

‘Forward-looking’ Jaker

Building on a breakthrough year

Bangladesh batter **Jaker Ali Anik**, fresh from a month-long West Indies tour, has had a breakthrough year, integrating into the national team across all formats. Despite a lacklustre T20 World Cup performance, the 26-year-old shone in the Caribbean, scoring consistently across formats. In an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star’s Abdullah Al Mehdi**, Jaker reflected on his latest assignment, team’s mindset, and his evolving game, among other things. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

THE DAILY STAR (DS): According to you, how was the West Indies tour from the team’s perspective?

JAKER ALI (JA): It was outstanding for us, as a team. After not playing well in the first Test, we made a comeback in the second. In the ODIs, we played well in most of the games, but maybe the bowling unit did not perform as they are used to... but they proved themselves again [in T20Is].

DS: What are your feelings about the T20I series win?

JA: The coach [Phil Simmons] told us not to give any quarters, and told us before the third game that we will only realise what we have done when we get back home. Now I am realising it since returning.

DS: Do you now feel more accomplished with your power-hitting game?

JA: The last T20 innings [72 not out] is special because bowlers were not bowling in my comfort zone. After the first One-Day [International], Windies bowlers realised that it’s free for the taking when they bowl at my stumps during the slog overs. You could see how wide they were bowling. Scoring runs against the tide was something special. I saw their plans and changed my stance. They were trying to bowl

wide yorkers or slower, and I shuffled to get closer.

DS: Senior assistant coach Salahuddin talked about needing more consistency. What did he say about changing mindset?

JA: He gave clear concepts like always. The biggest thing is he allowed us to play our natural game... to play with freedom. I will talk about a small incident. In the second ODI, we made only 227. In the meeting, he said, ‘Look, if we score 220 in such wickets, we will lose. If we don’t show intent, we will lose anyway. So if we show intent and score only 150 and lose, it’s not a problem. But we must play for 300 plus.’ In the third game, you saw the changes [as the Tigers scored 321].

DS: How do you see this year’s gains in making Test and ODI debuts along with playing in a World Cup?

JA: Actually, I don’t think about these things. Whatever took place has ended, whether good or bad. I am a forward-looking person. Obviously grateful for the good things, but I won’t be dawdling on it. I think I have to look forward to doing things better. Working on fitness currently.

DS: You are often criticised for being limited with your off-side shots. What do you make of it?

JA: It’s not important that I have to play through the offside. What’s important is that I score runs. I never felt like that; instead, I play to my strength, and that’s what I would continue. My strength is to get close to the deliveries. The bat swing makes it such that often I play through the on side, but I always aim to play straight. I know exactly how to play my game, and it’s not like I have to play only through the off side or only the leg side. In that microsecond of time, I have to find a way to hit it... It’s all practice and mindset.

DS: It’s said that you used to practise commentary in your childhood so you can talk when taking player-of-the-match awards?

JA: Yes, I used to practise that. Like how I am going to be when I win the man-of-the-match award. I was a big fan of Bangladesh cricket growing up, and these things happening for real give me joy.

DS: Your thoughts on ODIs going forward, especially with the Champions Trophy coming up?

JA: Given the mental strength the team has right now, I feel we will do something good in the Champions Trophy. Something big. We have good chances.



South Africa aim for place in WTC final

REUTERS, Pretoria

South Africa are within touching distance of a place in next June’s World Test Championship final at Lord’s but must win at least one of their two Tests against Pakistan, which start with the Boxing Day encounter in Pretoria today.

A run of five successive Test victories in the last five months – over the West Indies, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – has catapulted South Africa to first in the WTC standings and given them a strong chance of a place against either Australia, India or Sri Lanka in the one-off final in London.

They get two chances to advance to the WTC final, hosting a second Test at Newlands in Cape Town from January 3-7, and with home advantage and a winning record against Pakistan will be expected to do so.

The young South African side have exceeded expectations and gained momentum since success in Guyana in August set them on a winning streak.

Meanwhile Pakistan have never won a Test series in South Africa, and lost their last seven Tests there.

The tourists also arrived without coach Jason Gillespie, who dramatically quit this month and has been replaced by former fast bowler Aqib Javed.

But a home series triumph over England in October will have boosted Pakistan, as will the 3-0 whitewash of South Africa in a One Day International series that concluded at the weekend.

BPL teams set to gear up

SPORTS REPORTER

Chittagong Kings are set to kickstart their training for the much-awaited upcoming season of the Bangladesh Premier League, starting December 30.

The charges of former Australia pacer Shaun Tait – who had featured for the same franchise during his playing days – will begin honing their skills at 1:00 pm at the National Cricket Academy Ground in Mirpur.

Chittagong will follow Dhaka Capitals, who will start practice at 11:00 am at the same venue under the watchful eyes of former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mahmud.

Meanwhile, Fortune Barishal, Durbar Rajshahi, and recent Global Super League winners Rangpur Riders will begin training on Friday, with holders Barisahl gearing up for BPL’s 11th edition at the PKSP in Rugpanj.

The remaining two franchises, Sylhet Strikers and Khulna Tigers, will kickstart their preparations on December 28.

U-19 players set for BPL boost

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has decided to allow its U-19 players to feature in the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League T20 after several franchises expressed their interest to sign few cricketers from the current crop for the 11th edition of the meet, scheduled to start on December 30.

“We have already issued clearance for them. We have decided to allow them in the senior-level games. We will also allow them to play in the DPL as well. There are eight to nine cricketers who will play in the DPL,” BCB’s game development manager AEM Kawser told The Daily Star yesterday.

“The maturity and the courage of the players will definitely improve while playing in such a tournament. I think they can learn a lot from the senior players,” he added.

Five U-19 cricketers including skipper Azizul Hakim Tamim and pacer Iqbal Hossain Emon, who were part the Asia Cup winning squad in the UAE, featured in the just concluded National Cricket League T20 held in Sylhet, showcasing notable performances that caught the eyes of the franchises.

Azizul, who represented Khulna Division, finished with 237 runs in nine matches at a strike rate of 136.99 with two fifties, becoming the fifth-highest run-getter, while another U-19 batsman, Zawad



Abrar, who played for Dhaka Division, scored 105 runs in three matches at a strike rate of 141.89 with one half-century.

Pacers Maruf Mridha and Emon took five wickets each for Dhaka Metro and Dhaka Division respectively while pacer Al Fahad took one wicket in the lone game he played for Sylhet Division.

It was learnt that since many of these cricketers weren’t even listed in BPL players’ draft, some franchises asked for them through e-mails to the BCB.

Pacer Maruf, who won’t be eligible for the next U-19 World Cup in 2026,

was already picked from the draft by Chittagong Kings while some other franchises like Rangpur Riders are in serious attempt to get the services of Azizul.

Meanwhile, few other franchises have also shown interest to include Emon and Zawad in their BPL squads.

Kawser informed that they have rescheduled the U-19 side’s upcoming tour of Sri Lanka, further adding that they have already drawn a programme for the rest of the U-19 cricketers who won’t feature in the BPL.

“We have actually deferred the U-19 team’s tour of Sri Lanka [scheduled in January]. We may play the series before the next Asia Cup, which will be held in December next year,” he said.

“From January 6, we have a three-week fitness and skill camp. The Mirpur stadium and the athletics track of Bangabandhu National Stadium will be used for the fitness camp. Fitness test, running session will be conducted there. The skill camp will be held in Khulna which will start from January 10.

“They will train there and also play some intra-squad practice games. Those who will not be playing in the BPL, will be in the camp,” he said, adding that some players who performed well during the U-17s’ recent tour of Sri Lanka are likely to be called up for this camp.

Army off to winning start

SPORTS REPORTER

The Hockey Players Welfare Unity (HPWU) surrendered a lead to suffer a 2-1 defeat to title aspirants Bangladesh Army in Paragon Victory Day Hockey competition at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

National defender Amirul Islam gave HPWU the lead from a penalty stroke in the 21st minute before Army bounced back to level the margin, with Abdul Malek scoring from open play in the 32nd minute.

Though both teams fought neck and neck in the third quarter, Army established their control in the fourth and final quarter, thanks to have better fitness and endurance than their opposition, who just got together to play in a short notice.

Army scored the winning goal four minutes from time when Ahsan Habib converted a penalty corner.

Despite the defeat in their last group match, HPWU, a team comprising some current and former national players, have the chance of reaching the semifinal as they have beaten Bangladesh Air Force 4-3 in their first match while Army and Air Force will square off in the last match.

In the day’s other match, BKSP thrashed Bangladesh Police 5-0 in their last group match. Police will play their last match against favourites Bangladesh Navy, who beat BKSP 8-2 in their opening match.

‘YOU HAVE MY WORD’

Slot’s Christmas message to supporters

AGENCIES

Christmas Premier League chart-toppers Liverpool are overwhelming favourites to see off struggling Leicester on Boxing Day.

Ahead of Thursday night’s Anfield clash, the Reds hold a four-point lead in the Premier League, have a perfect record in the Champions League and are into the Carabao Cup semifinals.

“We are still just about in the first half of the season but we are getting close to the point where everyone will have played half of their fixtures and that is a moment when we will have a clearer idea of where we are all at,” wrote Slot on Liverpool website.

“This is why I have consistently said that judgements before this stage are not a true representation. It is only when each team has played one another and the fluctuations of form and fortune have evened themselves out that we will start to have a better understanding of how we are all performing.

“For this reason – and many others besides – I want to finish this first half of the campaign as strongly as we possibly can. No prizes will be given out during this period but as with the Champions League group, the longer you can be in and around the top positions, the stronger a platform



you can give yourself to build going forward.

“Of course, I would not be so naive to believe that other clubs do not have the exact same objective no matter where they are in the table. Leicester will see this spell as a chance to push themselves up the table and for this reason they will come to Anfield looking to make life as difficult as they possibly can for us.

“I also know from experience how tough it can be playing against Ruud van Nistelrooy’s teams and my expectation is that Leicester will increasingly start to play in his image the longer they get to work with him. This adds to the challenge that we will face but as with every other challenge

we have faced already this season it is one that we should look forward to.”

Slot continued: “I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of our supporters a Happy Christmas. I have still only been at Liverpool for six months or so but in that short space of time I have learned very quickly why our fans are regarded all around the word as being very special.

“I hope that you have enjoyed the football that the team has played so far and you have my word that we will keep on working as hard as we possibly can to keep on improving. There is a lot of football still to be played so hopefully the second half of the season can be as good – if not even better – than the first half.”



Cristiano Ronaldo enjoys a festive family dinner in matching outfits, celebrating the Christmas spirit, while fellow sports stars Lionel Messi, Pat Cummins, and MS Dhoni spread festive cheer with warm wishes to their fans on social media yesterday.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM