

# ‘Axar, Jadeja, Ashwin a blessing’

AFP, Nagpur

India's Rohit Sharma said Saturday it was a "blessing" to lead his champion spinners after they spearheaded a crushing innings victory against Australia inside three days.

Spin twins Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja combined to dismiss Australia for 91 inside one session of the third day's play in Nagpur as the hosts took a 1-0 lead in the four-match series.

Ashwin took five in the second innings and a match haul of eight wickets while the left-handed Jadeja grabbed five on his international return from a knee injury to bowl out Australia for 177 in the first innings.

Jadeja also scored 70 with the bat to be named man of the match.

Axar Patel took just one wicket but hit a match-winning 84 in India's 400 all out.

"It's like captaining Cummins, Hazlewood and Starc in Australia," Rohit said.

"When you have quality of Axar, Jadeja, and Ash, having played in India for so many years, playing on pitches like these, it's always a blessing," he added.

"The conditions are there, yes, but you need to exploit them as well and conditions are for both teams. They know which areas to hit, how to keep applying pressure."

Off-spinner Ashwin surpassed 450 Test wickets in the first innings and now has 457 in the bag.

Rohit said Jadeja kept pressing him for a bowl in the second session to complete his own landmark of 250 Test wickets.

"They are all reaching their milestones. Jadeja was on 249 wickets and he was telling me, 'Give me the ball'," Rohit said with a smile.

"Ashwin was on four wickets and he wanted five and that was the challenge I was facing. I really don't know too much about milestones but these guys know about it," he added.

Australia skipper Pat Cummins called Ashwin a "world class bowler", especially at home, and "one of the all time great Indian bowlers".

His side will take a leaf out of India's book when they bounced back from being bowled out for 36 in Adelaide to lose the Test but win the series 2-1 in 2021.

"Australia love playing Test cricket and they take pride in representing the country and so we are quite aware of them bouncing back and what they can do as a team," Rohit said.

Both teams now head to New Delhi for Friday's second Test.



Mushfiqur Rahim and his Sylhet Strikers teammates enjoy a light football session during training at the Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday. Sylhet, leaders of the league phase of the Bangladesh Premier League, will hope to carry their form into the business end of the tournament when they take on Comilla Victorians in the Qualifier 1 in Mirpur today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# ‘Not here to just be participants’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be looking for a far better outing in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023 than in recent times when they begin their latest campaign against Group A rivals Sri Lanka at the Newlands Cricket Ground in Cape Town today.

The Tigresses have not managed a single win in three editions of the T20 World Cup across 12 games since two wins against Sri Lanka and Ireland in their maiden T20 World Cup campaign on home soil in 2014.

But the inclusion of a few U-19 World Cup stars, who featured in South Africa just recently, gave captain Nigar Sultana Joty room for optimism ahead of the showpiece event this time around.

"We came here after going through the qualifiers so we know the value of this stage. This is a huge opportunity for them [U-19 stars] to show their capabilities. And obviously, because of how good we are, we have the potential to compete against good sides. We're just trying to give ourselves the chance to showcase that we actually are not here to be participants, we're here for the competition," she said during a press conference following their training session at the Western Province Cricket Club yesterday.

"We have played four World Cups. And, except in 2014, we



couldn't manage a single win in this tournament. So we are looking for our first win here. And we also want to get the momentum and carry it through the tournament. Our target is to play the semifinal," she added.

Three players from the U-19 squad -- Shorna Akter, Disha Biswas and Marufa Akter -- were introduced to the 15-member World Cup squad. Another U-19 star, Dilara Akter, was initially called up but has been replaced by top-order batter Fargana Haque Pinky.

"Obviously I am super excited to see the team. They gained experience during the U-19 World Cup and played good cricket. They are also excited to join the national side and I'm looking forward to seeing them perform," the skipper said.

Joty believes the team atmosphere and bonds they share are the team's biggest strength. "I

think obviously team bonding [is the biggest strength]. As you can see, we can win a game when we contribute as a team. We don't have a power-hitter or a good finisher like other teams. Actually, we don't have the good finisher, but we have a good team. If we can contribute as a team and do well in the three departments, then we can win a match. We are looking to playing good cricket," she opined.

Joty also informed that they were not looking to experiment at the top, especially in the opening slots, despite using two different pairs in the warm-up fixtures against Pakistan and India.

Opponents Sri Lanka already made headlines by defeating South Africa in a tight Group A match, but Joty insisted on taking things 'game by game' and focusing on Sri Lanka first, suggesting that Hasan Tilakratne's presence as head coach gave her side an added advantage going into the fixture.

# ‘Tough for Sriram to join full time’

SPORTS REPORTER

Sridharan Sriram's name had been floating about for a while even after Chandika Hathurusingha's appointment as Bangladesh's head coach for all three formats.

Sriram had been in charge of the Tigers in the Asia Cup and the T20 World Cup last year but he was given the post of technical consultant. The BCB and Sriram were then unable to come to an agreement ahead of the England series because Sriram asked for the head coach role in T20Is, but BCB were looking for someone who could serve full-time and Sriram's IPL obligations were a deterrent.

BCB cricket operations chairman briefed members of the media and talked about Sriram's chances of returning.

"I don't think Sriram is available. Most probably he will not be able to join now since he has an assignment in the IPL. So it will be very tough for him to come here full-time and chances are very slim. We never confirmed he would be given responsibility of the T20 side but he had said that if he wanted any role, it was as T20 head coach. At the same time, we had some terms and conditions. So when we appoint a head coach, he has to be there full time. We can't allow the coach time off for the IPL or other franchise duties. So maybe because of that he isn't interested," he said.

It was learned that the coach held talks with BCB president Nazmul Hassan recently over the role that BCB had offered. The BCB president had suggested to the media previously that Sriram was in the shortlist.

Meanwhile, Khaled Mahmud is set to return to his role as team director from the England series, having already started planning with Hathurusingha. "The decision [on team director appointment] comes from the board but since it's the responsibility of the cricket operations I feel that it should be him [Mahmud]," Jalal told the media yesterday.

# Hijacking success, chasing clout

ATIQUE ANAM

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) seems to have mastered the art of spoiling its own party every time it achieves something substantial. It has this uncanny knack of producing moments of controversy just when the whole nation is looking towards it with great anticipation.

As the nation was celebrating the latest achievement of its indomitable girls in the form of the SAFF U-20 Women's Championship triumph on Thursday night, a sorry episode was unraveling right in front of the media while the team was busy celebrating. One of the most important architects of the success was left in the lurch – deprived of the winner's medal – for he had become one too many in that group dominated by privileged officials.

Masud Ahmed Ujjol, the goalkeeping coach of the team, was spotted leaving the pitch bemused and sad when his name did not come up on the list of medal winners, instead there were names of two team leaders and two assistant team leaders on the list to receive medals from the podium. It is hard to find

logic in deeming those four officials more fitting for a medal than the one whose protege had just received the best goalkeeper award.

No matter how humiliating this latest saga is for the coaching staff and the team members, it should not actually come as a surprise to them at all. They have had the taste of it before.

Remember what happened when Bangladesh won the SAFF Women's Championship for the first time just five months ago? The first pictures and footages you saw on media, with garlands around their necks after the plane touched down from Nepal, were of those club officials and BFF members who barely had any contribution to women's football. And then when the much-anticipated press briefing took place at the BFF House, the front seats were all occupied by the same people, hardly leaving any room for the coaches and the players.

The BFF and its archaic members do not seem to learn from past mistakes and misdemeanours. The one thing that they are good at is hijacking someone's success so that they could have their faces



splashed across the newspapers and TV screens and have photographs of their 'achievements' hung on the walls of their offices. And then use these 'achievements' to further their agendas and wield their clout on the corridors of power.

You will not find these bandwagoners – most of whom

are associated with sporting clubs in Dhaka – when you need them for forming teams for the women's league. But you will find them as part of the delegation when the national team is playing in a SAFF Championship, because they know there is a high probability of success and, with that, their chance to be in

the limelight.

In fact, women's football has become a publicity tool for not just BFF members, but the federation itself. Devoid of any sort of success with the men's team for more than a decade, the BFF is trying to use the regional success of women to make itself a bit more appealing to common people and sponsors. These uncouth incidents, however, are hardly helping its image or whatever is left of it.

One can rest assured that many of these people will not be found anywhere near the team when they are up against much stronger opponents outside of the South Asian region. They know the model of women's football in Bangladesh is a short-sighted one, good enough to succeed at regional level for a time period, but destined for failure when it comes to sustainability against a bigger pool of competitors.

Moreover, short-sightedness is a systemic disease that eternally ails the country's football governing body. The BFF was myopic when it handed former coach Jamie Day a two-year extension despite a downward spiral in results, and then it turned completely blind when it

sacked the coach midway through the contract. Afterwards, they slept through an 86,000-dollar fine by the FIFA, so much so that it has yet failed to clear a penny of the fine even a month-and-a-half after the deadline passed.

This is not the first time this sort of fines were imposed and, rest assured, it will not be the last because the BFF officials had claimed on becoming wiser from their previous experience.

And now that they are facing a bigger sanction from the world football's governing body, the BFF officials helplessly claim that they do not have the money to pay the fine. At the same breath, however, they boast of inviting reigning men's world champions for a friendly match for a jaw-dropping sum of money.

These contradictions in their statements and actions, the deprivation of the deserving and the penchant for going for the extravagant while overlooking the basic demands – all of these point to a governing body which is morally decrepit, thoroughly unprofessional and full of people serving personal agendas rather than the national interest.