

Moving on to right path finally?

NABID YEASIN

From seeking Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as Bangladesh team mentor for World Cup 2023 to going overboard in protesting senior cricketers' retirements from some formats -- instead of relishing the achievements to commemorate their careers -- Bangladesh fans, media, and even the ones within the system have always been driven more by emotions than logic.

However, be it the latest World Cup debacle, or the lengthy toxic period that the country's cricket had to endure due to a fallout between two of its stalwarts -- Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan -- the Bangladesh team finally seems to have learned the lesson and is willing to move forward.

"If this team gets left alone, and these young guys get left alone for a period of time, two to three years, to just play... and you have faith in them. They have shown already what they can do," Bangladesh assistant coach Nic Pothas said yesterday ahead of the Tigers' second T20I against New Zealand in Mount Maunganui today.

If anything that could be ascertained from Pothas' remarks is that it was an attempt from the South African to not let anything hamper the team's harmony developed of late.

The assistant coach's desire is only justified as the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led Bangladesh now stand on the verge of a momentous occasion -- they are eyeing their maiden T20I series triumph over the Black Caps on New Zealand soil.

In fact, the sporadic successes that Bangladesh have had in recent years had



one thing in common. Before Shanto took charge as an interim skipper and guided the Tigers to a Test win over New Zealand at home in November this year and went on to record Bangladesh's maiden ODI and T20I wins over the same opponent at their den in the ongoing series, Mominul Haque's Test side had provided the Tigers their most prestigious accolade till date -- a historic win away to a full-strength New Zealand in the Mount Maunganui Test in 2022.

All these were achieved without Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, and Mahmudullah Riyad in the picture -- either unavailable due to injuries or due to quitting the format.

The fact that none of Shakib, Tamim, or Riyad were available in these aforementioned triumphs, or that Mushfiqur Rahim did not pull off any heroics, does not diminish or wash away what each of these big names had

done for the country's cricket.

Without taking anything away from any of these stalwarts, what all these triumphs meant is that Bangladesh do have in store what it takes to move on instead of wallowing in nostalgia every time the team takes a stumble in any series or tour.

Unprompted, Pothas still chose to fend off questions regarding experience and balance that usually arise after failure sans big names.

"When you talk of any team, if it's not a matured batting line-up then you are always going to have questions. Remember, we won

by five wickets [in the first T20I against New Zealand]. A five-wicket win in a T20 game is a pretty conclusive win," Pothas added.

Nonsensical over-the-top experimentations -- take the case of trying to have Soumya Sarkar established at number six or seven for many years -- are something that often come very casually to the Bangladesh team management.

It is also true that repeated failures from players at one position had sometimes left the management with no options so it had to attempt something out of the box to create a stop-gap fix. But Pothas reminded the repercussions in case of failure in being judicious in this case.

"The biggest danger is chopping and changing the team [so much] that when every time a batter walks in to bat, he feels it is his last innings," he explained.

Shrugging off the latest World Cup fiasco, Bangladesh finally seem to be getting into shape ahead of the next big event -- the T20 World Cup next year. It is nothing new for Bangladesh to lose momentum just at the most crucial juncture and be thwarted back to square one.

For now, all is happy and merry in the Tigers' camp as they look to seal a historic series. But what happens six months from now at the 2024 T20 World Cup? Or, what the scenario would be a year or five years from now?

If Bangladesh are not to find sombre answers to this then they might need to act on what Pothas said, especially on the part where he mentioned "leaving the team alone" in order to let the players keep on "just playing".



South Africa keep home record over India intact

REUTERS, PRETORIA

South Africa shredded through the Indian batting line up to claim victory by an innings and 32 runs in the first Test on Thursday, securing the win inside three days and ensuring their proud home record against the tourists remains intact.

The home attack dismissed India for 131 in their second innings after South Africa had earlier scored 408 for a 163-run first innings lead at Centurion. Only Virat Kohli provided any resistance in an alarming collapse as debutant Nandre Burger took four wickets, Marco Jansen three and Kagiso Rabada two.

With only two Tests being played, South Africa cannot lose the series and remain the only country where India have yet to win an away series. South Africa had begun the day with an 11-run lead on 256-6, with Dean Elgar moving from 140 to 185 before he was dismissed 30 minutes before lunch.

He and Marco Jansen put on 111-run partnership for the sixth wicket, as the pair started the day with positive intent and then fended off some intimidating bowling when India took the second new ball. Jansen was 84 not out, his highest Test score.

The second Test will be at Newlands in Cape Town from Jan. 3-7.

Demand grows for more women's Tests

REUTERS, New Delhi

Two mouth-watering clashes in and around Mumbai this month involving the "Big Three" have whetted the appetite for more Test matches in the women's game and at least one cricket administrator has said he is pushing the idea.

Women's Tests have always been a rarity with only 147 played in the nearly 90 years since England faced Australia in the first, and they have become even scarcer since white-ball cricket started to dominate the game.

That India had not hosted a single Test in nine years until this month -- they played and won in a one-off Test against Australia at Wankhede -- reflected the reality that one-off Tests only sometimes make up the numbers in multi-format bilateral women's international series.

That could be about to change after India, cricket's financial powerhouse, won women's Tests against England and Australia in December to spark renewed interest in the longest format.

"We didn't get that many opportunities in the Test format but hopefully the new generation will get many more games," captain Harmanpreet Kaur said after India's record-breaking victory over England.

Known for her power-hitting and aggressive demeanour, Kaur is one of the crowd-pullers in the women's



game but has played just five Tests in her 14-year international career.

Kaur's English counterpart Heather Knight, who has played less than a Test a year since her international debut in 2010, said the desire for the women's Test game to flourish even shaped England's approach to the game.

"We always feel as players when we play Test cricket that we're fighting for the format a little bit," Knight said before the match against India.

Australia captain Alyssa Healy has played eight Tests in the 13 years since she first played international cricket, a paltry number compared to the 119 her uncle Ian featured in during his 11-year spell wearing the baggy green cap.

Salahuddin undergoes successful surgery

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin underwent a successful coronary artery bypass surgery yesterday at a city hospital, said a BFF statement.

Salahuddin, who is also the president of South Asian Football Federation (SAFF), was shifted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) after the surgery for postoperative monitoring.

"The medical team is closely monitoring the president's vital signs and overall condition to ensure a smooth and uneventful recovery," the BFF statement read. "We are optimistic about the president's prognosis. The doctors are satisfied with the outcome of the surgery and are confident in a full recovery."

The 70-year-old got admitted to a hospital complaining of chest pain on December 17, a day after he unveiled the nameplates Shadhin Bangla Football Team members at the BFF House.

The former national team footballer remained under observation for a number of complications before finally undergoing a successful surgery.

Sohan smashes Bangladesh's fastest List-A ton

SPORTS REPORTER

North Zone batter Habibur Rahman Sohan hit the fastest ever century in List-A cricket in Bangladesh when he smashed a 49-ball ton against Central Zone in a Bangladesh Cricket League One-Day fixture at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar on Thursday.

The right-hander bludgeoned nine sixes and as many fours for his 61-ball 117-run knock that powered his side to an eight-wicket win.

Sohan's blistering knock saw him surpass former Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who had smashed a 50-ball hundred for Kalabagan Krira Chakra against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmendi Club in a Dhaka Premier League fixture in Fatullah in 2016.

However, Sohan has the opposition fielders to thank for his record-breaking knock, as he received two reprieves, once when he was yet to open his account and then again after reaching his fifty.

Chasing a modest target of 202, Sohan put together a 140-run stand with fellow opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim before the latter departed in the 12th over for a 25-ball 34.

Sohan's rollicking innings, that saw him amass 90 runs from boundaries, ended in the 18th over with the score on 174. Amite Hasan (21) and Abdullah al Mamun (20) then guided their side to an easy win.

Earlier, North Zone pacer Shohidul Islam broke the back of Central Zone's batting with four wickets, which was complemented by off-spinner Nahidul Islam's three scalps.



Melbourne Test 'evenly poised'

AGENCIES

Mitchell Marsh and Steven Smith combined to stage a rescue act yesterday as Australia forged a 241-run lead and regained control of the second Test against Pakistan in Melbourne.

The hosts were reeling on 16 for four after Pakistan were dismissed for 264, in reply to their first innings total of 318. But Marsh and Smith put their heads down to compile what could be a match-saving 153-run partnership.

"Firstly, there's a lot of voices inside your head at 4-16. It just comes back to being true to myself and being really clear on my role within this team and knowing how I play my best," said Marsh after agonizingly falling four runs short of a deserving century after a 130-ball stay, but it took a superb one-handed diving catch at slip from Agha Salman to remove him. "To get a Test match hundred would have been nice but ultimately I just wanted to extend that partnership as long as possible," Marsh added.

Australia reached 187 for six at stumps, with Smith (50 off 176) dismissed in the last delivery. "It's evenly poised," he added. "As we saw, I think there's still enough in the wicket so add a few more runs tomorrow [today] and we'll give it our all."

From the first 27 balls he faced, the right-hander scored only eight runs. As he later put it, speaking to Fox Cricket: "I was a cat on a hot tin roof and I felt like I had a defence like Swiss cheese."



Rafael Nadal arrives for a training session in Brisbane yesterday ahead of the Brisbane International tennis tournament, starting from December 31. The 37-year-old will return to the courts with the tournament, almost a year since the Spanish matador last played professionally before an injury curse that has long plagued him returned with a vengeance.

PHOTO:AFP