

Captain Liton up for Afghan challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

According to reports in the media, Liton Das was sceptical about leading Bangladesh in Tests as he was said to be willing to only focus on his role as a batter.

But as he walked into the press conference room at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Monday, Liton, set to be the 12th Test skipper of the nation on Wednesday during the one-off Test against Afghanistan in Mirpur, the 28-year-old seemed poised and ready for the challenge.

“Nothing of sorts was there,” Liton, however, brushed aside the speculations about his reluctance in assuming the leadership role.

“As the vice captain of a side, at times I had to act as the captain and lead the side for two or three overs when [Test skipper] Shakib [Al Hasan] was off the field. So, I was never worried about being the captain,” a confident Liton asserted.

Liton mentioned he is yet to feel the excitement that usually a cricketer feels when captaining a side.

“Let’s see, if I get such a feeling [of excitement] when I walk out for the toss,” Liton said. “Obviously, there is a good feeling about being a captain. In fact, being a Test cricketer is a matter of pride itself as everyone emphasises Test cricket. So, to lead the nation in this format is obviously a big thing.”

For Liton, the Afghanistan Test is set to be an uphill task, especially given how the Tigers were hammered in the only Test ever played between the sides in 2019 in Chattogram. That time, preparing a rank turner against a spin-heavy Afghans had backfired in the form of a 224-run thumping.

Things are not going to be the same this time around.

“Usually we play on spinning wickets in Mirpur. But this time the challenge would be how we will do better on a green surface. How we can stick around and play big innings – that will be the challenge for us,” Liton said.

In absence of star allrounder Shakib Al Hasan, who will be missing the Test due to a finger injury, and with Tamim Iqbal uncertain due to back issues, Liton said senior campaigner Mushfiqur Rahim will have a major role to play in giving solidity at the top.

The last time that Bangladesh faced Afghanistan, it was the star legspinner Rashid Khan who had scalped 11 wickets and turned the destroyer in chief. But the absence of Rashid for the only Test won’t see any difference in approach from the Tigers, Liton mentioned.

“We will be taking Afghanistan just as seriously as we would have taken them if Rashid [Khan] was around,” he added.



Veteran batter Mushfiqur Rahim turned up at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday despite heavy rain, which eventually postponed the scheduled training session. (Inset) Shamim Patwary and Nasum Ahmed, two of the players not in the squad for the upcoming Test against Afghanistan, seemingly enjoyed the rainfall from under the umbrella. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Significant board meeting sees major agendas approved

SPORT REPORTER

It was a significant board meeting for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday with many important agendas discussed and some major decisions reached.

One of the most crucial decisions was to increase the monthly remuneration and match fees in women’s cricket. The 25 centrally-contracted women cricketers will see their salaries enhanced while first-class players’ salaries will also be increased, BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon informed in a press conference.

“It’s not easy for girls to play cricket in Bangladesh. You need wickets and pitches and equipment. Given the impediments girls have overcome to play cricket, we have not been able to do much for them. In a different place, they would get more facilities,” Nazmul said bluntly.

Women in the country have long battled to pick cricket as a career, but the salary increase will help take the game to more doorsteps. “It is a first step and we are hoping that the process has begun and will improve day by day,” the BCB president added.

Nazmul also identified that carrying out the first, second and third division cricket matches in Dhaka has been difficult due to a lack of grounds. Matches need to be hosted at international venues, which means scheduling becomes a severe issue.

The BCB had been waiting for NSC to restructure the Khan Saheb Osman Ali Stadium at Fatullah but no work had been done. Fatullah will now be renovated with the BCB’s own fund, he informed. “We have given the go-ahead to work on both the grounds at Fatullah,” he said.

In another big step, the BCB approved the purchase of two plots in Purbachal and Pubail to meet the demands for ground with their

own funds. They are also looking at grounds at Chattogram and Bogura. “We are focusing on facilities and land currently,” the BCB president said of the move.

Another significant decision was applying for the BCB’s own channel to broadcast matches. “We are going to apply for BCB TV and we won’t have to wait for anyone to broadcast games, not only international but also domestic matches,” Nazmul said.

Regional cricket ad-hoc committees were



also formed, with five being received and approved while Barishal and Khulna are soon to be confirmed. The move will help decentralise the sport.

The salaries of A team players also received a significant bump. “It was very significant, especially the decentralisation of cricket. That we have given approval and that their activities will begin from now on is a significant step for the future of Bangladesh cricket,” the BCB president remarked.

Bangladesh A team have seen a significant increase in wages. According to sources, players will get Tk 1,50,000 for four-day matches, which is a Tk 1,10,000 buff in comparison prior to the meeting. For one-dayers, they are set to make Tk 1,00,000 per match, and as for T20s, the match fee has been set at Tk 50,000.

Women cricketers have seen a salary bump as now Nigar Sultana Joty and Co will reportedly see their salary cap at Tk 1,00,000, with the minimum being set at Tk 50,000.

With the aim of strengthening its domestic cricketing infrastructure, the BCB has taken an initiative to build new stadiums. BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon revealed that the board acquired plots measuring 30 bighas and 37 acres in Pubail and Purbachal areas respectively for that purpose and also revealed to do the same in Bogura and Chattogram.

To get rid of broadcasting issues, the BCB has decided to apply for its own TV channel named BCB TV.

In a bid to decentralise, the BCB has approved five ad hoc regional committees, with the remaining two in line to get approval.

The design for the Sheikh Hasina Cricket Stadium has been formally approved and construction would begin by December, with BCB issuing international tenders.

Booters warm up with win in Cambodia

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh began their second-phase preparation for SAFF Championship with a 1-0 win over Cambodian Premier League outfit Tiffy Army FC in a warm-up match in Phnom Penh yesterday.

Abahani midfielder Sohel Rana scored the decisive goal in the 12th minute of the match in which coach Javier Cabrera tested all of his 21 available players except for winger Rakib Hossain, who is still recovering from a hamstring injury.

Fit-again defender Tapu Barman played the last few minutes as Cabrera fielded centre-backs Tariq Kazi, Mehedi Hasan, left-back Alomgir Mollah and right-back Rahmat Mia behind three midfielders – Jamal Bhuiyan, Sohel and Sohel Rana – while Faisal Ahmed Fahim, Mohammad Ibrahim and Suman Reza played upfront.

“It was a good match as we created more [goal-scoring] chances and played well. It was not easy against the opponents who fielded three to four foreign players. It was a good test for us and the positive side is that we won without conceding any goals,” captain Jamal said in a video message. Cabrera believes the win would boost the



players’ confidence.

“At the beginning, it took us time to get into the match because they were quite aggressive and it was tough in the first 10 to 15 minutes but we had good chances with Sohel Rana scoring the goal. We could have scored one or two goals more to reach the first-half with better result. It was good enough, especially the defensive block was viable,” said the 38-year-old coach.

Manager Amer Khan informed that defenders Bishwanath Ghosh and Isa Faisal would join the squad this morning after flying from Bangladesh on Monday night.



Expectation is high, we are here to play good cricket and want to win the game. Obviously, it will be challenging as everyone knows he (Rashid Khan) is our main bowler. He has done well in Tests for us in the past but we still have enough bowling options in our side and hopefully they will play well. We have seen the wicket today and there were grass in it. We also have good pacers along with the spinners. We will play according to our strengths and prepared for everything.

Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi told the reporters during a press conference in Mirpur on Monday.

Hardship, adversity and ‘tennis mother’ key to Djokovic’s career

REUTERS, Paris

While Novak Djokovic was already looking ahead to a potential record-extending 24th Grand Slam title, there was also time on Sunday for him to look back at what had shaped him as tennis’s most successful male player – hardship and adversity.

Djokovic, who clinched his 23rd men’s major title at the French Open on Sunday, grew up in war-torn Serbia before moving to Niki Pilic’s academy in Munich, Germany in 1999 – one of two key encounters in his life.

“My upbringing was probably different than most of the other players from my generation. Going back to the 1990s when I was four, five years old, and we had couple of wars,” Djokovic told a press conference after winning his third French Open title by defeating Norway’s Casper Ruud in straight sets.

“Serbia had embargo. I couldn’t travel for quite a few junior tournaments. So there was a lot of adversity and it was a very



challenging time for everyone in my country.

“My family was on a very low budget. But my parents still decided to support me in my dream, which was to become a professional tennis player and hopefully win Wimbledon and be number one in the world.”

Djokovic reaped the rewards of spending time with another major

figure in his life, Jelena Gencic, who he called his ‘tennis mother’, with Pilic being the ‘father’.

“She passed away about 10 years ago, but she was an incredibly big influence on me, on and off the court,” Djokovic said.

“She was a true mentor. And she worked closely with my parents, who gave her space and permission to spend a lot of time with me, also when we were not training on the court. I used to go to her home, and we did many different things that were shaping my mind as a human being, but also as a professional, as a young player who dreams of becoming a professional.”

His parents, Srdan and Dijana, were former skiers but had no tennis background, and Djokovic was grateful that they took a leap of faith with him.

“My mother is a rock. She’s an incredible woman who kept the family together in the toughest moments. My father is an incredibly driving force of the family, someone who has instilled in me such power of belief and positive thinking,” he said.

With 23 Grand Slams to his name, Novak Djokovic has now surpassed Spain’s Rafael Nadal for most Grand Slam titles clinched by a male player since the beginning of the Open Era in 1968. In the all-time list, Djokovic is now tied with Serena Williams and only one behind Margaret Court (24).

The Serbian clinched his third French Open title and became the first man in history to have won every Grand Slam at least three times (Court, Serena and Steffi Graf have achieved the same feat in women’s tennis).

Djokovic, at 36 years 20 days, is the oldest men’s singles winner at the French Open since 1968. He broke Nadal’s record (36 years 2 days) set last year.

Djokovic, who already held the men’s record of most appearances in Grand Slam finals with Federer (31) in second and Nadal (30) in the third sport, also equalled the all-time record of Chris Evert (34).

Since turning 35 last year in May, Djokovic has reached three Grand Slam finals. Only Rosewall (6) and Federer (4) have made more men’s singles finals at Grand Slam events after turning 35.



Argentina captain Lionel Messi and winger Angel Di Maria prepare themselves during a training session at the Beijing Olympic Stadium ahead of their friendly against Australia on June 15. The Albiceleste, who are likely to field the same eleven that faced Australia in the World Cup in Qatar last year, will then visit Indonesia for a friendly on June 19 that will wrap up their tour of Asia.

PHOTO: TWITTER