

“I want to play forever. I love the sport. It’s given me so much, taught me loads of lessons over the years that I can use in the rest of my life. But I don’t want to stop, so it is hard.”

Two-time Wimbledon singles champion Andy Murray, who had an emotional sendoff on Centre Court following Thursday’s doubles defeat at Wimbledon. The British tennis icon is still set for at least one more match in the mixed doubles.



When will Hathurusingha take responsibility?

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

A lack of ambition has clearly surmounted the lack of ability in the Bangladesh national cricket team setup.

The team, evidently, is striving to maintain the mediocre status quo is an environment where no real ambition can pierce through, with the major stakeholders having no vision to reach excellence.

Exhibit A in this regard is how Bangladesh fluffed an opportunity to reach the semifinals of the T20 World Cup for the first time in their history.

Bangladesh needed 116 runs in 12.1 overs against Afghanistan in their last Super Eight contest to guarantee qualification. However, after losing a few wickets, the Tigers abandoned their attempt at fulfilling that equation and instead played for the win.

The reason behind that questionable approach that reeked of a mediocre mentality was later revealed by the skipper in a statement which most took as utter buffoonery, as Shanto

said that after Bangladesh lost three in the first three overs, they focused on only winning the game, a victory that would be of no benefit to them.

While Shanto has been copping a lot of flak for this statement, with even the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon criticising the skipper for it, the person who got the ball rolling in this mediocre path, head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, has seemingly got off scot-free.

After Bangladesh qualified for the Super Eight for the first time since 2007, Hathurusingha stated that the Tigers had achieved their goal in the tournament and whatever came after would be a bonus.

The players’ performances in the next two matches reflected the coach’s statement, where they surrendered against Australia and India without even putting up a fight.

And when circumstances presented them with an opportunity that every team could only dream about, the Tigers did not even go all out at taking it, perhaps already

satisfied with their ‘bonus’ phase of the competition.

Since Hathurusingha’s re-appointment at the beginning of last year, Bangladesh have played two World Cups– the 2023 ODI World Cup in India and this year’s T20 World Cup in North America.

He was brought in to streamline a path to the semis in last year’s World Cup but instead under his tutelage Bangladesh had one of their worst ever campaigns. In the T20 World



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Cup, other than a few match-winning efforts from the bowling unit, there wasn’t anything to get excited about.

However, these underwhelming displays have hardly mattered as Hathurusingha’s job seems to be secure and much like the BCB, his role seemingly demands very little accountability.

In every sport, the coach has to take responsibility along with the players for disappointing campaigns but Hathurusingha seems to be an exception in this regard.

Papon, who is serving his third

term as the BCB boss, expressed his satisfaction with the team reaching the Super Eight and with the team ending their campaign with three wins overall – the most ever by Bangladesh in a campaign.

He hardly said a word about Bangladesh’s appalling batting display, head coach Hathurusingha’s role in allowing the team to slip into such mediocrity and the failure of batting coach David Hemp to get the batters out of their slump.

Hathurusingha’s evolution as the Bangladesh coach also provides an interesting insight on how a culture of mediocrity effects everyone that’s part of it. When he was first appointed as Bangladesh coach in 2015, it seemed that Bangladesh had brought in a top coach who was astute in planning successful campaigns. And impressive results did follow.

Almost a decade later, and into his second stint with Bangladesh, it seems that the Sri Lankan has clothed himself in mediocrity and the once result-oriented and stubborn coach has settled himself well into

Bangladesh’s culture of playing it safe and doing the bare minimum.

BCB has always lacked in long-term vision and when the coach at the helm shares the same attitude, it’s a recipe for an unsustainable future filled with uninspiring showings and inevitable mediocrity.

In the T20 World Cup, Bangladesh shook the very foundation of why professional sports is played by consciously choosing to ignore a shot at excellence. It won’t be a stretch to assume that the 19 other teams that played in the tournament would go out of their way to achieve excellence if they were presented with the opportunity Bangladesh received.

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Now, will the BCB finally demand accountability from Hathurusingha or will they maintain the status quo as raising questions will bring them directly into the firing line?

MARTINEZ the shoot-out ‘animal’

AGENCIES

It will be tough for Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez to top his penalty shoot-out heroics from the run to World Cup glory in Qatar in 2022 but that certainly won’t stop him trying.

The keeper, known as ‘El Dibu’ by his adoring fans, produced two brilliant diving saves in the shoot-out to earn his team a 4-2 win on penalties against Ecuador in the Copa America quarter-finals on Thursday.

The game had ended 1-1 in normal time and with no extra time in the Copa, until the final, the game went straight to penalties.

When Lionel Messi chipped the opening attempt against the top of the bar, the almost 70,000 fans in NRG Stadium could have been forgiven for thinking Argentina’s title defense was about to end. But Martinez had other ideas.



Just as he had done against Colombia, in the Copa semi-final in Brazil in 2021 and then against the Netherlands in the quarter-final of the World Cup when he saved two Dutch spot-kicks, the Aston Villa keeper turned the game in his team’s favor.

“Dibu is an animal. The truth is that what he is doing is crazy. He deserves it. He loves to wear these colors. He gives us a lot of security and peace of mind. We try to do the same for him, but in these important moments he’s always there, he’s always there,” said midfielder Rodrigo De Paul.

“I knew that ‘Dibu’ would come good, he loves those moments, he rises to them,” said a relieved Messi. “He had faith in himself. Even before the game he was joking that if it went to penalties, we should relax.”

His most famous performance of all, of course, was in the World Cup final against France when not only did he save from Kingsley Coman but his mind games put added pressure on Aurelien Tchouameni who missed his kick as Argentina won the shoot-out 4-2.

This time there was no dancing on his line, no indication of his chatter with opponents or other mind-games – although he certainly made clear his joy at the saves with his gestures to the fans.

“I told the guys before the penalty shootout that I wasn’t ready to go home. This group deserves to go all the way to the final,” Martinez told Argentine television.

Martinez dived to his left to deny Angel Mena and then to his right to keep out

Alan Minda’s spot-kick, celebrating his saves wildly.

It also extended the 31-year-old’s penalty record with Argentina to an astonishing 50%. Of 24 penalties faced for the national side, Martinez has saved nine with three off target.

“I got a bit full on with the crowd. I had all the Argentinians here, my family close by. So these are special moments,” he said.

Martinez, who won the Golden Glove at the World Cup and was voted FIFA’s Best Goalkeeper in 2022, has come through plenty of tough battles in his career, having moved to England as a teenager, joining Arsenal.

While he dreamt of making his mark in the Premier League and with the national team, there was little glamour in his early years with the Gunners as he was loaned out to lower-league clubs.

He had spells at Oxford United, Sheffield Wednesday and Rotherham United before stepping up to Wolverhampton Wanderers and eventually getting a chance with Arsenal.

He was sold to Aston Villa in 2020 and saved a penalty in his first game for his new club against Sheffield United.

He has established such a rapport with the Argentine team and produced such vital saves from the spot and in open play that coach Lionel Scaloni said he had ensured an ultra-confident mood for his team-mates in the shoot-out.

“In the penalties I think the team felt a blind trust in their goalkeeper and for us that is fundamental. Even if Leo missed I think the team knew that something positive was going to happen. That is so important,” he said.



Zia ‘Bangladesh’s best’ with legacy unparalleled

Bangladesh’s fourth GM Abdullah Al Rakib shared his experience and memories with Ziaur Rahman, who passed away from a heart attack while competing in the National Chess Championship in Dhaka yesterday. Here are the excerpts:

“I have been playing for the national team since the age of 14 and from the beginning, I had a good personal relationship with Zia bhai; someone who always treated me as a younger brother. I have numerous memories with him during our chess journey. A friendly, big-hearted person, his simplicity, strong ethics and sincerity always inspired us. When we came into the scene, Niaz [Murshed] bhai had already passed his prime. We didn’t see much of his playing before he became Grandmaster, but Zia bhai and Rifat [Bin Sattar] bhai had seen him at work.

I think Zia bhai’s dedication and contribution to the sport is unmatched. After Niaz bhai, Zia bhai got the first GM norm and then I achieved the landmark in 2001. After that, Zia bhai told me that my GM norm has made him excited to seek another GM norm.

Actually, we were not jealous about others’ success. We have become Grandmaster nearly at the same time. We played so many tournaments as teammates and also as opponents. I can’t describe all these words. I think his contribution to the sport and Bangladesh will be remembered for a long time. I can say that, performance-wise, he was the best chess player for Bangladesh.”

Paris-bound archer Sagor ‘confident of bringing home Olympic medal’

Archer Sagor Islam, at just 18 years old, has made history as the youngest athlete from his country to earn a direct spot in the Olympic Games, following in the footsteps of golfer Siddiquir Rahman and archer Ruman Sana who achieved the same in previous editions. Overcoming poverty with unwavering support from his widowed mother, BKSP, and the Bangladesh Archery Federation, Sagor, a high school student in the 11th grade, has reached this milestone. While he has not yet won an individual event medal in either domestic or international competitions, Sagor surprised many by securing a direct Olympic entry and even clinching a silver medal in last month’s Final Olympic Quota tournament. The lad from Rajshahi discussed his career, passion for archery, and future aspirations with The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman in an exclusive interview, the excerpts of which are as follows:

ANISUR RAHMAN

The Daily Star (DS): How did you feel talking to your mother from Turkey after securing a direct entry to the Paris Olympic Games?

Sagor Islam (SI): It took me nearly four hours to reach my mother by phone from the hotel in Turkey because I had no network during the competition. When I asked her if she knew about my achievement, she replied positively and blessed me, hoping for even better results in the Olympics. At that moment, I felt like the most successful son in the world; I felt like I was number one. My mother’s happiness is my happiness because she raised me without my father, fulfilling as many of my demands as she could. I have come this far because of her.

DS: What were your expectations going into the Final Olympic Quota tournament in Turkey?

SI: We started to believe that our hard work and continuous practice could lead to something significant. Others also supported us in achieving our goals. I personally believed that this year, with seven months of relentless training, we had become really strong.

DS: There were high expectations for the men’s recurve team to secure a quota place,

but they were eliminated in the quarterfinals, and you outshone them in the individual events as the youngest team member.

SI: Yes, we had hoped for a lot from the team event, but things didn’t go as planned. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we cannot control the outcome. We approached the competition in our own way, but unfortunately, we didn’t succeed.

DS: What was going through your mind when you entered the quarterfinals following the elimination of two teammates in previous rounds?

SI: I started with a positive mindset. I focused solely on my performance without worrying about others because I had nothing to lose. I was confident that if I performed to the best of my ability, I could secure a direct quota place for the Paris Olympics.

DS: You will be competing against the world’s top archers in the upcoming Paris Olympics, although they were absent from

the Final Olympic Quota tournament in Turkey. How confident are you in your ability to compete with them?

SI: Korean archers and other top archers qualified directly. I achieved the same qualification as they did, so I never considered myself inferior to them. I believed I am on their level because I competed against archers from all over the world, not just Asia.

DS: What kind of training are you undergoing now under German coach Martin Fredrick in Tongi, following your qualification for the Paris Olympics?

SI: Previously, the coach focused on all members of the national team, but now he is solely guiding me for the Olympics. I continue to train by shooting over 320 arrows every day, similar to what I did during national camp. Fredrick and others are inspiring me greatly to boost my confidence and provide mental motivation so that I can perform well in the Olympics.

DS: What are your thoughts on the Paris Olympics?

SI: It’s hard to predict my own performance at the Paris Olympics, but I am confident



that if I perform naturally, I can compete with anyone and bring a medal home for the nation. The biggest challenge for me is to stay composed during critical moments and maintain my focus, as archery is as much a mental game as it is physical.

DS: How do you feel about the discussion to potentially send Hakim Ahmed Rubel instead of you to the Paris Olympics?

SI: I think it’s normal because I earned the quota for the nation, and the coach and federation have the right to decide what’s best for the country. I didn’t feel upset about it because I would have accepted whatever decision the coach and federation made. Nevertheless, I am grateful to finally represent the nation at the Paris Olympics.

DS: What are your expectations from the other athletes – Imranur Rahman, Robiul Islam, Samiul Islam, and Sonia Akter – participating in the Paris Olympics?

SI: It’s a rare opportunity to compete in the Olympics, so I hope they will give their best efforts to achieve something for the nation. In sports, there are no guarantees that even a talented athlete will succeed. As for archery, anything can happen.