

Naib feels 'at home' in Bangladesh

Afghanistan all-rounder **Gulbadin Naib** has been in fantastic hitting form, as evidenced by his performance in the recent India series. Thus the 32-year-old's inclusion in the Durdanto Dhaka roster has injected new life into the franchise's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) campaign. During an interview with **Abdullah Al Mehdi** of *The Daily Star*, Naib discusses the Bangladesh players, Afghanistan's ODI World Cup exploits last year, and why Afghan players are in demand in global franchise leagues. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Having competed in both Dhaka Premier League (DPL) and BPL, how would you rank the cricketing and the overall culture here?
Gulbadin Naib (GN): Honestly, I feel like I am at my own home here. The people are very friendly and they are very honest, which I've felt especially as a foreigner. When we're sharing the dressing room with Bangladeshi players, they are very friendly. Players such as Taskin [Ahmed], Mushfiqur [Rahim], Tamim [Iqbal] and the other guys make me feel like I'm not an outsider. I hope I will keep coming here again and again.



DS: What is the difference between playing for Afghanistan against Bangladesh and playing in BPL?

GN: When you're playing for the national side and when you are playing for a franchise, it's not much different; just the colours are different on the ground. The only difference is the pride we have as an Afghan.

DS: When players come to play BPL from other countries, spending time can be difficult for many. Do you experience boredom?

GN: I'm just trying to be myself. If I have my own teammates from Afghanistan -- like Najib [Najibullah Zadran], who is here, or Azmat [Azmatullah Omarzai] -- we are just trying to get together and go out for meals. Obviously, I like to know about new things, culture-wise and about people; different food too. I love going out and meeting Bangladeshis and their families. Last time we had a good time at Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's farmhouse in Dhaka. I find a lot of good things with the culture here, and that's the best experience.

DS: Afghanistan struggled at the beginning of the ODI World Cup but suddenly turned things around while showing great team chemistry. What was the secret?

GN: There's no big secret; it's just hard work. If you look at the last ten years of Afghanistan cricket's journey, we played against the top teams in the world. The good thing is our boys are playing a lot of franchise cricket all over the world, and that's another key factor behind our success. The best thing is not the cricket on the field, it's that the people in Afghanistan support us a lot. They give a positive energy to the team and it's always the same, regardless of the results.

Recently, we understood that we can beat any team in the world. Beating Pakistan, Sri Lanka, England and Netherlands and nearly beating Australia at the World Cup was a big achievement for us. We had the goal of qualifying for the semifinals but we couldn't; it's part of the game.



Rohanat Doullah Borson was elated as the right-arm medium pacer returned match-winning figures of four for 19 in 8.5 overs to help Bangladesh bundle out Nepal for just 169 to begin their ICC Under-19 World Cup Super Sixes with a comprehensive five-wicket win in Bloemfontein yesterday.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

'Mid-range BPL needs local talents in its core'

Russell Arnold joining the commentary panel of the ongoing 10th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) marked the Sri Lankan's return to the country after nearly eight years. The former Lankan batter did share his thoughts on Bangladesh cricket and BPL among a few other topics during an exclusive interview with **Mazhar Uddin** of *The Daily Star*. The excerpts of the interview are below:

The Daily Star (DS): Tell us about your experience here in Bangladesh.
Russell Arnold (RA): It's been good, decent but a lot colder than I anticipated in Dhaka.

DS: When compared to other franchise leagues, how would you rate BPL?

RA: I would say mid-range. Of course, it is hard to compare with leagues like IPL [Indian Premier League] and others. But the support and interest that you see in locals and the fact that the cricket is of a good standard is encouraging.

DS: What are the areas you think the authorities need to focus on in order to make BPL more competitive?

RA: The local talents need to take more responsibility and need to establish themselves as the core of the teams. Because once the local players start performing, the younger players will be given more opportunities and responsibilities. That's when the league will get better and stronger teams. Foreign players are there to be in the mix but the core of the team should be built around the local players and that's one area that could be looked at.

I thought it shouldn't have happened. If you go by the letter of the law, yes, there was a genuine reason why Matthews, at that point, had to be given out. But things could have been handled differently.

Russell Arnold on Angelo Matthews' timed out controversy during 2023 ODI World Cup.



DS: Do you think Bangladesh reached the stage it was expected to since getting the Test status?

RA: No, I don't think so as a lot more could be done with the talent that's around. They haven't made the strides you thought they would

have. There have been flashes and glimpses and then the next step is not taken. So, higher standards need to be set and I do think that Bangladesh have shown time and again that they should have been achieving a lot more.

DS: Do you believe Bangladesh need to win a major title -- like Sri Lanka did in 1997 -- for the flourishing of the country's cricketing culture?

RA: A title is always nice because that sets the bar higher and goals that others want to emulate.

DS: As Bangladesh are yet to prove their mettle in the T20 format, what should be the approach from the team in the ICC T20 World Cup later this year?

RA: Playing fearless cricket, believing in themselves, believing that they can compete with the best, and expressing themselves -- that's what Bangladesh need to do. They need to figure out their strength which is more spin-based just like Sri Lanka and try to capitalise on it. Also, the senior players need to lead from the front by performing well.

****Read full interview on The Daily Star website.**

Young Tigers keep hopes alive

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh kept their slim chances of moving into the semifinals of the ICC U19 World Cup alive with a five-wicket victory against Nepal in their first match of the Super Sixes stage yesterday.

The Young Tigers raced to the victory target of 170 in 25.2 overs in Bloemfontein, thanks to 55 from opener Jishan Alam and an unbeaten 59 from Ariful Islam. Subash Bhandari took all the five wickets for Nepal.

Earlier, Bangladesh skittled Nepal for 169 runs in 49.5 overs, with medium pacer Rohanat Doulla Borson taking four wickets.

The win took Bangladesh to four points overall. They trail India and Pakistan by two points. Bangladesh (NRR +0.348) will need to beat Pakistan (NRR +1.064) in their last Super Sixes game on Sunday and get the net run-rate above them to have any chance of finishing among the top two teams from the group to book a semifinals berth.

Mashrafe leaves BPL for Parliament

SPORTS REPORTER



Sylhet Strikers had already slumped to their fifth straight defeat in the Bangladesh Premier League on Tuesday and will have to do without the services of captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza for an uncertain period of time.

Mashrafe decided to take a break from the ongoing 10th Bangladesh Premier League to join his responsibility as the Whip in Parliament, the franchise announced on Wednesday.

"Mashrafe will be available to play for the Strikers further in the season if there is opportunity in between his political commitments and schedule," the franchise said in a statement.

Vice-captain Mohammad Mithun will take over the responsibilities in Mashrafe's absence.

Mashrafe had played in all the games for his side but faced criticism from all corners for beginning the tournament without full fitness after having returned to cricket following a break of eight months.

Questions have been asked about whether he was up to the task as he bowled with a short run-up and even as he got a wicket off his very first delivery, it was used as an argument against BPL's lack of competitiveness.

Sylhet cannot seem to get out of the hole they have dug for themselves, dwelling in the bottom of the seven-team league without a single point.



South Africa were the latest team to produce an upset in the ongoing Africa Cup of Nations, knocking out Morocco, the tournament's top-ranked team and the 2022 World Cup semifinalists, with a 2-0 victory at the last-16 stage in San Pedro on Tuesday. Morocco's exit meant that all of Africa's representatives at the 2022 World Cup have already gone home.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

Japan cruise into Asian Cup quarters

REUTERS, Doha

Four-time champions Japan eased into the quarterfinals of the Asian Cup with a clinical 3-1 victory over Bahrain on Wednesday at Al Thumama Stadium with goals from Ritsu Doan, Takefusa Kubo and Ayase Ueda.

Bahrain coach Juan Anotnio Pizzi had been looking to heal old wounds after his Saudi Arabia team lost to Japan at the same stage in 2019 but Hajime Moriyasu's side put in a commanding performance and rarely looked troubled against the Gulf nation.

Japan will face the winner of the final last-16 tie between Iran and Syria later on Wednesday.

"All Asian teams here are getting better. But even though other teams are growing, we've managed to improve as well which is down to our players' efforts," Moriyasu told reporters. "But I don't think today's performances were 100% and we can still improve."

SHORT CORNER

Mahmudullah 'auto choice' for Bangladesh T20I team

Based on form, former Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah Riyad should be included in the Bangladesh T20I team without any hesitation, claimed Jalal Yunus, the chairman of the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) cricket operations committee yesterday. Mahmudullah was sidelined due to his performance, fitness, and team combination, since he played for the Tigers in the shortest format back in September 2022.

Marsh beats front-runner Cummins to Allan Border medal

Australian all-rounder Mitch Marsh romped to his maiden Allan Border medal with 233 votes, 79 ahead of Pat Cummins. Marsh is the first all-rounder to take out the award in more than a decade, with Shane Watson the last to do it in 2011.

Shoaib Malik to return to BPL on Friday

Veteran Pakistan all-rounder Shoaib Malik is set for a return to action for Bangladesh Premier League side Fortune Barishal after a sudden departure from the tournament last week. Barishal confirmed that they will welcome back the all-rounder, who will join the side on February 2, on the eve of their final match in Sylhet.

****Read full stories on The Daily Star website.**