

‘Obstacles motivate me’

Since debuting on the international stage in 2013 through an ODI against Bangladesh in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe all-rounder Sikandar Raza has demonstrated his fighting prowess, on and off the field, time and again. The 36-year-old, who is enjoying a phenomenal run of form of late, keeps scaling greater heights with each passing game at an age when most good quality cricketers go into decline. Raza shared his views about his and side’s game, also how he views the current Bangladesh team and more, in an interview with The Daily Star’s Ekush Tapader, the excerpts of which are as follows:

DS: How do you feel after such top performances? How important is it for Zimbabwe cricket?

SR: Of course, it feels nice to finally have these performances given by the team. I mean, we’ve always played this cricket but maybe not consistently enough, and to be able to play a consistent type of cricket is really rewarding and humbling to see.

Because we’ve won the series, the T20s and the ODI series as well, what it’ll do is create that winning culture in the changing room and it’ll give us that belief that regardless of the situation what we find ourselves in when we’re playing the game, there’s always a way out and we’ll find a better way to win the game.

DS: Zimbabwe were missing several top players. How do you motivate yourself to beat an experienced side like Bangladesh?

SR: Of course, we were missing key players. But for me, how do I motivate myself is that if I can help the team to give hundred per cent and guide them, then I should do that, so that is motivation enough.

DS: How do rate this Bangladeshi side you are facing?

SR: You guys are saying Bangladesh have been performing consistently in ODIs, which they were, but I do think they are still performing consistently as well. They scored 303 and 291, these are good scores. I think you guys are putting too much focus on trying to be negative about Bangladesh but I think it’s not that. I think they still played good enough cricket. But I believe the credit has to be given to Zimbabwe as Zimbabwe actually ended up playing a lot better than the opposition. I think that’s where the focus should be. No answer I give will disrespect that part that Bangladesh remains a powerhouse in world cricket.

DS: Zimbabwe is playing fearless cricket. How important is the role of coach Dave Houghton for this approach?

SR: I think Zimbabwe is playing fearless cricket, and was playing fearless cricket as well. But sometimes, not so smart. So I think, we’re trying to encourage the fearless part with the smart part and try and know what needs to be done and at what time, and what are the individual’s strength. The biggest focus is to put team’s needs first before your own needs.

Of course, it’s nice to qualify [for the T20 World Cup] and to win [against Bangladesh] and go to Australia. We really worked hard and I think the difference has been to work a lot smarter as well. The new coach [Dave Houghton] has played a huge role. Zulu [Lance Klusener] has come back and played a huge role as well.

DS: You had serious health-related concerns last year, having gone through a major surgery. Do you feel like you’ve got a new life?

SR: The time, when the surgery was due, was scary. Have I got a new life? I certainly believe that. But in cricket? No, I don’t really. There’s far more important things in life than cricket. So, Alhamdulillah, to be alive, to be healthy and to be around my family. Obstacles motivate me, if you think positively.



Soumya finds a seat in BCB’s game of musical chairs

SPORTS REPORTER

The growing list of injured cricketers in the Bangladesh camp has made it a challenge for selectors to even form the squad for the Asia Cup T20, scheduled to begin from August 27 in the UAE.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board had already petitioned to submit their squad for the event on August 11 instead of the cut-off date on August 8, permission for which was granted by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

More than six cricketers are currently on the doctor’s table, with in-form opener Liton Das ruled out for weeks after suffering a Grade-2 tear during the first ODI against Zimbabwe on Friday and unlikely to feature in the Asia Cup.

Bangladesh’s think-tank opted to provide an opportunity to younger players in the three match T20I series against Zimbabwe late last month. But the Tigers lost that series 2-1, with no players raising their hands and proving their worth, especially in the middling batting department.

A big example of the lack of foresight from the think-tank was the inclusion of regular skipper Mahmudullah Riyad, who was initially rested for the T20I series in Zimbabwe after a string of poor performances. Interestingly, Mahmudullah was recalled as a replacement for injured stand-in skipper Nurul Hasan for the third and series-saving encounter but was not handed the captaincy, raising many eyebrows.

Meanwhile, those who were given the opportunity

failed to make anything of it, with the likes of Munim Shahriar, Anamul Haque and Najmul Hossain unable to step up and make a strong statement to the selectors. That forced selectors to wait for Liton till the eleventh hour before announcing the squad for the Asia Cup.

Akin to the past, it seems that selectors may once again look to players that were dropped from the national side due to dismal performances. It is not that those players have performed exceptionally elsewhere to merit a call-up but simply because of a lack of competitiveness and an inability to perform that forces selectors to walk backwards.

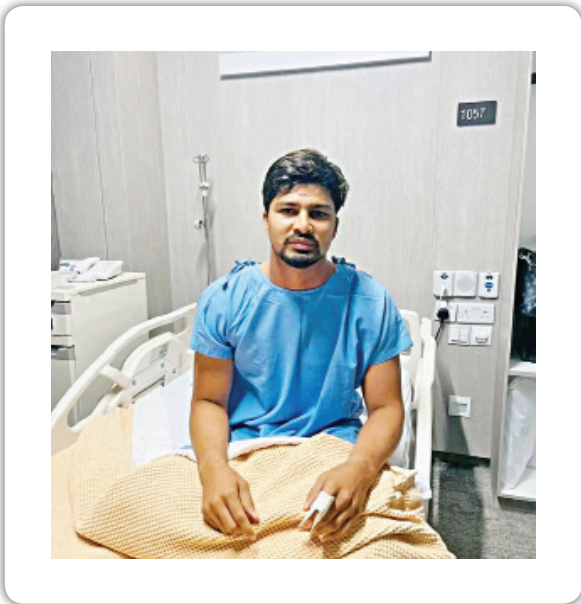
In line with that theme, Soumya Sarkar was the latest name that was put forward as a candidate for the opening position. The left-hander was dropped from the T20I side after a disappointing performance in the last ICC T20 World Cup, but it is not as if he has performed exceptionally since.

Despite showing glimpses of his potential, Soumya could not justify his place after scoring 1,136 runs in 66 T20Is at a strike rate of 122.15 and an average of just 18.03.

But according to sources, selectors want to

place faith on Soumya due to his naturally free-flowing stroke-making ability on bouncy pitches with the upcoming T20 World Cup in Australia later this year in mind.

It will be interesting to see whether the continuing games of musical chairs will ultimately benefit Bangladesh or whether they will once again end up as yet another stopgap solution.



Pandya open to full-time captaincy

REUTERS

India all-rounder Hardik Pandya said he is open to assuming the captaincy on a full-time basis after leading the side to a comprehensive victory in the final match of their Twenty20 series against West Indies.

India, who rested regular skipper Rohit Sharma, cruised to an 88-run win on the back of a superb performance by their spinners in Lauderdale, Florida on Sunday to a complete 4-1 series win.

Pandya said it was a “very special feeling” to captain India and when asked whether he was keen on the role in the future, the 28-year-old added: “Yeah, why not?”

“If given a chance, I’ll be more than happy to do it. But for now, we have a World Cup coming, it’s about getting better as a team.”

Pandya is no stranger to leadership roles, captaining the Gujarat Titans to the Indian Premier League title this year in their debut season. He also led India in the 2-0 T20 series win against Ireland in June.

India have used seven captains across the three formats this year and Rohit said it was an encouraging sign for the team.

“I know it’s very exciting to create so many leaders around the team ... and you want the guys to handle the pressure, who understand the game and know each other really well,” Rohit told broadcaster Star Sports.



BFF Academy teams to play BPL!

SPORTS REPORTER

The development committee of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) proposed the formation of a team from the BFF Elite Academy that would compete in the top-flight Bangladesh Premier League while also proposing a two-year contract extension for technical director Paul Smalley.

“We have decided to form two separate teams for the BPL and [second-tier] Bangladesh Championship League. We will now present our proposals at the board meeting for final approval,” BFF vice-president and development committee chairman Ataur Rahman Manik said after a meeting at the BFF House yesterday.

“We have decided to increase the number of academy players as we aim to form two separate squads. We will also recruit players over 20 if needed,” said Rahman, opining that players would never find that competitive edge unless they were vying for trophies.

A team from BFF Elite Academy featured in last season’s BCL for the first time and finished fourth in the table, 16 points behind champions Fortis FC, after they were initially barred from fielding an academy team in the BCL by the participating teams the season prior.

The development committee was also pleased with technical director Paul Smalley’s performance and wants to extend his contract for two more years.

“We all are satisfied with his performance as we think he [Smalley] is very hard working. So, we will propose that the BFF executive committee extends his contract for two more years,” Rahman said.

Muir’s time finally arrives

REUTERS

Laura Muir ended eight years of waiting by winning gold in the women’s 1,500 metres at the Commonwealth Games on Sunday and the Scot said her previous disappointments had only made her stronger.

Muir had finished 11th in the 1,500m final in front of her home crowd at the 2014 Games in Glasgow and was unable to compete four years later on the Gold Coast due to veterinary medicine exams.

“I think I would have said to the Laura Muir of 2014 ‘your time will come’,” said the 29-year-old, who won Olympic silver for Britain in Tokyo.

“It’s rotten at the time but you learn from it and you come back stronger. This meant a lot to me - missing the Gold Coast (in 2018) as well, it’s been bugging me for eight years.”

Muir, who also won bronze in the 800m in Birmingham, clocked a time of four minutes, 2.75 seconds to take gold on Sunday.

“It is so nice to come here and not just get one medal but two and in such a competitive field,” she added. “Those girls are fast. It means a lot.”



Bangladesh national women cricketers run during a Yo-Yo test at the BCB Indoors in Mirpur yesterday as part of a 15-day strengthening and conditioning camp. The Bangladesh team is scheduled to play three ODIs away to New Zealand in December.

PHOTO: BCB

Kasatkina breaks into top 10

AFP, PARIS

Daria Kasatkina was rewarded for her victory in San Jose at the weekend with a return to the top 10 for the first time since 2019, when the WTA rankings were released on Monday.

The Russian, who climbed three places to ninth, beat Shelby Rogers in three sets on Sunday to claim her fifth WTA title on the hard courts in California.

It is her highest-ever ranking and marks her first showing in the top 10 since January 14, 2019 after which she slipped to number 75 in October 2020.

Iga Swiatek retains the number one spot with almost twice as many points as number two Anett Kontaveit. Paula Badosa leapfrogs Maria Sakkari into third. American Danielle Collins fell eight places to 17th position.