

“I turned my critiques into my supporters”

-- NAHIDA AKTAR

Hailing from Kishoreganj, Nahida Aktar had her eye on sports from a young age.

“We used to live in Dhaka since I was a child because my father was a government job holder. We used to live in a colony where I was always playing something or the other with the neighbours. People would call those ‘boy’s’ sports,” she recalled.

Nahida Aktar, however, knew that just playing on the streets was not her goal. She wanted to make something of herself using her love for sports and her skills.

“I used to keep checking the newspaper to see when BKSP [Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishthan] was admitting students. The moment I found a suitable time to be admitted, I took my chance and thankfully got in,” Aktar explained.

And added — “My schooling, training, everything happened in BKSP. After leaving home and my family, there was a stubbornness working in me. I kept thinking, ‘I came away from home to do this, and I must do something bigger than just joining BKSP. I need to prove myself.’ Even being admitted was a big opportunity for me. When I got the chance, my thought

process changed. I thought, ‘If I need to do something for myself, this is where I can do it from, there is no alternative.’”

At BKSP, coaches Mehedi Hasan and Dolly Rani Sarker took Nahida under their wings.

“I was always more into batting, but they kept insisting that I get into spin bowling. They saw something in me that I had not. They pushed me towards left-arm spinning. I would sometimes get annoyed, but now I realise that because they pushed me, I am where I am now as a bowler,” she shared.

After training in left-arm spin, Nahida played her first match against Abahani and got a five-wicket haul.

“I was just in class eight. That’s when my journey began at the national camp,” she recounted.

However, criticism was always there. “My family was hounded by neighbours for letting me play, but that just pushed me further to prove myself. I told myself, ‘I need to get out of here [the colony] to play and show them what I can do,’” Nahida said.

“When I left, I was away from all the criticisms. They did not see me, so they did



not speak. But once I established myself, their attitude changed towards me. They then began praising me and telling my family about how well I was doing. I was able to turn my critiques into my supporters through my performance,” she said, with a smile on her face.

Today, Nahida is not only the vice-captain of the national team but also the only Bangladesh woman to be named ICC Player of the Month (November 2023) and to be included in the ICC Team of the Year (January 2024).

“Any such achievement, especially on an international platform, is a huge deal. Without the support of my team, my captain [Nigar Sultana Jyoti], our manager, it would have been impossible. However, there’s always some pressure after international achievements – that of holding on to it. People’s expectations rise. While that feels good, it also gives some pressure,” Aktar added.

Nahida Aktar Age: 24
Debut: 2015

Bowling style: Slow left-arm orthodox
Best performance: 5-8 against Pakistan
in WT20I, Chattogram, 2023

Courtesy: TDS Sports Desk

“I always say, ‘Don’t tell them, show them’”

-- JAHANARA ALAM

Jahanara Alam was one of 11 players to debut together and form the first-ever Bangladesh women’s cricket team. Before that, she never imagined she would be representing the country to the world.

“I was an ordinary girl with no big aspirations. My mother used to dream that my sister and I would become news presenters so that she could see us on TV. But my sister became a sub-inspector and I, a cricketer,” Alam shared.

From the age of 10, Jahanara had a knack for sports.

“I was a student of Pioneer Girl’s High School in Khulna, which was popular for sporting activities across the district. When I saw some seniors playing volleyball one day, I asked if I could touch and receive the ball. Our Madam, who was watching from afar, called me to her and asked me if I wanted to play, and I immediately said yes,” Alam recounted.

“With my parents’ permission, I began to practice the very next day and within months, I was included in the main school team. I realised then that perhaps I had something in me,” she reflected.

In 2003, Jahanara came to Dhaka to represent the Khulna division’s handball team, and in 2004, she played the first domestic football match for women as part of the divisional team.

“I was only 11 then. A news channel had taken my interview, and I was so happy that my mother would get to see me in the news, perhaps not as a presenter but in the



news nonetheless!” she chuckled.

In December 2006, the Bangladesh Cricket Board took the initiative to form a women’s team, as per ICC directives.

“All the divisional coaches under BCB were then informed to recruit talented sportspersons. Our divisional coach was the late Sheikh Mohammad Salauddin sir, who was the spin bowling coach of the national men’s team back then. He used to live near my home, and he noticed that I had a ‘sporty’ personality,” Jahanara explained.

She added, “Khulna is a conservative place and there, I stood out. I would be walking about in T-shirts, trousers, and sneakers. He noticed that. One day, he approached me and asked if I would be willing to play cricket. I immediately said yes – it’s a sport, so I will play.”

Jahanara, however, had no idea about cricket when she readily agreed to play.

“Initially, I was not able to do anything – no bowling, no fielding, no batting. I was clueless. I didn’t even watch cricket before I started playing it,” Alam admitted.

“But what I had was fitness. Even before training time, I would show up on the field and do whatever I could to increase my stamina and endurance. I was first put in the ‘batting group.’ However, after a month of training, I found my strength in pace bowling,” she revealed.

With intense training, Jahanara achieved her highest speed of 120 kmph. “Once it dropped to 116 kmph, I trained harder to bring it back up. And Salauddin sir ensured that I was able to do so,”

Back in Khulna, Jahanara was a victim of rampant “eve-teasing.”

“There was a time I borrowed my aunt’s burka to commute to school. I didn’t share it with my family out of fear that they would stop me from taking part in sports. My parents too faced a lot of insults from society. During my adolescence, people would tell them, ‘Your daughter is of age, why are you letting her play? If she wears sports jerseys, no one will want to marry

her,” she recalled.

To them, her father replied, “My daughter is not doing anything wrong. She is doing a good thing. If she wants to play, I will let her play. My grandmother too was one of my biggest strengths. She has passed away, but I remember when I was younger, my father had a rule to return home before Maghrib. If I was ever late, my grandmother would wait outside and when I came, she would take my hand and walk inside the house, saying, ‘She was with me,’” Jahanara Alam shared, her voice brimming with love and respect.

After Jahanara made a name for herself, those who had pressured her parents changed their tune.

“They now say, ‘Jahanara is our pride.’ And that’s why I always say, ‘Don’t tell them, show them,’” she concluded.

After a year-long break, Jahanara is representing the country again as they face Ireland. This interview was taken just before the start of the series.

“I feel blessed to be able to represent Bangladesh again. I worked hard for it,” she smiled.

Jahanara Alam Age: 31
Debut: 2011

Bowling style: Right-arm medium
Best performance: 5-15 against
Ireland in WT20I, Dublin, 2018

Courtesy: TDS Sports Desk