

## Heart, confidence and failure converge in Hridoy's turnaround

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Sylhet Strikers and Towhid Hridoy are seemingly turning a page. The batting order has stability with Najmul Hossain Shanto and Hridoy at the top along with the power of Zakir Hasan in the middle while Thisara Perera can still punch a hole at the death with the bat.

However, it is Hridoy's story that captures the essence as Sylhet garner attention with three wins on the trot, the latest coming against defending champions Comilla Victorians yesterday, which Hridoy was at the heart of.

Everything seems to be falling into place for Sylhet this BPL. Sylhet-based franchises have gone trophy-less since the inception of the BPL but in Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, they have a captain who has a knack for winning BPLs.

The skipper commands the respect of his teammates while there is also the experience of Mushfiqur Rahim to bank upon. The blend of youth and experience have worked and, importantly, the confidence given to youngsters such as Towhid Hridoy is having a great impact.



Azam Khan, son of former Pakistan wicketkeeper Moin Khan, smashed the first century of this edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) as he powered Khulna Tigers to a resounding 178-run total against Chattogram Challengers at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Azam smashed a total of nine boundaries and eight maximums to reach his maiden T20 century off just 57 deliveries. [Bottom] Towhid Hridoy won successive player of the match awards as his fifty helped Sylhet Strikers beat Fortune Barishal by six wickets. ফটো: এফসি এনএ



In last year's riveting final between Fortune Barishal and Comilla Victorians, the match hinged on Hridoy being able to pick up boundaries. But, needing 18 off the last three overs, he failed along with Shakib Al Hasan's Barishal.

"It's pathetic if you can't score needing six an over at the end," Barishal's then coach Khaled Mahmud had said after that game.

The match was remarkable for Hridoy, who was bitterly disappointed in his failure. But that only helped him focus on getting his approach right.

"When I did badly last year, I started thinking of how I could improve. Whenever I got the opportunity after that, I worked on my game in order to improve in T20s. I have worked on a few shots and tried working on the small details,"

Hridoy said yesterday after yet another player of the match performance.

A no-look shot, a flick off his pads or getting high on his ankles to guide a short Mustafizur Rahman delivery square through the off-side were all signs of a batter with newfound confidence in his ability.

In the previous game, he came out in the very first over after an early wicket and put together a 101-run stand with Najmul Hossain Shanto while scoring a 34-ball 55. He had said Mushfiqur was telling him to be ready for number three. The veterans have made him assured of his role and he has answered their call spectacularly so far.

"There was a lack of T20 experience before. I am getting support and understanding the responsibility of batting in the top order," he added, having hit a six off the first delivery he faced yesterday.

"We have been given the freedom and the coach and everyone concerned supports us. Maybe we won't be successful every day but if we keep our approach right, we will be successful more often than not. I try to work on my range all the time. BCB gave me opportunity in the high-performance and national camp and I tried to take my opportunity. I am grateful they included me even though I wasn't doing well," he said.

He still remembers the BPL final last year. "I was very down mentally. If I had hit one or two boundaries, the game could have changed. Although I wasn't a batter for that position (in the death overs), right down the order. I tried till the last delivery. People try to find success from failures and I tried to go forward," he added.

An Under-19 World Cup winner, his domestic performances had not caught attention. Two performances and three wins on the trot means the team mojo is finally going his and Sylhet's way this BPL.

## 'Can't recall last visit to Bangladesh'

SPORTS REPORTER

West Indies fast-bowling legend Sir Curtly Ambrose joined the commentary panel of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League and immediately added value to the broadcasting team with his wealth of knowledge yesterday.

Ambrose thought it was his first time in Bangladesh until this reporter reminded the imposing pacer that he had actually played here in 1999 when the West Indies toured for a two-match ODI series.



Although the West Indies won the series convincingly, Ambrose was surprisingly unable to pick up a wicket on the tour, making it one to forget on a personal note.

"Well yeah, I thought this was my first time here in Bangladesh. I couldn't even recall that series

but someone showed me the scorecard. I will try to remember my previous visit as I spend more time in Bangladesh," Ambrose told The Daily Star yesterday.

The 59-year-old was part of a golden generation of West Indies pacers and his partnership with Caribbean legend Courtney Walsh is something cricket lovers still cherish.

The pacer from Antigua was also satisfied with the improvement in pitches in Bangladesh over the years, especially as they have tended to offer assistance to seamers in recent times.

"It is very refreshing to see that pitches here are getting better. In the past, we saw slow and turning pitches. What I have seen so far is that there was a bit of grass on the surface and even bounce, which will certainly encourage pacers to develop," Ambrose said during an interview ahead of the second game between Khulna Tigers and Chattogram Challengers yesterday.

## No Premier Hockey League in near future

SPORTS REPORTER

Although the introduction of franchise-based Hockey Champions Trophy (HCT) last November presented a new ray of hope to revive the sport in the country, the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) officials have not yet chalked out a plan regarding when the next edition of the Premier Hockey League (PHL) will take place.

Over 12 months have already passed since the last PHL was held in November, 2021, courtesy of the financial assistance provided by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to the participating clubs. And after a four-year hiatus, which had left the hockey players in tatters, the latest edition of the much-anticipated PHL finally rolled onto turf.

It is being said that the continuation of the HCT and the PHL can set the platform for Bangladesh hockey to reach new heights as players can earn their bread and butter regularly. Also, the budding players will be able to grow their interest in the sport. But with only the HCT taking place, the revival of hockey in Bangladesh seems a distant dream.

The BHF officials have instead prioritised staging the first division hockey league - set to take place for

the first time since 2018 - in a bid to pave the way for holding the next PHL. Their other primary agenda is holding the next BHF polls as the tenure of the existing committee expires in April.

"There is no discussion of holding the Premier Hockey League at the moment because we can't talk about it until we complete the first division hockey league, from where the promoted clubs will take part in the Premier Hockey League," said Mohammad Yousuf, BHF acting general secretary, who has been operating at the post for over three years after elected general secretary AKM Mominul Haque Shaed fled the country in late 2019 following his involvement with casino scandal.

It has been learned that the first division hockey league is supposed to get underway after January 15. However, despite the completion of the players transfers, it is likely the competition will defer further. Results from the uncertainty of financial support involving the 12 participating clubs, who were each pledged by the federation officials to provide two lakh takas.

"We have been searching for sponsors to hold the first division hockey league. After the league completion, we have to start the

procedure of the BHF elections in February. So, we are not thinking of the Premier Hockey League," said Yousuf, who has been accompanying the national U-21 hockey team in Oman.

The BHF vice president, Zaki Ahmed Ripon, said, "There is no chance to hold the Premier Hockey League under the existing committee. I think the new committee will take the initiative of holding the next Premier Hockey League, which is likely to get underway after June, though it depends on the type of BHF executive committee being formed."


Ripon, also a representative of Abahani, informed that there is not even any discussion among the clubs to take part in the premier division hockey league, rather the officials are gradually shifting their focus on the next BHF elections.

For decades, the BHF had been struggling to hold the PHL regularly, either due to the obstacles from the clubs or the reluctance from the federation. As a consequence, the once prosperous hockey remains in dire straits as budding players keep losing their interest to aspire for excellence and, alarmingly, many resort to switching the profession merely for the sake of earning livelihood.



Bangladesh players stand with a placard reading 'Qualified' after reaching the semifinals of the Junior AHF Cup with a 6-1 win over Uzbekistan in their last Pool match, thereby confirming a berth in this year's Junior Asia Cup, at the Sultan Al Qaboos Stadium in Muscat yesterday. Bangladesh will take on Thailand in the first semifinal tomorrow.

PHOTO: BHF



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