

'I am happy to see seamers coming through Bangladesh's ranks'

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West Indies, a team that once possessed the fiercest pace quartet in cricket – Andy Roberts, Michael Holding, Joel Garner and Colin Croft – now rarely field three genuine quicks in an eleven, a fact that greatly pains Caribbean fast bowling legend Sir Curtly Ambrose.

Ambrose, who is currently in Dhaka working as a commentator in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), feels that a lack of sporting wickets has stagnated the production of fast bowlers in the Caribbean.

"I can give you an example on how the lack of emphasis on sporting pitches have hurt West Indies when it comes to producing new fast bowlers in the recent years," said Ambrose.

"Pitches in the Caribbean in the recent years are slow and low and I have seen no more than two seamers in the playing eleven, which is disappointing," he added.

Ambrose, however, feels that Bangladesh are heading in the right direction in this regard, as he senses an urgency to prepare sporting pitches during this season of the BPL, which he believes will help fast bowlers hone their skills and flourish in international circuit.

"It's good to be back here in Bangladesh and I must say I am happy to see how the new seamers are coming through the ranks in the past couple of years," said the 60-year-old.

"Pace bowling is a different art where a lot depends on how the surface plays for the seamers. You have to provide the opportunity for both the bowlers and batters to have an equal contest which would ultimately help develop the skills of the cricketers overall.

"I was here in the previous edition of the BPL and although this edition has just started, I can see the urge from the curators to prepare sporting tracks which is a positive sign," he added.

Ambrose also pointed at how difficult it is for pacers to ignore the lure of lucrative Twenty20 leagues around the world and keep their focus on other formats.

"You can't blame the pacers to be honest. T20 cricket is taking over the game in the recent years and it takes a lot out of them to cope up with that. It's also lucrative for the players to overturn the opportunities that they now get since there are too many franchise leagues going around worldwide.

"But I think if you got the skills a pacer can shine in any format of the game but fitness remains the biggest challenge," said Ambrose.

Bangladesh is currently looking for a fast bowling coach after South African legend Allan Donald parted ways with the Tigers after last year's ICC ODI World Cup.

When Ambrose was asked whether he would want to work with the Bangladesh team, the tall man from Antigua seemed pretty interested.

"I love coaching and want to help the pace bowlers to develop and share my experience. I know Courtney [Walsh] has worked with Bangladesh cricket in the past and you never know if things work out I might be interested to work with the Tigers. It's about sharing your knowledge and help the pacers to know the right things."



It was as if the Bangladesh Premier League reverted back to its usual self, producing low-scoring affairs in both encounters on just the second day of the 10th edition of the franchise-based league in Mirpur yesterday. In the first match, Fortune Barishal pacer Khaled Ahmed starred with four wickets for 31 runs to help restrict Rangpur Riders to 134 for nine and an eventual five-wicket win. [Inset] Meanwhile, Khulna Tigers' off-spinner Nahidul Islam helped set up a first win for his side as he returned four for 12 as Chattogram Challengers slumped to 121. Khulna batters still had to dig deep for their four-wicket win. PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED



Tamim, Shakib steal focus on dull day

SPORTS REPORTER

The fact that Tamim Iqbal, a day before Bangladesh Premier League's new season began, had expressed his willingness to talk to Shakib Al Hasan made yesterday's fixture between Fortune Barishal and Rangpur Riders a highly anticipated one.

Hence it was no surprise to see spectators fill the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur on a weekend to watch Shakib, Tamim, and several national stars such as Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad in action.

However, the quality of cricket expected from a T20 match left a lot to be desired as it became a low-scoring encounter, mirroring the tournament's opening fixture, leaving the fans and journalists channel their entire curiosity to the moment when Tamim and Shakib completed formalities at the end of the match.

The Tamim-led Fortune Barishal emerged victorious with five wickets and as many deliveries in the bank.

Based on footages, it appeared the duo restricted their interaction to a mere shake of the hands, after having bumped into the field for the first time following a lengthy absence since the latter half of last year – triggered with Tamim's retirement to unretirement saga before Shakib added fuel to fire during an explosive interview with T Sports ahead of the World Cup in India.

Asked to reveal the nature of his interaction with Shakib during the post-match presser, the winning captain took the minimalist route, saying, "No."

Tamim, who picked up five singles while facing

seven balls from Shakib during his brisk 24-ball 35, was visibly annoyed when the question was repeated.

"I don't think this question is important. You all know about it. Why do you keep on poking? If you have to ask something then ask him (Shakib)," said Tamim.

Speaking about his resumption to competitive cricket after around three months, Tamim admitted that his nerves began to settle after scoring his first boundary early in the innings.

"It was very challenging since I didn't even train for the past two and half months. I have started practicing for the last two weeks, so I think it was a positive start for me both as a captain and also as a batter," he said.

Shakib, on the other hand, made a comeback after missing the last two ICC World Cup matches due to a finger injury, and it was later known that he experienced vision impairment during the mega event.

Shakib, who was elected as the member of the parliament during this period, will be disappointed with his overall performance on return to centre stage.

He appeared out of sorts with the bat before being dismissed by pacer Khaled Ahmed after scoring only two runs. Nevertheless, the 36-year-old demonstrated his class with the ball, picking up two wickets and giving only 16 runs in four overs.

Given Shakib's character, the star cricketer will undoubtedly seek to win the next battle when he confronts Tamim.

Meanwhile, rest assured, fans and media will be keen to witness the next episode in the lingering drama involving the two stalwarts of Bangladesh cricket.



Bangladesh's 17-year-old left-arm pacer Maruf Mridha was effective both in the early and death overs, returning figures of five for 43 in eight overs which also included a maiden to help the young Tigers restrict defending champions India to a modest 251 for seven in 50 overs in their ICC Under-19 World Cup opener in Bloemfontein yesterday. However, a top-order collapse saw the reigning Asian champions begin their quest for a second title with an 84-run defeat.

PHOTO: X

Noskova joins the giant-killing party

AGENCIES

The Australian Open has fast turned into a graveyard for high-profile players as world number one Iga Swiatek became the latest top-10 seed to crash out, losing 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 to Czech teenager Linda Noskova in the third round as her bid for a maiden title at Melbourne Park and fifth Grand Slam trophy fell apart.

Poland's Swiatek came into the third-round match against 50th-ranked Noskova on an 18-match unbeaten run, targeting a first title at Melbourne Park.

Things were looking up for Swiatek after a strong opening set but Noskova dug deep to become the first teenager to defeat the top-ranked player at the Australian Open since Amelie Mauresmo toppled Lindsay Davenport in 1999.

"I'm speechless," said Czech player Noskova, who is at her first Australian Open. "I knew it was going to be an amazing match, but I didn't really think it would end up like this."

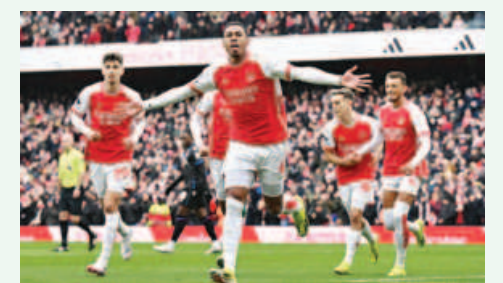
The emotional 19-year-old crouched to the floor and put her hands over her face when the big moment came and buried her head in her towel later and cried.

"I'm just really glad to get through this round," she added.

Just three of the top 10 women's seeds remain in the draw at the end of the first week – defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, Coco Gauff, and Barbora Krejickova. Swiatek joins current Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova along with Elena Rybakina, Jessica Pegula, Ons Jabeur, Maria Sakkari, and Beatriz Haddad Maia to have already crashed out of the Australian Open.

Swiatek took the opening set and barely let the

SHORT CORNER



Arsenal ease back to winning ways

Arsenal breathed new life into their Premier League title challenge as a 5-0 win over Crystal Palace got the Gunners back to winning ways. Arsenal had won just once in seven games before a two-week winter break.

Sufil regaining his lost touch?

Brothers Union striker Mahbubur Rahman Sufil scored a brace yesterday against Chittagong Abahani, taking his tally to three goals in the ongoing season of the Bangladesh Premier League – three times as many as his goals for Bashundhara Kings and Mohammedan combined following his departure from Arambagh KS in 2018.

Australia keep faith in Smith as opener

Steve Smith's first outing as a Test opener may not have gone to plan but Australia coach Andrew McDonald said he had the full support of the team and that it would take time for him to build a relationship with Usman Khawaja at the top of the order.

Low-key Miami debut for Suarez

Luis Suarez made a subdued debut alongside former Barcelona teammate Lionel Messi as Inter Miami kicked off their pre-season tour Friday with a 0-0 draw against El Salvador. The 36-year-old Uruguayan forward struggled to find his footing in a low-key start to his career with the Florida franchise. Suarez, Messi and fellow former Barcelona players Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba were all substituted at half-time with the match scoreless.

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intensity drop after that as she forced the Melbourne Park debutant into some uncomfortable positions in the second by working the angles and launching big forehands.

"I felt like I had everything under control until she broke me in the second set," Swiatek said. "I had couple of chances to break her in second set and I didn't use them. That's a shame."

"She was proactive, I wanted to do that later in the next games. Sometimes I was rushing it. I wasn't playing with my intuition and naturally."

Noskova heaped the pressure on the four-time major champion to take a 2-1 lead in the decider.

Swiatek looked to have composed herself during a brief pause in play as doctors attended to a sick supporter in the crowd and broke back, but Noskova did not relent and got her nose in front again to close out the match on serve and complete a huge upset.

"I was shaking a little," Noskova said about serving for the victory. "I didn't hit two first serves which was not the best start for me but I pulled out an ace."