

From humble roots to the national side

ANISUR RAHMAN

Having skipped classes, Dipok Roy once used to walk five kilometres almost every day from his residence to attend practice sessions at Boro Math of Dinajpur.

Hailing from humble origins, Dipok worked as an assistant to a carpenter only to be able to buy a pair of boots. He also had to endure taunts from his neighbours and berating from his father, who always wanted him to focus on studies for a better future instead of trying his luck at football.

After crossing such hurdles one after another in his childhood, and from playing the Pioneer Football League to the Bangladesh Premier League, the 21-year-old forward now got into the preliminary squad of the Bangladesh national football team for the two FIFA friendly matches against Afghanistan, scheduled to take place on September 4 and 7 at the Bashundhara Kings arena.

Five days into training under the national team's Spanish coach Javier Cabrera, Dipok could spot how different it is to play and train for the national side. And the Sheikh Russel KC forward is looking forward to



securing a place in the final squad to fulfill his ultimate dream.

The hardships of childhood made him realise one thing – that he would have to work harder to earn and keep his place in the national side, and the young forward seems determined to do so.

"Once, we didn't have anything and were going through a hard time. However, by playing football, I bought piece of land for my parents and also got my father a new auto [rickshaw]. When my parents and I heard that I got called up for the national squad, it was a different feeling and I want to stay in the national team as long as possible," Dipok said.

The young forward, who usually starts on the bench for his club in the BPL, realised he would need to push harder for his dream to come true.

"Except for a few clubs, the condition of all the other clubs is not good. But the environment of the national team is totally different than that you find at the club level. The standard of practice sessions, food, accommodation, facilities – everything is different. So, I am hoping my performance will reflect it [the improved facilities], and my ultimate target is to secure a place in the national team."

Dipok struck four goals last season for Sheikh Russel. He joined the club in the 2021-22 season after playing only 13 BPL matches in four seasons for Abahani, who picked him from their BPL U-18 tournament's winning squad in 2017.

"I left Abahani in a bid to get more playing time. I have been called to the preliminary squad following my performances at the club level and I have to prove it at the national team. I will be trying my level best to cement my place in the national team and mold myself the way the coach wants to play me," he said.

The winger believes speed and goal-scoring capability helped him earn a call in the national team and he does not only want to stick to enhancing his strong areas but also overcome his shortcomings in the national team's training.

"My strength is speed and the ability to score goals. I am always focused on scoring whenever I step onto the ground because I know it will help me have the focus on myself even if I play badly for the most part of a game," the lad from Dinajpur added.

Rakibul cleared to embark on World Duathlon journey

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

National gold medal-winning cyclist Rakibul Islam is finally heading to the Powerman Duathlon World Championships 2023 in Switzerland after resolving visa and sponsorship issues, the 30-year-old confirmed to The Daily Star yesterday.

Online shopping platform Daraz and tyre company CST Tyre have decided to sponsor Rakibul on his journey, while the Swiss Embassy helped expedite his visa application as an exception case.

Rakibul is the first Bangladeshi athlete who has qualified to participate in this world event. He is also the only invited contestant from the South Asian countries this year.

"My competitors are the best of the best. Hence, I don't have much expectations but I will share my experiences of competing in the event after coming back to the country."

"With that, the courage that I will gain from this event will encourage me to do well on the global stage. I want to represent Bangladesh in next year's



SAFF Games. No one from Bangladesh participated in the last edition of the competition," Rakibul told The Daily Star.

The Powerman Duathlon World Championships is a long distance competition held in Zofingen, Switzerland. One of the toughest sports competitions in the world, the Duathlon World Championships features a 10-km run, followed by a 150-km cycling race and then a 30-km run – all in the hilly areas.

This world event will be held on September 2-3 where Rakibul is supposed to compete against selected athletes (160 to 170) from around the world.

Rakibul had to deal with a lot of issues to apply for the visa and manage all the necessary documents and sponsors after the championship authorities sent an invitation letter to Rakibul on July 13.

He applied for a Schengen visa on August 8, but was informed by the Swiss Embassy that there is no date (slot) left for the visa interview until September 11. The embassy said that he had to apply at least 15 days in advance to get a Schengen visa.

Asked why the visa application was delayed, Rakibul said, "Many documents are required to participate in this competition. No objection letter from my authority (Chittagong Sports Authority), World Champions Race License issued by World Triathlon Organization (WTO), sponsor confirmation, race insurance and several other official documents,

including notarisation of civil status, needed to be collected.

"In addition, due to the recent floods, travelling from Khagrachari to Dhaka or Chittagong has become very difficult. Along with this, we have to pay the event registration fee. The credit card from the country can pay a maximum of 300 dollars at a time. But the fee is 410 dollars. So, I had to buy coupons and stick those together for the registration."

"Also, bank statements of me and my sponsor are required. It is very difficult for me to get a sponsor. However, on August 9, I managed a sponsor but they were not able to pay for the full expenditure, leaving me in big trouble at the last stage," added Rakibul.

The Daily Star did a report on Rakibul's situation on August 11 after which the 30-year-old sent a letter to the Swiss ambassador with an attached copy of the news. The Swiss Embassy responded to his request and expedited it, allowing him a slot for the visa on August 17. He was eventually issued a visa on August 21.



Opener Mohammad Naim smashes Shoriful Islam for a boundary as the cricketers played a 50-over practice game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Meanwhile, Shakib Al Hasan, set to lead the Tigers in the upcoming Asia Cup and the World Cup, visited the stadium for the first time since arriving in the country on Monday. [Bottom] Shakib, however, did not participate in the practice match.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Carlsen clinches WC title at last

FIDE

Former World Champion Magnus Carlsen has accomplished a significant milestone in his illustrious chess career by capturing his inaugural World Cup title, the only tournament that was missing from his immense collection of victories.

After a quiet draw in the second game of the finals on Wednesday, Carlsen – who is recovering from food poisoning – defeated the 18-year-old Indian prodigy Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa in the tiebreaks yesterday. It took just two tiebreak games and about one and a half hours.

Crucial was the first rapid tiebreaker which Carlsen won with black pieces. Game two was much quieter with Carlsen (playing as White) forcing exchanges in a better position. A draw was agreed as early as move 22, securing first place for the Norwegian.

Previously, the closest Carlsen came to winning the World Cup was in 2021 when he finished third. Now, with this feather added to his cap, the world's highest-rated player proved that he is the ultimate force majeure of chess.



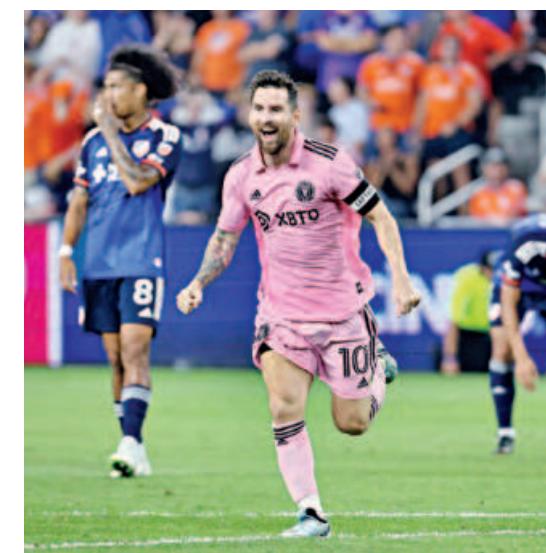
Afghanistan opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz hit a career-best 151 against Pakistan during second ODI of the three-match in Hambantota on Thursday. The 21-year-old scored an aggressive run-a-ball century and shared an opening stand of 227 with Ibrahim Zadran, who scored a 101-ball 80, as Afghanistan posted 300 for five. Gurbaz's previous best was 145 against Bangladesh in Chattogram last month.

PHOTO: AFP



As Hana Burzalova of Slovakia approached the finish line to eventually stand a lowly 28th in the 35-kilometre race walk at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest yesterday, she saw compatriot Dominik Cerny ready to propose her. Brimming with emotions, Burzalova then took a moment to say yes amid applause. In the same event completed a while earlier, Cerny finished 19th despite clocking a personal best.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Lionel Messi refuses to have an off day in the USA as Inter Miami yesterday edged past MLS leaders FC Cincinnati in tiebreakers after 120 minutes of action of the US Open Cup semifinals could not separate the two sides, with the scoreline at 3-3. The Argentine provided two assists after Miami went 2-0 down in the 53rd minute -- the last of which was an equaliser deep in added time -- and converted the first spot-kick in shootout in characteristic composed fashion.

PHOTO: AFP



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricketers were geared up to play a very important practice game yesterday as part of their Asia Cup preparations.

Shakib Al Hasan, who returned to the country on Monday, had a busy schedule since his return and yesterday was no different. The newly-appointed ODI captain came to the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium but did not feature in the practice game which was delayed by rain.

The practice game was supposed to start at 2:30pm but rain was on the offing, preventing the game from starting in time. In the end, the game started after 4:00pm. As the wait grew before the practice game, Shakib poked his head out of the dressing room door once but the star allrounder was not seen again.

In the end, Shakib was also not a part of the group that had featured in the intra-squad practice game.

Shakib, however, did not sit idle as it was learned that he had a one-to-one meeting with head coach Chandika Hathurusingha. The meeting divulged the plans for the Asia Cup. The Tigers are set to leave for Sri Lanka on August 27 to play the tournament which will be played in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

Preparations were made for the practice game in terms of making sure the team management had

enough footage to analyse their players. Cameras were located in one part of the stands and it was learned that video feeds would be provided from various angles to the team management.

Shakib, set to take on the reigns of the ODI side from the Asia Cup, also used his time before the practice game to hold a meeting with the players. The players' video footage from previous practice sessions was discussed while Shakib also discussed his plans for the different opponents that Bangladesh are going to face in the upcoming continental championship.

Mahmudullah Riyad and Soumya Sarkar had already been excluded from the Asia Cup squad but the two, along with the rest of the side, were part of the meeting with Shakib. Mahmudullah did not, however, play the practice game later but Soumya Sarkar was seen gearing up for the practice game. Both of the excluded stars have been undergoing practice with the backup players under coach Sohel Islam.

The idea, perhaps, is that Shakib is now looking to bring everyone under one umbrella and the likes of Mahmudullah and Soumya too have not been excluded from being part of plans with the ODI World Cup looming large.

Bangladesh will play Sri Lanka at Kandy in their opening game of the Asia Cup on August 31 before moving to Lahore, Pakistan to play Afghanistan on September 3.