

“There is still a lot left and we have to enjoy the moment. We have to go game by game and recognise that these players are making history.”

Girona coach Michel said after Monday's win over Alaves that took them back to the top of La Liga standings.



‘New way’ of thinking can reduce gap post U19 level

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh U-19 cricketers brought glory to the country with a significant addition to the trophy cabinet, winning the country's first U-19 Asia Cup by beating the hosts UAE in the final in Dubai last Sunday.

A peek at the records would show that the results at this level for Bangladesh have been very inspiring in the recent past. However, the same quality of performance and achievement has not come through to the national team.

The Under-19 side's World Cup triumph in 2020 saw focus shift back to the age-level group and many players like Shoriful Islam, Tawhid Hridoy, and Mahmudul Hasan Joy have come through to the current national side from that unit. There have been others such as Akbar Ali, who is yet to make it into the national team.

There remains a gulf in quality between the age level and the international arena. While one demands the highest quality of cricket consistently, the other is for developmental purposes. Thus, winning such a tournament will not necessarily mean someone will do well in international cricket.

“When a player plays at the U19 level, the opponents are also from the same group. But after that, there is no age barrier as they even have to compete against 35-year-old players. When you pit yourself against those opponents, you need to have proper maturity to face them,” said Hannan Sarkar, the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) U19 selector, addressing the surge in demand for quality in international cricket.

“The preparation [for getting ready for the national team] comes from the HP, Bangla Tigers or A team activities. Ready them properly would allow them to compete. Our departments are working well now but the process required, in that regard, maybe we have to think in a new way going forward. Or else the same thing will happen, since most players do come from the U19 level but the process has to be key to reduce that gap,” he also added.

Despite the successes of a few like Hridoy or Shoriful, not many coming from the age level could carry on performing. Hridoy, in fact, played twice in the U19 World Cup, suggesting he still needed development playing at U19 level.

In terms of institutional processes, the U-19 program runs solidly with little interference while the absence of outside noise allows players a better atmosphere at U19 level. The same, however, is not true for the national team set up.

Rabby, the Under-19 skipper, said the journey begins from now.

“I feel that after the [Under-19] World Cup [in January 2024], the important days will begin. If we neglect our work during those days then we will not be able to use that time and we will fall behind. In other countries, they have used good facilities and preparation to get into the national team. We will have to begin preparations from now on with the aim to do well in the national team,” he told The Daily Star yesterday, showing understanding of the difficulty of the jump.

The U19 coaching setup and how they prepared has to be recognised as they played on sporting or bouncy tracks before the major tournament. The process needs to be continued.

National team selector Habibul Bashar feels that the individual player's responsibility is to prepare themselves. “I think the system is working better now. Previously, we saw that they were not making the DPL teams or elsewhere after the U19 level but now they get into the HP program which has improved a lot,” he said.

Many of the U19 champions are now gearing up for the upcoming Bangladesh Cricket League one-dayers, slated to begin on December 24. The exposure to quality cricket, surfaces, and structure of cricket can go a long way to creating cricketers who can serve the national team in the long haul.



Humorous Hathurusingha running out of ideas?

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Talks of making changes, heading in a new direction, and bringing in fresh faces are all common phrases thrown around by people at the helm of teams that have fallen on their faces in a World Cup.

So when Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha said, “I think it is time that we need to move on from some of the players that have played for a long time,” right before a two-Test series at home against New Zealand after their disgraceful showing in the World Cup, it seemed like a measured response of a person who knew what he needed to say to deflect the heat.

The Sri Lankan was correct in his assessment as the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Mahmudulhasan Riyad, Tamim Iqbal, and Mushfiqur Rahim -- Tigers' stalwarts -- are in the last stretch of their international careers.

The team's abysmal showing in the 2023 World Cup, their worst in the last two decades, was also another indication that it is time to start moving in a new direction.

But it did not take Hathurusingha too long to contradict his own words.

On Sunday, the Tigers lost the first ODI of the three-match series against the Kiwis in New Zealand by 44 runs via DLS.

In the match, multiple rain interruptions exposed Bangladesh's shortage in the bowling department, and Soumya Sarkar, who was the fifth bowler in the match, leaked 66 runs off his full quota of six overs which allowed the hosts to run away with the match.

Yesterday, Hathurusingha was asked about the logic behind picking Soumya, who is basically a batter who can bowl some gentle medium pace, to play Shakib's role, to which the Sri Lankan gave a very familiar response, heard many times before during the all-rounder's unavailability.

“Bangladesh teams for the last 15 years were used to having Shakib. We are finding it hard to make a combination [without him].”

The problems caused by Shakib's absence are apparent to all. But the job of the national team's head coach is not to just point out the obvious problem, but to



come up with a solution.

Shakib, who is still the team's regular captain in all three formats as per the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) despite him announcing that he would not lead the team post-World Cup, is not getting any younger.

The all-rounder is 36 years of age and according to his own admission, he will retire from the game in 2025 after the ICC Champions Trophy.

On top of that, he has now ventured into politics, which is certain to take up more of his time in the coming years.

Bangladesh are without the all-rounder in the New Zealand series as he is still recovering from a finger injury.

So the series against New Zealand could have been a test case of how Bangladesh can play when Shakib moves on from the game.

In the first ODI, Bangladesh's grand solution to the problem was picking Soumya, a player who has the uncanny knack of getting selected for the national team without doing anything of note at the domestic level.

Soumya, who had taken only one wicket and made 139 runs in his nine previous ODIs on New Zealand soil, had a horrible time in the first ODI.

In Tuesday's media interaction, when asked about the batters' tendency of throwing away their wickets after getting starts, the Sri Lankan quipped, “It is a big concern. If you have the answer, let me know, I'll talk to them.”

It was most likely an innocent comment made in the spur of the moment. Or perhaps it was the Freudian slip of a contradicting man who is running out of ideas.

Paving a prosperous path

BFF Academy C'ship kicks off

ANISUR RAHMAN

A face-off between two Dhaka-based football academies may have promised the prospect of an eye-pleasing game, but yesterday's opening fixture BFF (U-15) Academy Championship scarcely lived up to expectations at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium.

However, a thrilling finish was provided by Gopalganj Football Academy from Dhanmondi, who defeated Milon Football Academy from Khilkhet with a last-gasp strike on a bouncy artificial turf in Kamalapur.

It was a clash of contrasting styles as Gopalganj FA displayed fine individual skills, while their oppositions showed more collective prowess, in terms of maintaining possession.

In the second match between Karondika Inclusive Football Academy and Tiger Kids Football Academy at the same venue, spectators were treated to a scintillating free kick struck on the edge of the box by the former.

With the continuous absence of national school football, national age-group football and the youth development programme of the professional clubs, the introduction of BFF Academy Championship -- featuring 168 BFF-accredited football academies across the country -- can be a good platform for some 3700 budding footballers to hone their skills under certified coaches this time.



While there are many participating football academies that can only organise training without competing in tournaments to assess players' growth curve, this time the local game's governing body created a space for young footballers in the financial collaboration of FIFA Talent Development Scheme, aided with BDT one crore.

Amid several obstacles in financial constraints, lack of training facilities and playing kits among others, these academies are run by individuals who possess a pure love for the sport, devoid of vested interest. “I could not fulfil my childhood dream of becoming a footballer due to a lack of opportunity in Khilkhet. That's why I aspired to create a football academy for our neighbourhood kids,” Milon FA president, Shafiqul Islam Milon, told The Daily Star yesterday.

“It'd be better to receive some financial help because I've to bear some Tk 60-80 thousand from my own pocket despite the academy earning nearly Tk 40,000 per month from students,” he added.

Mahmudul Hasan, Gopalganj FA coach and former national full-back, also echoed similar sentiment. The AFC B-licence coach has been running his academy for the last six years with 40 students at present. He urged BFF to arrange such a tournament two to three times per year.

Although Tiger Kids FA coach Imran Mridha Rubel is yet to obtain a coaching licence, the former footballer is teaching 100 youngsters in the Khilgaon region -- based on what he learned from coaches such as Wazed Gazi, Syed Jilani, Mahbubur Rahman Roxy, Kamal Babu and Abu Faisal during his short-lived playing career.

Milon FA coach Mohammad Asadul Islam, owning an AFC C licence certificate, however believes that all academies require certified instructors to generate good quality players from grassroots.

Tigresses look to seal maiden SA series

SPORTS REPORTER

A confident Bangladesh national women's team will be eying to clinch the three-match ODI series against South Africa as the Tigresses take on the hosts in the second game at Potchefstroom today. The day-night affair is scheduled to start at 6:00pm Bangladesh time.

On Saturday, Nigar Sultana Joty and her troops registered their maiden ODI win over South Africa in their backyard, winning the first ODI by a comprehensive 119 runs win in East London. It was also Bangladesh's biggest margin win in terms of runs in the format.

The in-form Tigresses, who also won an ODI series against Pakistan at home and drew another home series against a strong India side recently, will be hoping to continue their momentum and seal their maiden series win in South Africa.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh stalwart Mahmudulhasan Riyad, who is recovering from a shoulder injury, took his son to the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday to watch the ongoing Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) match between Central Zone and South Zone.

World Cup winners shatter IPL auction records

AGENCIES

Australia's World Cup winners were in high demand during the Indian Premier League 2024 auction at the Coca-Cola arena in Dubai on Tuesday, with franchises dishing out millions of dollars for their services at the glitzy Twenty20 tournament.

Within two hours of the auction, records were broken as four teams involved in intense bidding for Pat Cummins made the Australia captain the most expensive player in IPL history, but that record didn't last long with fellow Australian Mitchell Starc coming in later in the auction.

In the end, it was Sunrisers Hyderabad who bagged the services of Cummins for the upcoming season for a whopping 205 million rupees (\$2.47 million). Starc, meanwhile, went for a stunning 247.5 million rupees (\$2.98 million) to Kolkata Knight Riders, setting an all-time IPL auction record.

“We won, Mr Starc!” the franchise posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Before Tuesday, England all-rounder Sam Curran was the most expensive player after being bought for \$2.23 million last year by Punjab Kings.

“Pumped to be joining SRH for the upcoming IPL season,” Cummins, who skipped this year's IPL because of a



packed calendar, said in a video posted by the franchise on social media. “I have played in Hyderabad a few times and always loved it so can't wait to get started.”

Hyderabad beat Royal Challengers Bangalore in a fervent bidding session for Cummins, to claps and cheers from other franchises participating in the auction. Both Australians were key members of the team that led Australia to ODI World Cup victory in November, beating hosts India in the final at Ahmedabad.

Cummins will be playing alongside countryman Travis Head, who came in with clutch Player of the Match performances in the World Cup semifinal and final. Sunrisers Hyderabad bought

Head for 6.80 crore rupees.

KKR, meanwhile, reunited with Starc after five years. Starc is joined by some heavyweight overseas stars including Andre Russell, Jason Roy, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, and Sunil Narine at KKR.

New Zealand all-rounder Daryl Mitchell was the third-top player at the auction, grabbed by Chennai Super Kings for \$1.6 million.

While SRH did splurge cash, they made a smart buy by getting Wanindu Hasaranga, at INR 1.5 crore (base price).

Up-and-coming New Zealand all-rounder Rachin Ravindra failed to arouse much interest, with Chennai paying an underwhelming \$216,000 for his services.

Fizz to play for CSK in IPL

Mustafizur Rahman will play for the Chennai Super Kings in the 2024 IPL. The MS Dhoni-led team roped in Mustafizur in the auction in Dubai yesterday for his base price of INR 2 crore. This is the left-arm pacer's fifth team in the IPL. He earlier played for Sunrisers Hyderabad, Mumbai Indians, Rajasthan Royals and Delhi Capitals. He won the IPL with Hyderabad in his maiden appearance in 2016.



Mominul ton puts East in control

SPORTS REPORTER

Batters showcased a strong response during the second day of two Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) fixtures yesterday.

Two big knocks from Mominul Haque and Parvez Hossain Emon cemented East Zone in a commanding position against North Zone in Sylhet, while two gritty fifties from Naem Islam and Mahidul Islam meant the Central Zone-South Zone encounter is nicely poised in Mirpur.

Following close of day's play, North were 67 for three in their second innings, trailing by 117 runs.

Earlier, resuming the day's proceedings on 122 for two, overnight batters Parvez missed out on his hundred by ten runs following a 200-ball stay -- unlike Mominul who went on to register his 28th first-class century.

The former Bangladesh captain hit 11 boundaries and two sixes for his 117 for 167 deliveries, while Shahadat Hossain scored 56 to steer East to a formidable 352.

Meanwhile, Central recovered from a precarious 54 for four to tally 248 all out in their first innings, courtesy of Naem's team-high 89 and Mahidul's 66 in Mirpur.

Naem missed out on a consecutive hundred but the veteran, building on his overnight score of 22, held the innings from his end and was the last batter to get out, as Central edged a 34-run lead.

Sumon Khan and Nayeem Hasan took three wickets apiece for South, who will adopt a cautious approach in today's proceedings after having slumped to 47 for three at stumps.