud on the global archery scene. There are more than 200 registered archers in the country and more than 40 teams take part in national competitions.

Chapol, though, feels that they are focusing more on quality than quantity.

“We stress on quality, not quantity,” the veteran sports organiser said. “Going for medals [in Olympics] is one thing, building a base is another. We are working to build a strong base for archery.”

While the base was built with the support

and encouragement of World Archery and Archery Asia, the continuation of the process of training players round the year and taking them to international events regularly needed financial support. And that support came in the form of City Group.

The conglomerate has been with the archery federation for five years now, taking care of the federation’s expenditures in organising training, national events and international assignments. A rarity in Bangladesh’s sports sponsorship culture, Chapol hopes City Group’s association with the federation will continue for long.

“That archery has gone to a world level has been possible due to the support of City Group,” Chapol said. “Teer (bow) is the symbol of our sport and Teer is also a brand of City Group. So these two symbols aligned and created good things and will continue to create good things in future.”

What the long-term sponsorship has done, among other things, is help the federation stick to a world-class coach in Martin Fredrick, who by now, has made Bangladesh his home and regards the archers as his children.

The German has led the team to a number of successes in international arena and given proper planning and support, more success should be on the way. There have been downs alongside the ups in the sport, but the trajectory taken by Bangladesh archery over the past decade has been one on the up.

With the base firmly in place and financial support ensured, the day shouldn’t be too far off when archery’s ultimate dream, that of winning a medal on the biggest platform of all – the Olympics – comes true.

‘Bangladesh counts only medals but little steps are important’

Since his arrival in 2018 as the national coach of the Bangladesh archery team, Martin Fredrick has led the country to great heights at the continental level. The German coach, whose five-year contract is on the verge of ending, shared his experience of working in Bangladesh and mentioned some critical issues which need to be addressed while talking with The Daily Star’s Ashfaq Ul Mushfiq. The excerpts of the interview are below:

The Daily Star (DS): What was your initial impression of archery here and how is it today?
Martin Fredrick (MF): I felt the impressive potential of archery here in Bangladesh and a strong will to do well from the national team and federation in general. While looking back today, we can see us going forward, improving and producing proud positions on the podium here in the region, in Asia and making some visible connection to the world results.

DS: What were the key things that helped to bring such changes?

MF: For me, in working as a national coach I try



to approach the task much wider to improve the network; to make better structures, for example. One key thing is planning well, not just somehow managing the moment.

DS: Archer Ruman Sana mentioned how things improved drastically after you arrived in Bangladesh. He credits you for most of the country’s success in archery.
MF: Yeah, it’s a nice compliment and valuable feedback for the joint work that we have done.

DS: Despite great success at the Asian level, why do our archers fail to progress past the elimination stages in the world championships?
MF: You are right and I don’t close my eyes to it. Archery is developing rapidly in the world and we have to keep up but that takes time. We need to continue to gain experience and compete in high-level international competitions. However, we cannot overlook the little steps, what we did. Yes, Bangladesh counts only medals. That is important, of course, that’s what we are aiming for. But for me, again, the little steps are important.

DS: Ruman Sana and Dia Siddique are the faces of Bangladesh’s archery. But who is next in the pipeline and who could carry their legacy?
MF: At the moment I see we have, more or less, a good pipeline, especially from BKSP. I think there is a healthy mix of established archers and young aspiring players. And if you talk about legacy, Dia [Siddique] is just 18 and she is at the beginning of her career. I expect Dia to complete at least 10 more years.

DS: Despite the significant improvement, what areas which ‘if fixed’ can take Bangladesh to a higher level?
MF: The improvements are the result of good teamwork. Teamwork means working together with institutions such as the federation, the executive board, our president and secretary general, government, BOA [Bangladesh Olympic Association], the organisations, clubs, regions and last but not the least, with the absolute, valuable support from our sponsor City Group.

Let me give you some bullet points [regarding archery’s growth]. We need more players, more organisations, clubs and more movement in archery, maybe in schools or whatever.

Another point is the coach’s situation in the country. We do not have the national structure still or coaching certification structure we need at the moment. We have an international coaching course and while it’s good we have some initiative but still, at the moment, I’m not so happy with the situation. We need a national license certification system for coaches.

Again, we need efficient scouting, promotion and development of talents. Then some athletes are husbands or wives so how we can help them manage the family and job is important. As I mentioned in the beginning, good planning and deep thinking is the key.

Unbowed Ruman keeps eyes locked on the prize

Ruman Sana, Bangladesh’s second athlete to directly qualify for the Olympic Games, has been involved with archery for the past 14 years and brought a lot of laurels to the nation. The 27-year-old archer talked to The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman about his career and as well as the future of Bangladesh archery. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Following Archery World Cup, how was the preparation for next month’s Islamic Solidarity Games?
Ruman Sana (RS): Bangladesh archers recently featured in five international tournaments. However, we participated in those tournaments to prepare for the Asian Games and Islamic Solidarity Games though Asian Games were postponed. We are also confident to play the finals in a few events.

DS: What are the reasons behind your inconsistency since your best-ever performance in the Tokyo Olympics qualifiers in 2019?

RS: Ever since I suffered shoulder injuries before the Tokyo Olympics, I can only take 70 percent of load. Currently, the bow I use is three pounds less than the previous one.

Secondly, I was accustomed to the extra practice after the regular session and threw nearly 350 arrows. I benefited from that extra practice in international meets but now if I take that load, I feel pain in my shoulder and thus perform only regular sessions to keep my career alive.

DS: Are your current scores good enough to bag gold in big stages?

RS: Of course, it’s possible to win medals in big stages since it’s hard to predict who is going to win a medal. The man, who won silver in the Tokyo Olympics, scored one point more than me in the

qualification round. In the Archery World Cup (stage 3) in Paris – I scored 670, which is a world-class score – and finished 21 in the qualification. I think if I can maintain such a score, then it is possible to win a medal. However, luck is an important factor.

DS: As you enter the 15th year of your career, how do you contemplate your decision to venture into archery?

RS: I think it was the right decision though it was initially not my decision; almighty Allah took me to archery. When my school teacher asked to join an archery camp in 2008, I skipped joining the camp on the first day because I didn’t know the meaning of archery. On the second day, I joined the camp and saw it is bow and arrow which I used to play before.

DS: How long do you wish to prolong your career?

RS: I desire to play in the 2028 Olympic Games though everything depends on

the situation. One day I will have to leave the national team but I want to represent Bangladesh Ansar in the domestic circuit for as long as possible.

DS: In Bangladesh archery, your name comes first. How do you react to it?

RS: Sometimes I can’t believe it and often think, is it really me? I was really overwhelmed time and again to receive honour in different programmes.

DS: You have once been worried over your post-archery career. What is your current state?

RS: Now, I have no tension with post-archery career but other archers still have apprehension though. I’m now doing a job as a soldier of Bangladesh Ansar but everyone is not like me.

DS: Why other promising archers have not been able to perform as expected at international level?

RS: I think they will perform and we have to be patient. Also, the authorities concerned have to take care of the promising archers a bit more.

