



NAHID RANA A golden goose worth taking care of

ASHEFAQ-UL-ALAM

One of Aesop's renowned fables, 'The goose that laid the golden eggs', imparts a timeless lesson: too much greed can ruin one's fortune. It also highlights the value of patience – a virtue the Bangladesh Cricket Board could embrace to nurture the immense potential of one of their brightest prospects, Nahid Rana.

The youngster on Monday treated the hopelessly optimistic Bangladesh fans, who tuned to watch the third day's play of the second Test against the West Indies in Jamaica, with a breathtaking bowling performance.

Despite the team's prospects looking quite dire, Bangladesh speedster Rana did not only spring life back into the Tigers but also saw the visitors assume the driver's seat.

Rana breathed fire and the heat was too much to handle for the West Indian batters, who hopped, swayed, took blows and swung the bat blind while trying to cope with his raw pace.

The reading on the speed gun rarely dropped below 140kph and often skirted around the 150 mark and his line and length were similarly unrelenting.

The pitch at the Sabina Park felt tailor-made for Rana, who from his 6.3 feet stature took full toll of the movement offered from the wicket and made life difficult for the host batters.

Seeing him tear through the opposition and claim a maiden five-wicket haul in Tests inevitably brought up one question, however.

Why oh why, was Rana not picked for the first Test?

One match in, one match out

In the series opener, Bangladesh went with the pace trio of Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud and Shoriful Islam, leaving Rana on the bench. No official or unofficial source said anything about the pacer being injured or unfit. Rana was simply not picked.

A brief look through Rana's five-match-old Test career shows that this was not a one-off occurrence.

Rana made his debut in March this year against Sri Lanka in Sylhet in the first of a two-Test series but was left out in the second match.

In August, he played both Tests against Pakistan in Rawalpindi. But in the away series against India and then the home series against South Africa, he played one match each.

This tendency of playing the pacer sporadically may seem like an error from the team management. But in retrospect, it has been a wise choice.

To say an express pacer like Rana is a rare commodity in Bangladesh cricket is a gross understatement. A pacer with such raw pace would be considered a special talent anywhere. But bowling this fast takes a toll on the human body.

Pacers are naturally more prone to injuries than cricketers of other specialties and hence need extra care. And for an express fast bowler like Rana, the need for care increases in folds as one misstep is enough to ruin a career.

The pitfall of greed

Bangladesh's track record of handling fast bowlers is not exactly great. In fact, it could be argued that the team management singlehandedly took years out of the career of the first true fast-bowling prodigy the country ever had.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Bangladesh's most successful white-ball captain, was the country's first true pace bowling sensation too.

In November 2001, at 18 years of age, Mashrafe made his Test debut in Dhaka and almost immediately grabbed everyone's attention. In him, Bangladesh finally had a pacer who could bowl in excess of 140kph.

And the Tigers did not shy away from using his services, making him bowl over 60 overs in his first two Tests.

About a month later, he was in Hamilton, playing a Test against the Kiwis while carrying back pain. The team management knew about his pain, but still used him for 27 overs in the lone bowling innings for Bangladesh, more than anyone else in the attack.

It was reported by the media at the time that Mashrafe was in so much pain that he did not bowl at all in the net session before the second Test was expected to be rested.

But coach Trevor Chappell and captain Khaled Mashud could not resist the temptation of having a genuine pacer in the attack. Mashrafe played in the Wellington Test as well, while carrying the injury, trudged through 16 overs before leaving the field in pain.

It took Mashrafe more than a year to recover and return to the Test arena but his pace was never the same. He still remained an effective bowler and carved out a decent international career but never reached the height he might have.

Preserving the golden goose

Now, coming back to the question posed at the beginning, the Bangladesh team management, led by head coach Phil Simmons, surely knew Rana could be a lethal bowler in Caribbean conditions and improve Bangladesh's chances drastically.

Still, they chose to sit Rana out in the Antigua Test, which they lost by 201 runs, to manage his workload. Presumably, they sat him out for one Test each in the India and South Africa series for the same reason.

Simmons, who has also coached the West Indies team in two terms, knew that the wicket in Jamaica would suit Rana's style even more and chose to unleash him in the second Test.

"We knew it was coming at some stage. When you bowl 150kph, you are going to take wickets eventually. We've got to look after him. That's why he didn't play in the first Test match," said Bangladesh bowling coach Andre Adams after the day's play.

The ploy has worked wonderfully so far, as after winning the first Test quite easily, the hosts were almost lulled into a sense of security, which got shattered by Rana.

Now, some might feel that by not playing Rana in the first Test, Bangladesh missed a serious trick. But, the aforementioned fable of Aesop and Mashrafe's tragic career teaches us that it's better to be extra cautious with your golden goose as too much greed could leave one without any gold at all.

Bangladesh hockey reaches elusive shores

ANISUR RAHMAN

Creating a landmark moment for Bangladesh hockey, the U21 team outplayed Thailand 7-2 in the Hockey Junior Asia Cup in Muscat, Oman, yesterday to secure a spot in next year's FIH Junior World Cup in India – set to be the country's maiden appearance in a hockey World Cup at any level.

In 2008, Bangladesh's youth hockey team – who featured in the Youth Olympic Games in 2014 and 2018 – came close to qualifying for the main event but returned home disappointed after a 1-0 defeat to Malaysia in the deciding fixture.

against strong teams like Malaysia and China being significant achievements. Finishing third in the pool was crucial, as we knew we would face Thailand, and that gave us a better chance to secure a World Cup spot."

Samin also urged the authorities to arrange an open-top bus to celebrate their "truly memorable" achievement upon their arrival on Friday.

"We have seen in the past that the cricket and football teams received grand welcomes at the airport and were given open-top bus receptions. My teammates and I would love to experience the same," said Samin, a second-year Dhaka University student.



This time, despite uncertainties over the preparation camp, a lack of practice matches, and no domestic competitions, Mehrob Hasan Samin's team did not disappoint the nation.

"Though our target was to secure a place in the Junior World Cup, I still can't believe we have achieved this feat. I feel really proud to be the captain of this team and want to thank my teammates, coaching staff, and everyone else for their hard work," captain Samin told The Daily Star over the phone from Muscat.

"The journey was really hard for us because there was uncertainty about starting the training camp after August 5, as hardly any federation officials were active. Finally, the camp began in September under the directives of the BHF president, Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan, and the players showed determination and dedication to achieve this goal," Samin informed.

"We progressed step by step, with draws

Coach Moududur Rahman Shuvo, meanwhile, expressed gratitude to the BHF president and BKSP DG for providing facilities. He also praised his players for their temperament, commitment, and dedication over the past three months.

"After playing a 30-minute practice match against Korea before the tournament began, the boys gained confidence and courage, realising they could perform well. They delivered outstanding performances in all five matches," Shuvo told The Daily Star from Muscat.

"The boys were highly focused on qualifying for the Junior World Cup, keeping in mind that such a feat could rejuvenate the domestic hockey circuit. A World Cup berth could draw renewed attention to hockey, make the turf busy again, and give players more opportunities to participate in domestic competitions," Shuvo said, adding that the team had achieved their mission for the nation's hockey.

Amorim asks United to be 'brave' at Arsenal

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester United are unbeaten in their first three games under Ruben Amorim and have climbed into the top half of the Premier League table but the Portuguese faces the first real test of his managerial skills at high-flying Arsenal on Wednesday.

United, who are in ninth place 15 points adrift of leaders Liverpool, have struggled to score this season with 13 goals in their first 12 league matches, but the floodgates finally opened on Sunday when they thumped Everton 4-0 at Old Trafford.

However, they travel to the Emirates for a Premier League encounter knowing full well the scale of the task at hand, having lost their last three meetings with Arsenal, who are in second spot, six points above United.

"It's the best team that we have faced by far. But a test is every game. If you saw the last game (against Everton), it was really tough..." Amorim told reporters on Monday.

"It's important to be brave (on Wednesday), when I say it's brave it's not pressing all the time higher. You have to understand the game, the moments of the game. We need to have the ball, that is key. "We want to have the ball, we want to dominate some moments of the game, because you know these matches, it's hard to control all the game. We have to be brave and play the game."



Topu rescues Kings

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings began their Federation Cup campaign on a winning note despite having to toil for a 1-0 victory against Brothers Union in the opening match of the tournament at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Defender Topu Barman separated the sides in the 69th minute with a decisive header, thanks to a poor clearance from Brothers Union defender Sushanta Tripura on the uneven ground, which was the main talking point instead of the performance of the teams.

Though the domestic season was deferred by a few weeks owing to unprepared grounds, the Cumilla venue was not ready to host the opening match as a cricket pitch was removed from the venue on Monday. The ground caused trouble for both sides in controlling,

passing and playing buildup game all through the match.

Even though Bashundhara Kings had the last laugh, they struggled despite coming into the match on the back of a 7-0 win over Chittagong Abahani in a Bangladesh Premier League encounter on Friday.

Brothers Union were denied by the woodwork in the 34th minute when Gambian forward Zakaria Darboe saw his free-kick come off the crossbar while their goalkeeper Pappu Hossain made a string of saves either side of the break.

Pappu, however, could not stop a close-range header from Topu, who nodded home after Brothers defender Sushanta failed to clear a cross from Brazilian forward Miguel Ferreira.

In the day's other match of Group A, Bangladesh Police and Fortis FC played out a goalless draw at the Rofique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh.



A graffiti showing Abu Sayed, the first martyr during the July uprising, is unveiled at a hotel in the capital yesterday during a ceremony in which Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) also revealed the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League's theme song. Youth and Sports adviser Asif Mahmud, chief guest in the event, informed that Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has penned a few lines for the theme song.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BCB plans to fast-track women's Test debut

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

In an attempt to expedite the women's team's Test debut, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has planned to hold a first-class competition, through a revamped Women's Bangladesh Cricket League (WBCL), later this month.

In 2021, along with Afghanistan and Zimbabwe, Bangladesh were granted Test status after the International Cricket Council (ICC) decided to award all their full member women's teams Test and ODI status permanently.

Although three and a half years have passed since then, the Tigresses are yet to feature in the game's elite format, with their participation remaining limited to the white-ball formats, where they are also achieving successes now and then.

The maiden WBCL last year was played as a two-day tournament, involving three teams, but this time the competition will see four teams clashing in three-day encounters.

"If we want to play Tests, we need to play first-class matches. If we can play this year and also next year, we will be eligible to play Test matches," BCB's women's wing head Habibur Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The women's BCL, a three-day tournament, will be quite similar to men's BCL," said Bashar, further informing that they are planning to host the event in the third week of this month.

"Each team will face the others once in the competition. We will play two rounds this month. The other round will be played after our return from the West Indies.

"We are trying to start the tournament on or after December 18... and complete the first two rounds by December 30, so that the girls can get some rest as well as some practice time before the West Indies tour," he said, adding that if they cannot avail the desired BKSP venues – which are currently hosting the first division and second division matches – the WBCL matches will likely be staged in Rajshahi and Bogura.

U19s lose final Asia Cup group game

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh made a meal of their run chase as they succumbed to a seven-run defeat at the hands of Sri Lanka in the final Group B fixture of the ACC Men's Under-19 Asia Cup in Dubai yesterday.

Despite a solid start, courtesy of openers Zawad Abrar's 24 and Kalam Siddiki's team-high 95 runs off 134 balls, Bangladesh lost their way, losing six wickets for 47 runs and getting bundled out for 219 in pursuit of a 228-run target.

Off-spinner Vihav Thewmika was Sri Lanka's standout bowler, with three scalps.

Earlier, Bangladesh pacer Al Fahad grabbed four wickets and seamer Rizan Hossain picked up three. Vimath Dinsara starred with a 132-ball 106, helping Sri Lanka reach past 200.

Both sides had already ensured qualification to the semifinals, with Sri Lanka guaranteeing their spot into the final four as group winners after the win against Bangladesh.