



Selectors 'hoping' Bijoy card works this time

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Anamul Haque Bijoy's name resurfacing in the national squad often sparks mixed reactions. Since his Test debut back in 2013, the opener has appeared in just five Test matches over a span of 12 years, managing an average of only 10. It's no surprise, then, that each return raises more eyebrows than optimism.

The reaction may seem odd given Bijoy's enviable domestic record, yet his repeated chances across formats often felt like squandered opportunities or mismatches with the team plans.

His most recent outing in national colours came against Sri Lanka in Chattogram last year. Prior to that, he had earned a spot in the ODI side following a prolific Dhaka Premier League (DPL) season, but could not cement his place. After being dropped following India's 2022 tour of Bangladesh, he briefly returned for a dead-rubber clash in Asia Cup 2023 -- then vanished from the radar again.

His Test career has been even more fragmented. His last four innings -- scores of 9, 0, 23, and 4 against the West Indies played between 2014 to 2022 -- did little to help his case. So why bring

him back now?

This year's DPL certainly has the answer. Bijoy has piled up nearly 900 runs, scoring back-to-back hundreds to reignite selectors' interest. With Bangladesh's top-order woes persisting, the door creaked open -- and Bijoy walked through it once more.

He had also toured Pakistan with the A team during the senior side's successful Test campaign last year. The idea, according to selectors, was to groom players who might be needed as backups.

"The process that anyone needs to be under in the national side, Bijoy was within that process," chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu told The Daily Star.

Last National Cricket League (NCL), Bijoy scored 700 runs with six fifties and a ton, averaging over 50. Selectors believe it is a "new beginning" for the 32-year-old opener.

"It's something like the last window -- if he gets a chance now, he may be able to widen that window of opportunity. We also needed to protect our number three, four and five, and his ball selection or leaving deliveries -- he has that skill."

The circumstances in which Bijoy has been pushed in and out of the national

fold have been largely reactionary -- bordering on impulsive. Previously, strong red-ball performances in domestic cricket earned him call-ups for white-ball series. Now, in a twist of irony, it's his white-ball form that has handed him a Test recall.

"Bijoy had not done badly in the NCL but the thing where we lack, especially in temperament, he is in good shape -- despite DPL being a different format.

"We felt that, whether white-ball or red-ball [format], when someone has occupied the crease for the longest, he is the most deserving candidate."

It is as if the selectors have kept the 'Bijoy card' tucked away as a convenient stop-gap solution -- a move driven more by need than by belief, and with little patience shown for the right-hander.

"It's true, when he got small windows of opportunity, he has not been able to become a strong contender [for the national side], but we are hoping for the best," Lipu concluded.

While his return may look like a one-off decision, there are whispers that Bijoy could be included in the upcoming A team tour -- a sign that the selectors are willing to give this chapter a few more pages.

SAFF C'ship pushed to 2026

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are set to miss out on a few international matches this year following the postponement of the next SAFF Championship to 2026.

The South Asian Football Federation's secretariat announced the decision yesterday, citing feedback from member associations and SportFive -- the tournament's rights holder -- that more time and preparation were required to ensure the competition's 15th edition could be held smoothly in Sri Lanka.

The regional event, originally scheduled to take place in Colombo from 22 June to 5 July, involves seven nations: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh could have played two to three group-stage matches, and potentially two more in the semifinals and final. In the previous edition held in Bengaluru in 2023, they reached the last-four stage. Currently, the charges of Javier Cabrera are competing in the ongoing AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers. They have already played one match against India and are scheduled to play four more -- against Singapore, Hong Kong, and India -- through to the end of December.

Of the four FIFA international windows available in 2025, Bangladesh will be active in three. However, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is now considering whether to utilise the September window to compensate for the missed SAFF fixtures.

This could also serve as preparation for the October window, during which Bangladesh will face Hong Kong twice in the Asian Games Qualifiers.

Century-chasing Mushy in a battle of his own

BISHWAJIT ROY

Stalwart Mushfiqur Rahim is staring at a rare feat -- he is en route to becoming the first Bangladeshi with 100 Tests under his belt.

For a team that have played 151 Tests, Mushfiqur earning 95 Test caps speaks volumes of the veteran's testament and longevity, especially considering that the next in line in this regard is Shakib Al Hasan, who has featured in 71 Tests.

At a time when Bangladesh were supposed to rely on Mushfiqur's experience to guide the side, the batter himself is struggling to prove his worth in the middle order. It even casts doubt over the 37-year-old's aim of reaching the exceptional feat.

Bar any drastic change, Mushfiqur, the only Bangladeshi with three double tons in the format, will most probably reach the desired three figures.

The fear?

By the time Mushfiqur reaches 100 Tests, will the stalwart end up seeing questions over his inclusion in the team pile up even more than it already has, especially after his dull outing in the recently concluded first Test against Zimbabwe in Sylhet?

Bangladesh's three-wicket defeat against Zimbabwe at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on Wednesday not only defied expectations but also exposed lingering weaknesses in the team's batting setup.

Chief among these was the underwhelming performance of the batting unit -- a recurring problem that

once again proved costly. While several players underperformed, it is the prolonged dip in form of veteran Mushfiqur [who has 6015 Test runs at an average of 37.36] that has become the most pressing concern.

Despite Zimbabwe chasing down a modest target, Bangladesh failed to capitalise on key moments, largely due to a brittle middle order and lack of partnerships. Mushfiqur's scores -- 4 and 4 -- were emblematic of a broader trend.

Over his last seven international appearances across formats, he has managed only 13 runs, a statistic that clearly portrays his

during training. Of course, his batting is important. I am not thinking about his milestone or achievements from the past, I don't think he is either. I hope, with one match remaining, he will make a comeback. I am not giving up hope. He has been in poor form in the past and made comebacks."

While captain Shanto acknowledged Mushfiqur's value in leadership and preparation -- citing his role in planning and mentoring -- the reality remains that contributions off the field cannot compensate for consistent failure with the bat, particularly in a



current struggle to adapt to the demands of top-level cricket.

Mushfiqur, who retired from T20Is and ODIs earlier, was expected to anchor the Test batting lineup and offer stability. However, since his 191 against Pakistan in Rawalpindi last August, he has failed to cross 40 in 12 Test innings -- a stretch that puts significant pressure on both his individual place and the team's overall batting strategy.

Despite the numbers, Mushfiqur found a supporter in captain Najmul Hossain Shanto. "He is an experienced cricketer," Shanto said during post-match briefing.

"He helps the batters. He talks a lot

format that demands both resilience and productivity from senior players.

The timing could not be more critical.

With the second and final Test set to begin on April 28 in Chattogram, Bangladesh face a must-win scenario not just to salvage the series but also to stabilise their Test campaign going forward.

And, for Mushfiqur, he will have to deal with the additional pressure of proving himself in the game.

SHORT CORNER



Nepal women's kabaddi team handed a 21-17 defeat to the visiting Bangladesh side in Kathmandu yesterday, wrapping up the five-match series 3-1 with a game in hand. PHOTO: BKF

Hridoy to miss next DPL match as 'previous rules reinstated'

Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) cricket operations chairman and newly appointed convener of the CDDM technical committee, Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, confirmed yesterday that Mohammedan Sporting Club captain Towhid Hridoy will be suspended for his team's upcoming Dhaka Premier League (DPL) match against Gazi Group on April 26. Speaking on the matter, Fahim acknowledged the mishandling, saying, "I think we went outside of the process."

18000-plus tickets allocated for Hamza's first home appearance

As many as 18,300 tickets will be available for fans as excitement builds for Bangladesh's AFC Asian Cup Qualifier against Singapore on June 10 -- a match that could see Sheffield United midfielder Hamza Choudhury make his first home appearance in national colours at the newly renovated National Stadium.

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Liverpool on brink of title after Arsenal held

AGENCIES

Liverpool are on the brink of winning the Premier League title after Arsenal were held to a 2-2 draw by Crystal Palace on Wednesday.

Arne Slot's side were watching in anticipation of an Arsenal defeat that would have secured Liverpool's record-equalling 20th English title.

They didn't get their wish to start the party just yet, but Liverpool look certain to lift the trophy for the first time since 2020 after Jean-Philippe Mateta's late equaliser for Palace at the Emirates Stadium.

The draw left second-placed Arsenal on 67 points with four games remaining meaning they can only match the 79 of Liverpool who still have five games to play.

Had Arsenal lost, Liverpool would have won the title on Wednesday but they can now seal it with one point against Tottenham Hotspur at Anfield on Sunday.

Jakub Kiwior put the Gunners ahead early on. It was another success for Arsenal's set-piece coach Nicolas Jover as they scored from a well-worked dead ball routine for a Premier League

leading 16th time this season.

Martin Odegaard whipped a free-kick into the Palace area and Kiwior was left completely unmarked to power his header past Dean Henderson from 12 yards.

But Eberechi Eze equalised for Palace.

Leandro Trossard restored Arsenal's advantage before half-time, only for Mateta to come off the bench and bag a sublime leveller with seven minutes left.

Arsenal had delayed Liverpool's celebrations by routing Ipswich 4-0 on Sunday when a defeat for the Gunners and a Reds win over Leicester would have ended the title race.

Mikel Arteta's team again kept Liverpool waiting a few days longer, but their real focus was already on Tuesday's Champions League clash with PSG.

Arteta had insisted he would not rest his stars against Palace with a view to protecting them for the PSG showdown.

But he opted to leave Bukayo Saka on the bench after the England winger was left limping by a foul from Ipswich's Leif Davis last weekend, with Mikel Merino and Ben White not fit to feature.



Real Madrid's Arda Guler celebrates scoring their only goal with teammates David Alaba and Raul Asencio in a nervy 1-0 LaLiga win at Getafe on Wednesday. Guler's strike from outside the box was enough for Real to keep their title hopes alive as they remain second in the table with 72 points in 33 matches, four points behind leaders Barcelona with five matches remaining. However, Real, who are already out of the Champions League, suffered setbacks following the game as midfielder Eduardo Camavinga was ruled out for the rest of the season due to a groin injury he suffered in yesterday's game. The injury is a big blow to the Madrid side ahead of the Copa del Rey final against Barcelona on Saturday, with Kylian Mbappe, Ferland Mendy, and David Alaba also injury doubts. PHOTO: REAL MADRID