



Despite having won just two out of 17 matches across four ICC Women's T20 World Cups since making their debut appearance in the 2014 edition, expectations from the Nigar Sultana Joty-led Bangladesh side will be at an all-time high as the women in red and green gear up to prove their mettle in the upcoming mega event in South Africa, starting February 10.

As a team, we want to inspire the next generation of women's cricketers back home and the best way to do that is by winning matches.

Nigar Sultana Joty
Bangladesh women's cricket team captain



Prottasha's relishes her taunters' u-turn

Despite having hardly any expectations, Bangladesh Women's Under-19 team surprised everyone with their performance in the recently concluded ICC Women's Under-19 T20 World Cup in South Africa. Afia Prottasha was among the few cricketers who shone bright in the mega event as she displayed glimpses of her hard-hitting ability. **The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin** caught up with Prottasha and the cricketer from Rajshahi addressed her game, future plans along with a few other topics during an exclusive interview, the excerpts of which are given below:

The Daily Star (DS): How did you begin your journey in cricket?

Afia Prottasha (AP): I heard from my parents that when I was a kid and whenever they asked me what toy I needed, I used to reply: bat and ball. It all started from there. And since my father was also a cricketer, he used to take me to the ground. There was a field near my house where I started practising. There, Tushar sir and Saad sir helped me a lot.

DS: Your father had a great impact in you becoming a cricketer.

AP: My father, being a pace-bowling all-rounder, used to assist me in the batting drills, and it took place even one or two months ahead of any tournament. He always bowled quick during the drills and said that if you are able to face fast bowlers, it will help you become a better batter.

DS: How was the preparation of the team, and you personally, while approaching the World Cup?

AP: Our preparation began a couple of years back, when a total of 40 cricketers started the training camp and worked really hard ever since. There was a message from the coaching staff that we need to play aggressive cricket. If I talk about my own preparation, I always tried to improve my game. Our head coach Dipu Roy Chowdhury sir and Ruhul Amin sir helped me a lot. I love to play lofted strokes and having observed this, they tried to enhance that skill and specifically worked on it. It worked well for me.

DS: We have seen you hitting some big sixes in the World

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Cup. Tell us about your big hitting ability.

AP: To be honest, I never intend to hit big sixes whenever I go out to bat. My main focus is to play according to the [merit of the] ball. I used to practise with a tennis ball since my childhood, I also played taped-tennis tournaments with the boys, and that helped me to develop my natural habit. Actually, it's not important which position I bat at. I will try to adapt and deliver for my team in any position.

DS: Could you share the story of your encounter with national cricketer Mahedi Hasan.

AP: We were in a camp in Khulna and there I possessed a poor-quality bat. While I was batting, I couldn't connect the ball properly. However, Mahedi Hasan bhai was observing the net session and he approached me and, to my surprise, offered his bat. Once I held and used it, I felt great and I had realised the difference between a good bat and an average one.

DS: What was the situation in the dressing room after the South Africa loss as Bangladesh could have qualified for the semi-final if we had won that game?

AP: The way we started off the tournament, everyone in the country was expecting us to bring the trophy. It was a tight game (vs. South Africa) and our emotions were running high. We made a few mistakes and after the game were all in tears since we were almost there in the semi-finals.

DS: Four cricketers from the U-19 World Cup team were called up in the national team. Do you feel that you could have also made it to the senior team?

AP: To be honest, I want to improve my game and I think it (national call-up) will eventually happen when the time is right. My goal is to serve the national team for a long time.

DS: Who is your role model?

AP: I follow the batting of Virat Kohli to improve my game. I try to learn a lot from his technique and mentality as a batter.

DS: Has everything changed around you after coming from the World Cup?

AP: To be honest, yes. Since returning to my hometown everyone has been appreciating me. Interestingly, when I started playing cricket, many people from my area used to complain to my father about why I play cricket being a girl. They commented on my dress as well. But My father told me one thing: if you want to continue, don't bother about what others say.

Now I am enjoying the fact that those people who resorted to taunt me in the past are encouraging me.



set to appear in her fourth T20 World Cup, the team is ready for the challenge.

"Our main strength as a team is our unity. We are very well-balanced, we have a mixture of experienced players and talented young players, and our team are always ready to take on a challenge.

"As a team, we want to inspire the next generation of women's cricketers back home and the best way to do that is by winning matches," she said.

Bangladesh will begin their World Cup journey with the game against the Lankans on February 12 in Cape Town, and they will hope to defy history and odds and even out the column of good memories in the event.

A chance to make a statement

NABID YEASIN

The recent success stories of the country's women's sides across different sports -- Bangladesh's triumph in the SAFF Women's Championship last year still very fresh in memory -- have not only resulted in a boost in viewership but also raised the bar of expectation from the girls representing the nation at any level in any sport.

Even the women's under-19 cricket team came through on those expectations as they marked the inaugural ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa last month with some impressive showings -- including taking down a strong Australia in the tournament opener before bowing out from the Super Six only due to net run-rate.

And in that regard, it is no surprise that expectations will be there from the Nigar Sultana Joty-led side, who are set to fly Bangladesh's flag in the next big global event -- the eighth edition of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, set to commence on February 10 with the hosts South Africa taking on Sri Lanka in Cape Town. Nigar & Co have also been boosted by three in-form players -- Shorna Akter, Disha Biswas and Marufa Akter -- that featured in the Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup.

However, realistically, expectations might need to be tempered, given Bangladesh's recent form and how they fared the four times they featured in the event. Having made their first appearance in the 2014 edition at home, Bangladesh have played in all three editions of the T20 World Cup since. But unfortunately, the Tigresses do not have much to show for the 17 T20 World Cup matches played as the only two wins managed by the women in red and green were nine years ago, against Sri Lanka and Ireland at home.

Moreover, recording the two lowest innings totals in the tournament -- 46 all out in just 14.4 overs against hosts West Indies in 2018 and 58 for nine against England in 2014 in Sylhet -- only dampens the Tigresses' history in the biennial event.

But, in words of the Tigresses' skipper Joty, the dismay of the past only makes the upcoming event even more a spectacular opportunity for her side to prove a point and make amends.

"The upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023 is a big and exciting opportunity for our team. We have played in four T20 World Cups but in the last three, we have not played so well and have not been able to record a win. This time, we are determined to make

sure we break that record, get some momentum going, and show the world what we can do," Joty was quoted as saying in a column published by the International Cricket Council as part of the build-up to the mega event.

Following a dismal showing in the Asia Cup in October last year, Bangladesh also failed to win a single game in their tour of New Zealand in November-December. The Tigresses lost the three T20Is by convincing margins before losing the three-ODI series 1-0 with the final two games abandoned against the Kiwis.

However, with hopes to better acclimatise to the conditions, Joty's troops already arrived in South Africa last month and the side will be hoping to bounce back to winning ways in the two official warm-up games -- against Pakistan on February 6 in Cape Town and India on February 8 in Stellenbosch.

Having been placed in Group 1 with hosts South Africa, defending champions Australia -- who are also the most successful side in the tournament with five titles so far -- New Zealand, and the Asia Cup finalists Sri Lanka, the Tigresses definitely have their work cut out.

But according to Joty, who is

Not just a fluke

MAZHAR UDDIN

Even though Bangladesh's performance in the recently-concluded ICC Women's Under-19 T20 World Cup surprised many, it was, in fact, a reflection of the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) long-term planning and the hard work put in by the players.

Disha Biswas and her troops barely missed out on qualifying for the semifinals of the inaugural event as Bangladesh and three other teams -- Australia, India, and hosts South Africa -- from Group 1 of the Super Six stage ended with six points, with the former two sides eventually progressing courtesy of a superior net run rate.

The young Tigresses began their World Cup campaign with a thumping seven-wicket win over Australia and went on to beat Sri Lanka and the USA in the group stage to advance to the Super Six as unbeaten group champions.

But a defeat to South Africa in the first Super Six game changed the scenario as the young Tigresses' only slip-up in the tournament proved too costly. And had it not been for that five-wicket defeat against the hosts in Potchefstroom, the plan that had been set in motion more than two years ago could have culminated in an even better outcome.

According to Bangladesh women's team head coach Dipu Roy Chowdhury, the preparation for this Under-19 World



Cup began in 2020 during the Women's T20 World Cup in Australia. Back then, the women's wing and the game development committee of the BCB collaborated to hunt cricketers through a divisional Under-18 tournament.

"It all started during the Women's World Cup [in 2020]. At that time, the women's wing and the game development committee of the BCB worked together to scout players from an Under-18 divisional tournament. We selected cricketers for the Under-19 side from that tournament. We also gave opportunities to first division players to play in the premier league. The selected players also played with the senior

side and [BCB Women's Wing manager] Towhid Mahmud bhai arranged for a few players to be sent to New Zealand with the senior team to give them exposure," Dipu told The Daily Star.

Under the guidance of Dipu and in presence of a fast-bowling coach and a batting coach, the Bangladesh Under-19 team held a training camp in Khulna. The girls were made to play matches against boys in order to improve their skills and build their confidence to play fearless cricket.

"We tried to instil the attacking mindset in the girls right from the start which was reflected in their body language in the