



Leadership role adds to MIRAZ'S CT CHALLENGE

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced Mehedi Hasan Miraz as Bangladesh's vice-captain for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy yesterday evening, mere hours before the squad's scheduled departure for the UAE, continuing the custom of frivolity when it comes to national team's vice-captaincy.

There are many examples of the slapdash nature of decision making when it comes to naming a vice-captain for the Tigers. One such instance happened in July 2023, during Bangladesh's home series against Afghanistan, when then skipper Tamim Iqbal's injury forced the BCB to appoint Liton Das as vice-captain just a day before the first ODI.

Later when Tamim announced his shock retirement after the first match, Liton stepped up and captained the team in the second and third ODI.

The BCB had done better in this regard ahead of the ICC ODI World Cup 2023 and last year's ICC T20 World Cup. Current three-format captain Najmul Hossain Shanto was named Shakib Al Hasan's deputy in the former and Taskin Ahmed was Shanto's deputy in

the latter way in advance.

But this time, before a major tournament like the Champions Trophy, the BCB waited till the very end to disclose who will be Shanto's second-in-command, reverting to older ways.

"Miraz was the designated second man for us. One also has to understand that there really was no one else we could have given it to," a BCB official claimed.

One could argue that vice-captaincy or its late announcement holds little significance, but on-field leadership is of particular importance for any team and especially for a side like Bangladesh which has to maximise its resources to the fullest if it hopes to do well in the tournament.

Miraz had recently captained the Test and ODI side in the West Indies. In that series, he was able to articulate his plans to the rest with Liton Das noticeably helping him manage the field from behind the stumps.

Miraz has played 103 ODIs for the Tigers and his batting has become increasingly important for the side in recent years while his contributions with the ball has always been crucial.

The Tigers are also without ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who is still

serving a bowling suspension and was not picked for the Champions Trophy squad, which makes Miraz's all-round contributions even more important.

As captain, Miraz made history in the West Indies tour, leading Bangladesh to their first Test win in Caribbean soil since 2009. However, Miraz got plenty of help from Liton, who could be heard on the stump mic suggesting field changes and who should come to bowl.

Liton's captaincy instincts were on full display in the T20I series in the West Indies, which the Tigers swept 3-0. Had Liton not lost his place in the Champions Trophy squad for his woefully awful form, he would have likely been named vice-captain, not Miraz.

However, now the added responsibility of aiding Shanto in leadership alongside the weight of performing with both bat and ball has been thrust upon the shoulders of Miraz.

This tournament could prove to be a acid test for Miraz's future as a leader as well as if he can handle the added leadership responsibilities and perform as an all-rounder, he is likely to be earmarked for a promotion to permanent captaincy when the position opens up.



New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner and Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan pose with the Tri-Nation Series trophy on the eve of the final in Karachi yesterday. The Black Caps have been the team to beat in the 50-over tournament, having won by comprehensive margins against both Pakistan and South Africa. Pakistan made into the final after recording their best run chase in ODIs -- chasing down the Proteas' 353-run target on Wednesday. With both sides set to clash again in the Champions Trophy group stage alongside Bangladesh and India, today's showdown is more than just about silverware -- it's a statement for what is to come. PHOTO: PCB

CT will bring more ICC events to Pakistan: PCB chief

AGENCIES

Pakistan will host a major ICC men's tournament in nearly three decades next week and its cricket chief is hopeful that a successful ICC Champions Trophy will bring a flood of other such events.

Top teams shunned Pakistan after the 2009 attack on a bus carrying Sri Lankan cricketers in Lahore and it took the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) years to convince foreign counterparts that it was safe to visit.

"ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is a culmination of those efforts," PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi told Reuters.

"Once we successfully staged home international series and consistently delivered PSL [Pakistan Super League] editions at world-class standards, the ICC accepted and recognised Pakistan's readiness to host a global event."

Pakistan's last major men's ICC event as hosts was the 1996 ODI World Cup. Pakistan was supposed to host the 2008 Champions Trophy as well but the ICC shifted that tournament to South Africa owing to security concerns.

Even though ICC had named Pakistan as the sole host of this year's Champions Trophy back in November 2021, all of India's matches, which includes the highly anticipated India-Pakistan clash on February 13, will take place in the UAE after India refused to send their team to Pakistan.

The PCB also upgraded the stadiums in Karachi and Lahore in an 11th-hour facelift and are now ready to host the event set to begin on February 19.

"Since 2019, all major Test-playing nations - except India - have toured Pakistan, some multiple times," Naqvi said. "Our successful hosting of this event will further enhance Pakistan's credentials, positioning us as a strong contender for more ICC events."

48TH NATIONAL ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Imranur's absence paves way for home-grown sprinters

ANISUR RAHMAN

Home grown sprinters are set to compete to be crowned the country's fastest man in the upcoming National Athletics Championships as England-based Imranur Rahman, a four-time winner of the event and also the current champion, withdrew himself from the 48th edition of the competition, scheduled for February 17-19 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Imranur stunned everyone in his debut appearance in the 45th National Athletics Championship in 2022 as he dethroned the previous edition's winner Mohammad Ismail to win gold while setting a new national record. He clocked 10.50 seconds, breaking the previous best timing by a Bangladeshi sprinter made by late Mahbub Alam (10.54 sec) in December 1999. The next year, Imranur also broke the national record (10.11 sec) in 100m sprint in a competition in England.

Since then, Imranur defended his 100m crown in the 46th and 47th

championships in 2023 and 2024 respectively.

However, this time around, Imranur kept himself away from the championship in order to avoid major injury ahead of the upcoming South Asian Games in 2025 and the Asian Games in 2026.

Imranur was supposed to take part in the National Athletics Championships for Bangladesh Navy, who signed him in January [2025] for the next two years. However, he refrained from participating to avoid any risk of being injured as he underwent an operation some days ago," Bangladesh Navy long-jump coach and former national long jumper Al Amin told The Daily Star yesterday.

Al Amin also informed that Imranur has been training and focusing on major tournaments like the South Asian Games and Asian Games, as per recommendations from his coach and medical team.

Al Amin mentioned that Navy, however, will continue providing the sprinter with all facilities alongside

his monthly remuneration.

Imranur also withdrew himself from March's World Athletics Indoor Championships in China and the Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) has decided to replace him with the best sprinter from the 48th National Athletics Championships.

The absence of Imranur, who represented the Bangladesh Army for the last three years, has made men's 100m race open for home-grown sprinters, especially for the likes of Ismail and Rakib Hossain of the Navy and Tushar of the Bangladesh Army.

"The 100m race will be very competitive as Rakib became champion by beating Ismail in Bangladesh Navy while Tushar of the Army is also doing well. I think they will share the medals in 100m sprint," Al Amin added.

Despite Al Amin's optimism, there remain concerns regarding competitiveness in the 100m race as 30 teams have sent BAF entries of 400 athletes till yesterday whereas about 550 athletes from 63 teams took part in the last edition of the championship.

BAF general secretary Shah Alam is however optimistic to see some national records in the newly-installed track as they decided to deliver cash awards of Tk 20,000 for each national record.



'Mayhem' in final Merseyside derby at Goodison Park

AGENCIES

A chaotic end to Wednesday's Merseyside derby, featuring a last-gasp goal and a raft of red cards, provided the perfect conclusion to an old-fashioned tussle between Everton and Liverpool, the last at Goodison Park after 131 years.

Everton captain James Tarkowski equalised deep into stoppage time to earn them a 2-2 Premier League draw against Arne Slot's side.

But it felt like a victory to Everton boss David Moyes and the Toofees faithful, who serenaded their squad long after the final whistle.

"It was mayhem all game," said Everton boss David Moyes, whose team are unbeaten in their last four league games.

"It was an old fashioned throw back in some ways. I think it was hugely important that Evertonians get to finish as best they can in this stadium."

Everton are set to move to a new 53,000-capacity stadium next season and Goodison was given a fiery goodbye in the last clash between the two sides, whose stadiums are separated by less than a mile.

Everton's Beto scored the game's opener in the 11th minute before



Timed at 97:08, James Tarkowski's equaliser for Everton was the latest goal scored on record (from 2006-07) in a Premier League Merseyside derby.

This was the 120th and final Merseyside derby between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park in all competitions as Everton are set to move to their new stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock for next season.

Mohamed Salah first set up Alexis Mac Allister's goal in the 16th minute and then scored his own in the 73rd and

the league leaders looked poised for victory.

Tarkowski struck a blistering goal into the corner in the 98th minute, sparking bedlam among players and fans.

Everton's Abdoulaye Doucoure then sparked a melee by celebrating in front of the Liverpool fans at full-time.

Doucoure and Liverpool midfielder Curtis Jones were sent off before the Reds' manager Arne Slot and his assistant Sipke Hulshoff were also shown red cards for their protests towards referee Michael Oliver.

A draw edges Liverpool seven points clear at the top of the Premier League, while Everton move 10 points above the relegation zone in 15th.

Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk, however, lamented that referee Oliver lost control of the game.

"You know what happens when there is a tussle, I think the referee didn't have the game under control," Van Dijk told TNT Sports.

Despite Van Dijk's reservations, the draw, which featured four goals and four red cards, was a fitting finish with neither side able to claim permanent bragging rights -- the tally totalling 41 wins apiece at Goodison for the Merseyside rivals with 38 draws.



Michael Olise celebrates with Harry Kane after putting Bayern Munich ahead with a stunning shot in the 45th minute in their Champions League playoff first leg against Celtic on Wednesday. Kane doubled the lead with a 49th-minute volley at the far post, and when it looked like Bayern were headed for an easy win, late pressure from Celtic saw the Scottish side cut the deficit in the 79th minute thanks to Daizen Maeda's close-range header. Bayern, however, managed to edge the game 2-1.

PHOTO: BAYERN MUNICH