



Is this it for Shakib?

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

"The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry," is a line penned by Scottish poet Robert Burns around 250 years ago. It was the poet's personal take on how even the most meticulously planned scenarios get overturned by the cruel hand of fate.

It's unclear whether Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is familiar with this quote, but after his omission from Bangladesh's squad for the ICC Champions Trophy, where he had planned to call time on his career, he is definitely experiencing the truth of the sentiment behind this line.

The Champions Trophy, starting on February 19 in Karachi, was meant to be the 37-year-old's ODI swansong as said by the all-rounder himself in an interview before the 2023 World Cup. But unforeseen events have now removed him from that event where he almost single-handedly ensured Bangladesh's qualification.

Had Shakib not timed out Angelo Mathews in Bangladesh's 2023 World Cup encounter

against Sri Lanka in Delhi and also put forth a match-winning all-round display, featuring figures of 2-57 with the ball and a 65-ball 82 with the bat, Bangladesh, who climbed to eighth and edged Sri Lanka and the Netherlands on a better run-rate after the win, would not have qualified for the prestigious event.

Shakib has not played an ODI since that World Cup match and the last time he represented Bangladesh was in September 2024 in a two-match Test series against India. He had announced his T20I retirement last year.

His involvement with the ousted Awami League government has kept him from returning to Bangladesh. The bowling ban imposed on him by the ICC made it easier for the national selectors to drop him, as they found it difficult to rope him into the side solely as a batter.

Shakib, whose bowling action was reported as suspicious in September 2023 in a County Cricket match in England, failed his bowling test for a second time last Thursday.

"He can play as a batter as he has failed the bowling test [relating to his action]. We have considered him as a batter while making up the squad but due to the constraints brought forth due to the team combinations, we could not include him," chief selector Gazi Ashraf Lipu confirmed in Mirpur yesterday.

But the question is why would the selectors even consider him as a sole batter? The uncertainty regarding him being able to play matches at home coupled with the fact that he has not played any of the 12 ODIs the Tigers have played since the 2023 World Cup should have been enough to look towards the future.

The BCB also confirmed yesterday that Shakib can retake the bowling test as many times as he wants. Does that mean if Shakib passes the next test, he will be back in consideration as an all-rounder?

The BCB can make changes to the squad till next month. So, is there another twist around the corner or have we seen the last of Shakib in national colours?



Capitals make BPL records tumble

Dhaka Capitals' 254-1 against Durbar Rajshahi yesterday is the highest team total in BPL history, beating Rangpur Riders' 239-4 against Chattogram Vikings in 2019.

Liton hit his maiden T20 ton off 44 balls -- the fastest by a Bangladeshi in BPL and also the joint-fastest hundred in BPL alongside Chris Gayle (for Barisal Burners against Sylhet Royals in 2012).

Liton and Tanzid Tamim's 241-run opening partnership is the highest in BPL for any wicket. It is also the highest opening stand in any franchise-based T20 tournament, surpassing the previous best of Quinton de Kock and KL Rahul's unbeaten 210 in an IPL game in 2022.

Tamim became the second Bangladeshi after Tamim Iqbal to score two centuries in BPL.

Liton's unbeaten 125 off 55 is the second highest by a Bangladeshi batter in BPL - Tamim Iqbal's 61-ball 141 for Comilla Victorians against Dhaka Dynamites in 2019 is the highest.

Liton left out as Bangladesh bet on form, youthful aggression

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced the squad for the upcoming Champions Trophy, with the exclusion of batter Liton Das standing out as the main talking point.

While Liton's recent poor form made his omission less surprising, Bangladesh's selection trends often leave room for debate about inclusions and exclusions. This time, the selectors leaned towards youthful confidence and aggression over experience.

Chief selector Gazi Ashraf Lipu had sound logic for why Liton did not inspire much confidence ahead of squad selection. His run drought was the obvious reason; the other was that the selection panel saw the Soumya Sarkar-Tanzid Tamim pair as the likely opening combination for the tournament, starting February 19.

Since 2023, Liton's form has taken a dip and the manner of his dismissals has been quite similar. He was a big cause for optimism in the 2023 ODI World Cup in India but failed to live up to expectations. After the marquee event, Liton's ODI form deteriorated further, reaching a nadir in the last five ODIs where he managed just six runs.

The recent ODI series in the West Indies, played on flat wickets, eventually sealed Liton's fate.

"Obviously his past history was considered, but recent history was more in consideration," Lipu said yesterday,



"If you look at the team, there is huge competition."

BCB chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu

BANGLADESH SQUAD

Najmul Hossain Shanto (C), Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Tamim, Parvez Emon, Mushfiqur Rahim, Towhid Hridoy, Mahmudullah, Jaker Ali, Rishad Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Nasum Ahmed, Tanzim Sakib, Nahid Rana.

adding that opposition analysts have been increasingly successful with their plans against Liton in white-ball formats.

"In the Windies, we scored runs and crossed 300 twice. The wicket was very good, and since Liton failed there too, it was difficult to keep our confidence in him," he said.

The argument is that batting-friendly surfaces are likely to be prepared for the global tournament, and a top-order batter still struggling with form cannot provide the required start.

Curiously, Parvez Hossain Emon has been picked as a backup opener. He is

yet to make his ODI debut and averages 12.57 in seven T20Is. In his last T20I, Emon got the team off to a flying start in the West Indies. It was his attacking approach that was considered.

"Maybe he doesn't have a huge contribution. But what we felt, what we were looking for, is aggressive batting in the Powerplay, which we saw in him," Lipu said of Emon.

However, the squad faces a lack of experience. With Tamim Iqbal retired and Shakib Al Hasan and Liton absent, the top order relies on individuals -- such as Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Tamim,

skipper Najmul Shanto, and Towhid Hridoy -- who are also battling form issues.

"Experience obviously has a lot of value, but our players have gathered enough confidence from A teams and HP tours. When you are young, there is an advantage in being more aggressive, eager to take challenges. It can also work against them, but some excitement will be there," Lipu said.

"If you look at the team, there is huge competition," he added.

Liton, however, appeared to be regaining form in dramatic fashion in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League. Playing for Dhaka Capitals in their match against Durbar Rajshahi yesterday, Liton scored the joint-second fastest century and the quickest by a Bangladeshi player in BPL history, reaching the landmark in 142 balls before ending up unbeaten on 125 off 55 balls.

He also forged BPL's highest-ever partnership and the highest-ever opening stand in T20s, combining with Tanzid Tamim (108 off 64 balls) for a colossal 241 runs, leading to a BPL record team total of 254-1.

Selector Hannan Sarkar told The Daily Star on Sunday that they will be able to make changes to the Tigers' squad in the next month. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether Liton's form, if it continues, will bring him into consideration for the Champions Trophy in the end.

Strikers turn it around in Sylhet

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

Sylhet Strikers had a woeful start in this year's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) as they lost their opening three matches and two of them were in front of their crazy home fans at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

BPL isn't a kind of tournament where home and away system is followed as only three venues -- Dhaka, Sylhet and Chattogram -- are used to host the matches of the seven different franchises, each named after different divisions.

But like in previous years, fans in Sylhet are leaving no stone unturned in showing their support for the team named after their city, and for the past week and so, from galleries to roads and hotels to restaurants, Sylhet people were seen talking about their team's underwhelming performance.

Sylhet played their first three games against tournament favourites Rangpur Riders (two games) and Fortune Barishal (one) and as expected both teams are currently leading the points table. But since they started to play against similar-strength teams, they took no time to get results -- leading to fans turning up in large numbers in every Sylhet game to cheer for their side.

On Sunday, Sylhet registered their second successive victory in the tournament when they beat Khulna Tigers by eight runs in a hard-fought contest and the victory came within 48 hours after they beat Dhaka Capitals by three wickets to open their account.

"When you play at home, there is a plus point as well as a negative point. I think the fans [of Sylhet Strikers] have so much emotion for their side and that's why they get upset and when we play well, they say good things. I think it's good because players also remain very energetic because of it," said Sylhet skipper Ariful Haque, who was criticised heavily by the Sylheti fans for his poor captaincy at the start of the campaign.

Habib makes history for Lebanon

AFP, Melbourne

Lebanon's Hady Habib made history Sunday at the Australian Open by becoming the first player from his country to win a Grand Slam match.

World number 219 Habib is the only Lebanese ever, man or woman, to come through qualifying and reach the main draw at one of the four majors.

The 26-year-old continued his fairytale run with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) victory over China's Bu Yunchaoket in front of a frenzied crowd out on Court 13.

He was draped in the Lebanon flag as he signed autographs after the match.

"This is probably one of the best days of my career honestly," said Habib.

"It's such an incredible feeling to get this win not only for myself but for Lebanon and Lebanese tennis."

"As you guys could see there, the crowd was absolutely wild. It made it even more special to win in front of them."

Born in America to a Lebanese father, Habib lived in Lebanon for a few years from the age of six and has been representing the country since he was 15 when he first played in the Davis Cup.



His reward is a second-round match against France's 14th seed Ugo Humbert.

"It's a huge win, especially what we've been going through as a country," said Habib.

"I think to bring something positive, especially we've been having a rough time with obviously the war. We had our other issues in the past. It's just nice to get this win for Lebanon and for the people."

"This is the biggest achievement I've had in my entire career."

Sabalenka wants to 'keep winning'

REUTERS, Melbourne

Aryna Sabalenka launched her bid for a third successive Australian Open title with a storm of power hitting and a 6-3, 6-2 demolition of former US Open champion Sloane Stephens on Sunday.

It was by no means peak Sabalenka, with the world number one broken twice by the American in a wayward first set at Rod Laver Arena.

But on the same court where she hoisted the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup twice in two years, Sabalenka steadied with the help of her pulverising forehand to claim a 15th successive win at hardcourt Grand Slams.

"It's just an incredible feeling. I just want to keep winning as long as I can just to feel the atmosphere," Sabalenka said.

The stand-out hardcourt player in the women's game, Sabalenka stormed to a 4-0 lead over Stephens in the first set as fans were still settling in their seats.

Though Stephens broke her twice to claw back to 4-3, Sabalenka regrouped to claim the set with strong net play and customary aggression.

A few years ago, Sabalenka might have lost her head after surrendering a few games but she is now a different player. "In that moment I would get frustrated and probably would lose the first set," she told reporters.

"I'm really glad that I improved my mental toughness, let's say."



PHOTO: AFP