

From club’s third choice to national squad

ANISUR RAHMAN

Despite having been the third-choice player at his position, injuries to two of his teammates in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League not only paved the way for Abahani left-back Alomgir Mollah in cementing his place in the starting eleven but the 22-year-old went on to earn a call-up to the national team’s 27-member preliminary squad for the upcoming 2023 Tri Nations Cup at home.

“Initially I did not expect a national call-up. My first target was to perform consistently for the club so that the opportunity arrives automatically. It finally happened, I think,” Alomgir told The Daily Star yesterday before leaving for Saudi Arabia with the men in red and green for a preparation camp ahead of the tri-nation tournament, involving Seychelles and Brunei.

Alomgir was drafted in the starting eleven during Abahani’s fourth league match against Bangladesh Police FC after Rahmat Mia, fielding at the left-back in place of the injured first-choice Nurul Nayeem Faisal, had to vacate his role to play the right-back role in place of Sushanta Tripura who was also sidelined due to injury.



Since then, Alomgir played consecutive seven league matches and one Federation Cup match and went on to feature even when Faisal returned from injury.

At the moment, clubmate Rahmat Mia and Bashundhara Kings’ Rimon Hossain are ahead of Alomgir in the national football squad’s pecking order, leaving him again in the third-choice left-back slot.

Asked if he can enter the final squad, the lad from Jhenaidah said, “For sure, no one will leave his place for me. I have to earn it through hard work. Getting a place in the preliminary squad of the national team has already been a big achievement for me, but I’ll give my highest effort to secure a place in the main squad and then in the playing eleven.”

Alomgir, interestingly, had not featured in any lower division leagues -- including second-tier Bangladesh Championship League -- as he directly played in the BPL for Muktiyoddha Sangsad in 2018.

Following three seasons at Muktiyoddha, he joined Mohammedan Sporting Club in the 2021-22 season before signing for another crowd-pulling Abahani before the current season began. “I knew no footballer can increase his value without playing for the national team, and that it is also tough to grab attention by playing for minnows like Muktiyoddha Sangsad,” said the freshman at the Dhaka University’s World Religions and Culture department.

Alomgir has the experience of being drafted in the preliminary squads of the national U-18, U-19 and U-23 teams but his failure to advance beyond also drove him to work harder.

He wished to remain in the national circuit for long as a lot of players have been going in and out under Spanish coach Javier Cabrera.

“Now competition is very high among the national players, so I will definitely not want to get out of the national team after getting the call,” said Alomgir as he went on to address his strengths.

“As a left-back, my first priority is to defend and then think of attacking the opponents. However, I have to increase the strength of my right foot.”



Kylian Mbappe surpassed Edinson Cavani to become Paris Saint-Germain’s all-time top scorer with his 201st goal for the club on Saturday. The French forward, who had equalled Cavani’s record mark of 200 goals with a brace in last week’s win at Marseille, netted one in stoppage time to help the Ligue 1 leaders to a 4-2 win at the Parc des Princes.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Barring Shakib Al Hasan, pressure will be on two other stalwarts to redeem themselves in the final ODI against England in Chattogram today after underwhelming performances in the first two defeats. PHOTO: FIROZ AJMED

Professionalism in the backdrop of distress

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

“Shakib! Shakib,” Tamim Iqbal called out. “Who? Me?” Shakib Al Hasan gestured after someone brought it to his attention. Soon the ace all-rounder converged on the centre wickets to speak to Tamim and coach Chandika Hathurusingha.

The relationship between Shakib and Tamim had all of a sudden turned into the focal point of Bangladesh cricket, leaving the England series in the background. But with the series already lost 2-0, the attention had been drawn to many issues that still need to be sorted out during a World Cup year. Thus, dressing room environment and the negativity around it will have to give way to finding solutions for the third and final ODI. Just as Bangladesh will have to show professionalism, the two seniors appear to be sorting out how to work as professionals despite differences. As the series moved to Chattogram, that professionalism appears to be settling in even as there is not much to play for result-wise.

Shakib had seen the wickets before anyone from the Bangladesh team management yesterday morning, a day ahead of the third ODI today. The coach and captain wanted his opinion on the wicket and perhaps what the makeup of the team would be in the final ODI.

It was an optional training session for the Tigers with the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Liton Das and Afif Hossain not attending the session. Shakib had seen the wicket before bowling at the nets and joined Tamim for a little chat. He then moved for quite a long discussion with selectors Minhajul Abedin and Habibul Bashar before Tamim and Chandika came to look at the wickets and asked Shakib to join in.

Despite what has come out onto the open regarding the Shakib-Tamim saga, the pair has managed to put the team’s need first and communicated. That there

had been something was apparent even during the first session since Shakib was back from USA.

The skipper also has to sort out his own game, having not managed to make good on starts in both innings against England so far.

Shakib was later seen walking around with a football, searching for players to form two teams. He gave a thumbs up after Mushfiqur Rahim entertained the idea of teaming up for a game of football. Soon the pair was celebrating, having left Mahmudullah Riyad, who was trying to save a goal, on the turf.

With many things to rectify, the team sent in spin coach Rangana Herath at the press conference yesterday. He argued about the importance of the game, behind just getting a result to avoid a series whitewash.

“There’s a lot to come after these two matches against England. We play against Ireland, Afghanistan, leading up to the World Cup. This game is very important for us. We need to do our best in this game, leading up to the World Cup’s preparation. We need to come back strongly to do well in the last ODI against England,” Herath reminded at the press



conference.

He put forward the notion that the team combination may have three spinners or three pacers while also alluding to the fact that spinners get more purchase in Mirpur. However, given the ‘dry’ nature of the wicket that Herath also pointed out, spin, rather than pace, could find more help.

The only real glimpse of seriousness Tigers put forward in the session was in planning around the wicket to be used. As Herath had said, it is an important game, thus professionalism for Tamim, Shakib and the rest will have to set in to avoid the world champions completing a whitewash.

Wood expecting no help at ZACS

SPORTS REPORTER

England seamers had been kept in their mark and asked to do their task properly after their initial performance in the first ODI against Bangladesh, paceman Mark Wood said yesterday at a press conference.

Jofra Archer had been wayward in the first ODI, which was fought closely until Dawid Malan’s ton took the game away from Bangladesh. Thus, despite a win, the slow start from pacers was discussed.

Regarding their early spell in the first ODI, Wood said: “As a bowling unit, we’re always trying to take wickets. If you try and sit back, the game can drift a little bit. As a seam-bowling unit, we felt like we started very slowly in the first game and we got a bit of a rollicking off David Saker, the fast-bowling coach, who wasn’t impressed with how we all performed early on in that game.”

The surface in Chattogram looks like one with runs in it. Wood felt that there would be no real help here for the faster bowlers. “No, not really. We’ll have to wait and see how this wicket plays and adapt to it,” he said when asked if he expected any help for the pacers.

The pacer also said that Taskin Ahmed’s performances during the series has come into notice and the Bangladesh pacer has shown the way in terms of how to bowl on surfaces such as Mirpur.

“He’s impressed everybody, not just me. The whole team have said how well he’s bowled. He’s bowling quickly, hitting good lengths. I think in the first game, he showed our seam-bowling group where to bowl, really. We took a lot from his performance, myself, Jofra and Woakesy, and the areas that he bowled. He put us under pressure and kept it tight as well,” Wood said.

Shadman hits maiden double century

SPORTS REPORTER

The Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox’s Bazar witnessed runs galore on the second day of the final of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) as South Zone opener Shadman Islam notched up his maiden first-class double century against Central Zone yesterday.

Having resumed the day on 130, Shadman took his score to 246 as he hit 29 fours and three sixes off 447 deliveries to help his side to a mammoth first-innings total of 500 for five.

Fazle Mahmud, who was unbeaten on 50 on day one, managed to add 11 runs to his tally before being undone by pacer Mushfik Hasan, who used the new ball to find the batter’s outside edge.

The wicket brought an end to a 154-run stand between Fazle and Shadman, whose marathon innings came to an end when part-time off-spinner Mohammad Mithun got the better of the batter. Central’s ploy of putting up a part timer against Shadman worked perfectly as the left-hander played a lethargic shot only to edge it back to the wicketkeeper.

Before his dismissal, however, Shadman put together a 218-run stand with Marshall Ayub. Ayub also smashed his 24th ton in first-class cricket, remaining unbeaten on 120.

In reply, Central got off to a solid start as they ended the day at 33 for no loss, with Soumya Sarkar and Abdul Mazid unbeaten on 15 and 16, respectively.

Taskin must ‘bombard’ Donald with questions, says Cork

Dominic Cork is currently in the commentary panel for the ongoing bilateral white-ball series between hosts Bangladesh and England. In an exclusive interview with Mazhar Uddin of The Daily Star, Cork shared his observation on Bangladesh cricket, spoke about the Tigers quicks’ scope for improvements, among other things. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Bangladesh cricket is nearing a transition period as experienced players like Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, and Mahmudullah Riyad will most likely be playing their last ODI World Cup this year. What should be the approach for Bangladesh cricket in moving forward?

Dominic Cork (DC): Bangladesh should be investing in their younger players now. It’s important they practice and play under intense pressure and a level higher than normal. You will then see who will have a chance of replacing these senior players. Whoever the Under 19’s coach is, has a very important job.

DS: How should a pacer from the subcontinent cope with it since

conditions and pitch are not ideal for seam bowling here?

DC: I’ve been surprised with how much pace and bounce there was in the Mirpur pitch. The pace bowlers have to find a way to move the ball. If that’s through swing, reverse swing, or variations. The fundamentals of bowling have never changed: a repeatable action with a skill to hit an area on the pitch consistently and a change-up delivery.

DS: What’s your take on Taskin Ahmed?

DC: Taskin is such a good bowler. He has good pace and a lovely action. He delivers the ball from a mid-crease area and creates an angle into the right-hander and is able to move the ball off the seam. I think he has the perfect bowling coach and mentor in Allan Donald. Taskin must bombard him with as many questions as possible.

One area I think he could slightly improve is bowling wide and straight yorkers. I understand it’s not easy to do at will but practice will help him when under pressure at the end of an innings.

DS: Has Mustafizur Rahman become too predictable?

DC: Mustafizur has obviously had success but is struggling a little bit at the moment. I’m sure AD (Allan Donald) is working with him on his wrist position.

His strength is that he’s a left-arm. Think of some of the best in the world at the moment -- Shaheen Shah Afridi, Mitchell Starc etc. -- what do they do well? They try and swing the ball early on and take wickets. I would try to change his role and ask him to take the new ball with Taskin and look to swing the ball and take wickets in the powerplay. Batters now use his quicker ball as a variation.

DS: England are well known for producing quality pacers. What is the process you follow back at home?

DC: In England we have 18 first class counties, which have a first team, second team academy, and age level teams. So a lot of cricketers and, more importantly for me, pace and swing bowlers coming through. We have a system which from an

early age teaches these bowlers the fundamentals of a strong action. Of course sometimes it doesn’t work out but these young players get all the information, fitness and technical advice which will help them in the future.

DS: How did England manage to adapt this attacking mindset across all formats that has paid rich dividends in recent times?

DC: England have been crying out for this positive approach. We have as a cricketing nation gone through years where players have had a fear of failure. A positive mindset is important for everyone, not just cricketers and sports people.

DS: What factors do you deem necessary for a country to have a prosperous cricketing culture like England?

DC: A strong domestic system is obviously the perfect springboard for the international side. Under 19 cricket is important, too... Pitches are really important in age-group cricket, leading into first class cricket. The coaches are important and I believe employing some senior successful players and coaches will help set this.

