

Taskin hoping to step up to 'next level'

SPORTS REPORTER

Taskin Ahmed has matured as a cricketer over the years and the tall seamer is now among the most experienced pacers in the Tigers camp across all formats and, with the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) set to begin from January 6, Dhaka Dominators' icon attended a training session spearheading the bowling unit alongside Shoriful Islam and Al Amin Hossain.

The 27-year-old was aware of the expectations placed on him by the franchise and was looking forward to making an impact and keeping his process intact.

"I will definitely try to give my best. What I always say is that there is nothing outside the process. The same applies this time around too. Obviously, there is pressure whenever you go out to the field. Since I have been named an icon player for the past two years, it's added pressure. But I will try to give my best and adapt to the pressure," Taskin told the media yesterday.



Interestingly, Taskin has yet to be part of a title-winning BPL team over the years, but the pacer was hoping that would change this time around while also expressing his desire to finish among the top wicket-takers in this edition of the BPL.

"I never had the taste of a championship in the BPL. I played the final once during my maiden campaign. I don't know why, but hopefully it will come one day. Obviously, I wish to be among the top wicket-takers and I also hope to contribute to the team with a few match-winning spells," he said.

Taskin has dealt with multiple injuries over the years and only recently recovered from a back issue to make his comeback during the last home series against India.

When asked how Taskin how he managed to deal with injuries, he said that instead of being demoralised, it was important to face reality and stick to the process.

Sri Lankan fast-bowling legend Chaminda Vaas will oversee Dhaka as the head coach and Taskin informed that he was looking forward to getting some tips as he looked to reach the next level.

"He [Vaas] is a legendary fast bowler. When I got to know he would be our coach, I felt good personally. Hopefully, if I can improve my skills from his tips, then why not? I always want to learn. It's pretty natural that things will go easier when you start an international career as a fast bowler. But after one or two years, it becomes difficult. A majority of our fast-bowling unit have already played for some time now so our main challenge is to take things to the next level since everyone has been observed. It is important to work extra hard to reach the next level," he added.



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was in a cheery mood when the Sylhet Sixers skipper joined the franchise's bowling coach and former Bangladesh pacer, Nazmul Hossain, and their foreign recruit, Thisara Perera, for a light conversation during a training session at the Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday ahead of the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Shakib opines he could do better than BPL organisers

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Premier League's (BPL) organisation once again became the focal point of discussions ahead of the ninth edition of the country's premier T20 competition.

While on Tuesday, it was BCB director and Khulna Tigers coach Khaled Mahmud speaking about a lack of effort to put in a revenue sharing model that would have made the BPL more lucrative to franchise owners, this time criticism came from one of the players.

And that player was none other than ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who tore into the BPL with his remarks, bugged by severe organisational issues.

There will be no DRS in this year's BPL, which in itself puts the seriousness of the tournament in doubt. Due to rise in T20 franchise leagues, such as the latest in Dubai, foreign players have found more lucrative places to showcase their talents, which inevitably also brings attention from teams in the IPL.

In short, the BPL is quite some way down the ladder among T20 franchise leagues.

Shakib, who is the brand ambassador of Gulf Oil Bangladesh Ltd, was made CEO of the organisation for one day and when he talked, he was in no doubt that he could do a much better job than the current BPL organising committee of the Bangladesh

Cricket Board (BCB).

"If I am made CEO of the BPL it wouldn't take me too many days. I think it would take one or two months at most to make everything right," he told reporters yesterday when asked what he would do if he was given the responsibility of organising the tournament. "It may not even take two months, even two months seem like too long," he added with a smile on his face.

Shakib went on to say that he would abolish the current way of doing things and added that the players' draft and auction would have to be staged afresh if he was in charge.

The tournament this time found players from Pakistan and Afghanistan due to a few series cancellations, but overall the team-building processes from the franchises showcased how not to organise a tournament of the BPL's stature, which in its formative years had struck a chord with the general populace.

"Here, a player will come and then leave after two days. No one knows who will arrive and when they will depart," the Fortune Barishal skipper remarked.

"This is the worst scenario. Even our Dhaka Premier League (DPL) is better organised since they can build the team for a good period

ahead of the tournament. They know early on what the team will be and they prepare in that manner," Shakib said, lambasting the BPL.

The tournament's current scenario fails to excite fans, barring a few star players turning up the heat. Shakib pointed out the fact that the availability of the players, the marketing required and the plans needed for implementation of a successful tournament were all missing.

"We don't think we have tried to do anything with an honest mind. There is no budget because we haven't created it. If we could garner value, the budget would be bigger. Crores of people like the game in this country but it's very unfortunate if there is no market for it. I don't believe that to be the case.

"It's a big marketing failure. I don't see any reason why DRS shouldn't be there. No reason for the draft and auction not to take place three months before tournament and the for the teams to not be ready two months before tournament," Shakib said.

With just a day left before the tournament, the BPL's lack of awareness is more acute than its excitement. Since its inception in 2012, lack of brand value has become a headache for the BCB.



Messi given guard of honour at PSG

AGENCIES

When Lionel Messi reached the training ground at the Camp des Loges on Wednesday morning, he was given a rousing welcome by his Paris Saint Germain teammates and staff.

The Argentine returned to the French capital after enjoying a well-deserved break in his homeland following his country's run to their third global title. He was also presented with a special memento by the club as they recognised his World Cup triumph.

Earlier in the day, Messi was given a hero's welcome as he arrived at the Paris airport. Thousands of fans lined up to catch a glimpse of the Argentina captain, who achieved his long-standing dream in Qatar in December last year.

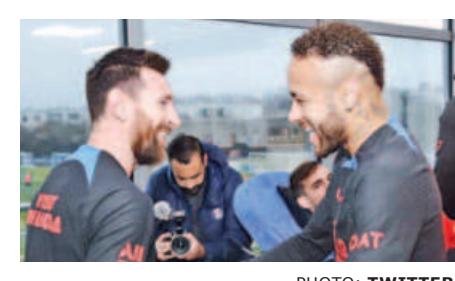


PHOTO: TWITTER

'More to come from Sterling'

REUTERS

Chelsea manager Graham Potter said forward Raheem Sterling has been through a challenging phase at the London club following his move from Manchester City but backed the England international to deliver more.

Chelsea signed Sterling from City for about 47.5 million pounds (\$57.3 million) in July but his performances have been underwhelming with six goals in 21 games in all competitions this season.

Sterling will face his former club City in the Premier League on Thursday at Stamford Bridge before the teams meet again in the FA Cup at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

"It's been a challenge for him but it's been a challenging period for everybody," Potter told reporters on Wednesday, as his team sit 10th in the table, 11 points behind second-placed City.

"There is more to come from Raheem I'm sure but he gives his best every day and we need to help him get to the level we know he can reach."

Kiwis fight back after Shakeel's maiden Test ton

AFP, Karachi

Left-hander Saud Shakeel hit a maiden century Wednesday before New Zealand hit back to keep Pakistan to 407-9 at the close of the third day of the second Test in Karachi.

Shakeel was unbeaten on 124 and Abrar Ahmed yet to score after New Zealand took four wickets in the final session for 70 runs, leaving the hosts 42 runs shy of the tourists' first innings total of 449.

Shakeel kept his end intact for 488 minutes -- batting all day Wednesday, and adding 83 for the fourth wicket with Imam-ul Haq (83) and 150 for the fifth with Sarfaraz Ahmed (78).

But New Zealand spinner Ajaz Patel dismissed Agha Salman (41) and Hasan Ali (four) as Pakistan slumped from 385-5 to 397-9, losing four wickets for just 12 runs off 27 balls.

Shakeel, who has hit 17 boundaries, was lucky to get a life off pacer Tim Southee when Tom Latham grinded a simple catch at short cover when the batter was on 102.

With wickets falling at the other end, Shakeel went into a shell, scoring just 23 runs in the final session. He completed his century before tea.



City will struggle to catch Arsenal: Guardiola

AFP, London

Pep Guardiola believes Manchester City have it all to do if they are to overhaul leaders Arsenal at the top of the Premier League table.

Reigning champions City can move back to within five points of the Gunners away to Chelsea on Thursday after Arsenal dropped points in Tuesday's goalless draw with Newcastle.

"We have to reduce the gap by playing good and winning games, but they (Arsenal) get more than 100 points if they keep this average and we will not catch them," Guardiola told a pre-match press conference on Wednesday.

"We have to be almost perfect and hope they drop points. Last night they were still excellent."

Chelsea have won just one of their last seven Premier League games but Guardiola still expects a difficult encounter at Stamford Bridge.

"It's the Premier League," the Spaniard said.

"They're all tough. They're a tough side, well-managed. It doesn't matter what position you are when you go to Stamford Bridge. It is always difficult."

Aymeric Laporte will be given a fitness test ahead of the journey to London after missing the New Year's Eve clash with Everton with a back problem but fellow centre-back Ruben Dias is still sidelined with a thigh injury.

Guardiola added: "Ruben is out. Ayme we will see in this afternoon's (Wednesday's) training session."

