

## ‘Bangladesh is very close to my heart’

EKUSH TAPADER

English cricketer Robin Das caught the attention of fans worldwide when he, a then 19-year-old, came onto the field as a substitute fielder in place of Matthew Potts in the first Test between England and New Zealand at Lord's in June last year.

The joyful stutter in his walk and the smile of sheer excitement, which he tried to hide with a smirk, made everyone notice the Leytonstone-born Englishman. But the interest was particularly high amongst Bangladeshi fans who later got to know that Robin has Bangladeshi heritage as his father was born in Sunamganj, Sylhet.

The right-handed batter will now look to test his trade in Bangladesh after Bangladesh Premier League franchise Dhaka Dominators drafted the 20-year-old for the ongoing edition.

"I was very happy when I got to know that I would be playing in the BPL. I was looking forward to playing in such a league," Robin told the Daily Star.

Robin's budding years in cricket have now brought him to Bangladesh and the batter revealed that this journey is not only a professional one but one of an emotional connection as well.

"Bangladesh is very close to my heart because my father is from this country. I have a lot of relatives in Bangladesh and I have come here a lot, but this time to play cricket.



Everyone in my family feels proud of the fact that I got the opportunity to play mainstream cricket in Bangladesh. We love this country," he said.

An aggressive top-order batter, Robin showed glimpses of his talent in the recently concluded Royal London Cup.

Although the Essex batter will be playing for Nasir Hossain's Dhaka, he revealed upon his arrival to Dhaka that his favourite cricketer is Bangladesh's Liton Das and that he is looking forward to meeting him.

"My favourite cricketer is Liton Das. He was very successful last year in all three formats. I think he is an unbelievable cricketer. I really like watching him play. I haven't met him yet but I'm waiting," he said.

Robin, who plays in the top order, said that he was given a warm welcome by his coaches and teammates of Dhaka, who got their campaign off to a winning start with a six-wicket victory over Khulna Titans.

"I've met all the players too and they've really taken me well. They wanted to know a lot about me. Overall, it's a very good atmosphere," he said.

The England team had several players of Indian or Pakistani ancestry but have never had someone of Bangladeshi heritage represent the English Lions before. Though he came on as a substitute fielder, he was an exciting first for fans who enjoyed watching him try hard to hide the butterflies in his stomach.

Despite his Bangladeshi connection, Robin said his aim was to play for England.

"It is of course a difficult challenge but I want to play for England. I have to rise to the challenge and reach new heights in order to play for England and I want to go there, that is my aim," he said.

Robin landed in Dhaka on Saturday and will be in contention to get picked for Dhaka Dominators' fixture against Sylhet Strikers on Tuesday.



Usman Khawaja shares a joyous moment with his daughter, Aisha, yesterday after he was duly awarded Player of the Match for his unbeaten 195 – three more than his combined tally in seven innings prior – in the rain-affected and drawn Sydney Test between Australia and South Africa. The 36-year-old southpaw opener struck his 13th century after joining the 4,000-run club in the format during his nine-hour stay at the crease.

PHOTO:AFP

## Adaptability the key to batters' success in Mirpur

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a day's break, the ninth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) will resume today as Comilla Victorians take on Sylhet Strikers in the first fixture while Chattogram Challengers face Khulna Tigers in the night game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

There was a certain pattern during the first four matches that took place at Bangladesh's home of cricket, with the day fixtures producing low scores and the night ones offering more excitement with high-scoring encounters.

Chattogram managed to post 89 for nine in the opening game of the tournament against Sylhet. While the pitch did offer some assistance to the bowlers, it was some poor application which caused the downfall of the batters.

Khulna batters, too, failed in batting application in their opening game and went on to face a six-wicket defeat to Dhaka Dominators after posting 113 for eight. Almost all the Khulna batters threw their wickets away including Tigers' ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal, who handed a simple catch at short square-leg off a long-hop from left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny after scoring eight runs.

Defending champions Comilla failed to chase a competitive target of 177 against Rangpur Riders and ended up being bundled out for 142. Imrul Kayes and his troops will be looking to bounce back today against Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's Sylhet, who have won their first two games.

Comilla's English batter Dawid Malan, who announced himself on the world stage with remarkable

performances in BPL alongside a stint in the Dhaka Premier League, opined that it was important to adapt to the Mirpur surface to get the best output.

"I've always enjoyed the BPL. It is one of the first tournaments I've played in. It gave me a stepping stone; it helped me learn my cricket, not only in BPL but Dhaka Premier League as well," Malan told reporters yesterday.

"The more you play in the sub-continent, the more you learn skills. I always try to learn. When you come to conditions like these, you play high quality spinners; lot of T20s are here bowled by spin, whereas in other tournaments you only have one or two spinners.

Here you have two or four; wickets also dictate that. So, you have to learn to play attacking game and also conservative game because there is some low-scoring wicket as well and there is high-scoring game where you have to attack. I guess you learn different ways to play spin," he added.

Sylhet banked on local cricketers to register the third highest successful run-chase in the history of BPL, beating Fortune Barishal by six wickets in a chase of 195 runs.

Towhid Hridoy struck a half-century while Zakir Hasan, who scored a century on his Test debut against India recently, played a cameo of 18-ball 43 to help Sylhet seal an emphatic win.

Sylhet's bowling coach Nazmul Hossain hoped that Zakir can be a great asset for Bangladesh and can continue his form to help the side keep the momentum.

"He (Zakir Hasan) batted exceptionally well. He thinks a lot about his batting and is willing to represent Bangladesh in all three formats. I hope he will be able to continue his fine run," hoped Nazmul.



## BCB and Sriram to continue negotiations

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is still under negotiation with Sridharan Sriram over his contract renewal as the T20 coach of the men's national cricket team.

The former India all-rounder returned to India following a meeting with the board on Saturday, a day after he was seen in the president's box during the opening game of the Bangladesh Premier League.

Last year, Sriram was initially roped in till the T20 World Cup in October-November after he was appointed during the 2022 Asia Cup. Following the T20 World Cup, in which Bangladesh produced their best result statistically, having won two matches of the Super 12 stage. It now appears both parties had a positive discussion regarding the contract renewal.

"We had a meeting with Sriram but nothing is confirmed yet. Since there are a few factors we need to consider, we can't disclose anything at the moment," BCB's cricket operations chairman, Jalal Yunus, told The Daily Star yesterday.

It was learned that Sriram's contract with the Indian Premier League franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore is set to expire after the upcoming season, and the 43-year-old is expected to arrive again in Bangladesh next month to further discuss his contract with the BCB.

According to sources, Sriram is set to take the role of Bangladesh's T20 side. For the Test and ODI format, however, the BCB is considering other candidates that involve a few names alongside former Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha. The board is apparently willing to appoint the new coach ahead of the upcoming home series against England in March after the post was vacant following Russell Domingo's resignation as the Tigers head coach last month.

## Djokovic wins 'very special' Adelaide title

AFP, Adelaide

Top seed Novak Djokovic saved a match point Sunday before defeating Sebastian Korda to win the Adelaide International and reinforce his status as a heavy title favourite for the Australian Open.

The 21-time Grand Slam winner needed more than three hours to stamp his authority on his unseeded American opponent, son of former world number two Petr Korda, 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/3), 6-4.

In doing so, Djokovic extended his unbeaten streak in Australia to 34 straight matches and won his fifth consecutive final dating to Tel Aviv last year.

The winner of 92 career titles now heads to the Australian Open in about a week with momentum in his bid to secure the Grand Slam for a 10th time, helped by the absence at Melbourne Park of injured world number one Carlos Alcaraz.

Djokovic, the 2007 champion at Adelaide in the early days of his career, called the pre-Open



tune-up week "very special for me", thrilled by overwhelming fan enthusiasm.

"It's been an amazing week. To be standing here is a gift definitely," said the Serbian world number five, who missed last year's Australian Open after being deported over his vaccination status.

"I gave it my all today and throughout the week in order to

be able to get my hands on this trophy.

"The support I have been getting in the last 10 days was something that I don't think I've experienced too many times in my life," he added, with packed pro-Djokovic crowds whenever he played.

"It definitely felt like playing at home."

Djokovic nullified Korda's

match point while serving at 5-6, 30/40 in the second set, coming good on an overhead to make the save before the set moved into another tiebreaker which the Serb won.

Korda, 22, was playing his fifth career final and said the experience boded well for the rest of the season.

"It was a great start to the year, I wish I could have gotten it done today, but I know there's a long journey to go and a lot of positives from this week," he said.

"I think we're (he and his team) are going to have a great year together."

Djokovic, who showed no sign of the leg problem which bothered him on Saturday during his defeat of Daniil Medvedev, agreed, paying tribute the fast-emerging American.

"Amazing effort today Seb. I'd probably say you were closer to victory today than I was. It was decided in one or two shots, one or two points," he said.

"Tough luck today but the future is bright for you."



Aryna Sabalenka warmed up for the Australian Open by capturing her 11th WTA Tour title with a 6-3, 7-6(4) win over teenaged Czech qualifier Linda Noskova in the Adelaide International 1 final on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP