

Hamza’s role in Bangladesh’s TACTICAL REBIRTH

RIFAT MASUD

In a national team ranked 185th in the world, the arrival of a midfielder with Premier League experience doesn't merely represent a symbolic gesture -- it marks a fundamental reorientation of the team's tactical approach and identity. Hamza Choudhury's integration into the Bangladesh national team isn't about star power or reputation; it's about the system-wide evolution his presence enables.

Hamza is not a traditional midfielder, nor is he merely a destroyer of opposition attacks. He occupies a hybrid role -- part defensive anchor, part deep-lying playmaker.

In early training sessions -- ahead of Bangladesh's Asian Cup qualifiers fixture against India in Shillong on March 25 -- he has displayed a keen understanding of responsibilities that transcend simple defensive duties. Hamza appears to be adept at reading the game, identifying probable passing lanes, stepping into space to disrupt attacking movements, and communicating proactively to ensure defensive cohesion. His positional awareness and discipline provide



PHOTO: BFF

Bangladesh's midfield with a level of structure rarely seen.

Without possession, his focus shifts to anticipation and spatial control. Against a player like India's Sunil Chhetri, who thrives in the half-spaces and operates between the lines, Hamza's role will be to not just shield the defence but also enable them to maintain their shape. It's this

quality, more than any individual flair, that will elevate Bangladesh's defensive organisation.

Hamza's tactical freedom within the team structure is perhaps the most striking aspect of his role. While comparisons with players like Lionel Messi are often emotionally charged and tactically misguided, a more fitting

comparison might be someone like Spain's Sergio Busquets or Joshua Kimmich of Germany. These are players who don't seek the spotlight but dominate through their understanding of structure, their anticipation, and their ability to dictate tempo.

This is not a story of one player single-handedly transforming a team; it is about one player providing a blueprint for tactical evolution. Hamza's true impact will not be measured in goals or assists but in his ability to shape the team's rhythm, structure, and control of the game.

If those around him can rise to the tactical demands his presence implies -- if the federation, coaches, and supporters understand the potential now within their grasp -- then Bangladesh football could embark on a new era. Not one of sudden miracles, but one of steady, mature growth.

The real question is not whether Hamza can carry this team forward. The question is whether the team is prepared to move forward with him -- tactically, intelligently, and with renewed purpose.

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BCB to hold key meeting today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will sit down for a meeting today with several immediate agendas, particularly those related to the coach and captaincy.

Taskin Ahmed and Liton Das were the names being considered for the T20I captaincy once speculation regarding Najmul Hossain Shanto started to gain ground. Liton, too, had claimed, after the 3-0 series sweep in the West Indies, that he was ready to take over if BCB wanted.

As it stands, Liton -- who was left out of the Champions Trophy -- is the front-runner to take over the T20I captaincy, sources inside the board have claimed. The national team has been without a selector since Hannan Sarkar's resignation; thus, the vacant spot on the selection panel is also on the agenda.

"Some proposals will be made, and they will be discussed. Shipon [Sazzad Ahmed] is being considered as one of the proposed names," a BCB source informed.

BCB has been positive about head coach Phil Simmons, and while the official decision to extend his contract has not been announced, the board is likely to finalise the matter in the coming days.

"Simmons has already been confirmed, according to information in the board, but the decision would be discussed in the board meeting," a source said.

CWAB ad-hoc committee brings new hope for players

SPORTS REPORTER

Past and present cricketers gathered in Mirpur yesterday to hold a Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) meeting and after 11 years, CWAB's leadership changed with president Naimur Rahman and general secretary Debobroto Paul stepping down.

CWAB formed an ad-hoc committee of 13 members with former cricketer Saleem Shahed as the convener during the meeting attended by around 50 players.

Cricketers such as national team captain Najmul Hossain have been named in the committee as representatives of divisions. The committee will now consider the organisation's constitution amendments and form an election commission for upcoming elections, slated to take place tentatively within three months' time.

In 2019, cricketers of the country went on strike, feeling undermined by the board and unrepresented by the cricketers' welfare organisation. In 2023, in CWAB's first Annual General Meeting in 10 years, no other candidates challenged the leadership even as it did not mean cricketers had been happy with all that had gone on.

This DPL is being played on reduced budget with CWAB not having any say over the players' plight. Sources informed that one national team player is playing for a newly promoted club where his contractual salary has been halved from previous years for participating in seven games.

When asked whether CWAB has done anything to fulfil players' wishes in recent years, one cricketer pointed out that DPL



was being played under reduced salaries.

"I have seen nothing of that sort [positive changes to help players]. At least 50-60 percent of the payment has been reduced this DPL from previous years," he said.

The cricketers have requested that first-class contracts and match fees be improved. Currently, there are three categories (A, B, C) receiving monthly salaries of Tk 35,000, Tk 25,000 and Tk 15,000 respectively. A discussion took place yesterday to bump those figures up to Tk 100,000, Tk 80,000 and Tk 60,000 respectively.

"For 15 years, there has been no real activities seen in CWAB," another cricketer said.

"Since everything has started afresh, let's see what happens. Now the players representing the divisions will sit down

with players from their respective divisions and discuss the changes in rules and regulations (proposed by the ad-hoc committee)," he added.

Avoiding conflicts of interest has also been on the agenda in forming the ad hoc committee. Those representing the board as directors were not named in the committee and once the ad-hoc committee completes its work in forming election commission, members can also partake in elections.

"We will consider these issues [conflict of interest] in a more complete manner so that a transparent system grows. We have to keep in mind that those that are players, are directly or indirectly involved with the board. So we will try to formulate the policy and then abide by it," Saleem, convener of the committee, told reporters.

Piastrri hails ‘mega’ McLaren

AFP, Shanghai

Oscar Piastrri hailed his "mega" McLaren after winning a Chinese Grand Prix on Sunday later overshadowed by the disqualifications of Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc for technical infringements.

Alpine's Pierre Gasly was also kicked out after Piastrri led a McLaren one-two from pole position with Lando Norris second.

Almost three hours after the chequered flag, stewards ruled that Leclerc and Gasly had cars that weighed less than the 800 kilogram minimum, while Hamilton was found to have excessive plank wear underneath his car.

Leclerc had finished fifth and Hamilton sixth. Their points have been stripped with all the drivers below them gaining places. It was a disastrous end to a weekend that had started so brilliantly for Ferrari when Hamilton took his maiden win for his new team in Saturday's sprint.

On the other hand, it was McLaren's 50th one-two finish in their long history.

"It's been an incredible weekend, the car has been pretty mega," said Piastrri, 23, after McLaren made a one-stop strategy work to perfection. "Very, very happy. The hard was a much better tyre than everyone expected so to go all the way to the end was a bit of a surprise, but a happy surprise."

Red Bull's world champion Max Verstappen snatched fourth place after a thrilling late pass on Leclerc.



NZ hand Pakistan biggest defeat

New Zealand clinched the five-match T20I series 3-1, with a game in hand, against Pakistan in style after thrashing the visitors by a record margin at Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui yesterday. Having posted a mammoth total of 220 for six, New Zealand bundled out Pakistan for just 105 in 16.2 overs.

The 115-run defeat for Pakistan is their biggest loss in terms of runs in the format, eclipsing a 95-run defeat, also against New Zealand in Wellington nine years ago.

It was New Zealand's second biggest T20I win by runs, nearly surpassing their 119-run drubbing of the West Indies in 2018 at the same Bay Oval venue.

New Zealand pacer Jacob Duffy claimed 4-20 and fellow seamer Zak Foulkes ended with figures of 3-25 to dismantle the Pakistan lineup.



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Ishan Kishan celebrates after scoring his maiden Indian Premier League century against Rajasthan Royals in Hyderabad yesterday. Hyderabad piled up 286 for six -- just a run short of the best-ever tournament total of 287 for three, also scored by Hyderabad in a game against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the previous edition. Kishan remained unbeaten for a 47-ball 106 in a game that saw England and Rajasthan fast bowler Jofra Archer return figures of none for 76 in four overs -- the most expensive bowling figures in IPL history.

PHOTO: AFP

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS Bangladesh women set sights on uncharted territory

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team are gearing up for the AFC Women's Asian Cup qualifiers, with preparations set to begin on April 6.

The qualifiers will take place from June 23 to July 5, marking a historic opportunity for Bangladesh to compete on Asia's biggest stage for the first time.

A revamped format for the tournament's 21st edition has opened the door for their long-awaited debut. A total of 34 nations, divided into eight groups, will battle for eight spots in the 12-team final round, set to be held in Australia in 2026.

The draw for the qualifying round is scheduled for March 27, with matches to be played across eight host nations -- Vietnam, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Myanmar, Jordan, Indonesia, Cambodia and Tajikistan.

Placed in the third pot, Bangladesh will likely face some of Asia's strongest sides such as Philippines, Chinese Taipei, and Iran.

To stand a chance, the women in red and green will need rigorous training and a unified squad, putting past disputes between senior players and the coach behind them.



Head coach Peter Butler, who is returning to Dhaka from England on April 6, had a bitter experience in the last training camp. Eighteen senior players refused to train under the British coach, citing various concerns, which led to the formation of a probe committee to resolve the issue.

Bangladesh Football Federation's women's committee chairman, Mahfuza Akter Kiran, informed yesterday: "We have called up nearly 50 players, including 18 who weren't part of the squad for our last two FIFA friendlies against the United Arab Emirates, as well as U-20 players.

"This is because we have two major commitments coming up -- the AFC Women's Asian Cup qualifiers and the SAFF U-20 Women's Championship [from July 1 to 11]."

Before departing for Dubai for two matches with a squad of junior players, those 18 senior players were released from camp with instructions to rejoin after the Eid break.

Asked about the situation, Kiran remained optimistic. "We haven't spoken to Peter yet, but we're hopeful that everything will be fine. Let's get the camp started."