

Mixed reaction over 3-captain approach

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Bangladesh cricket entered a new era with the appointment of Mehidy Hasan Miraz as the new ODI skipper, resulting in three leaders in three different formats which generated mixed reactions from former players.

Bangladesh last endorsed three different captains back in 2022 when Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah were at the helm for Tests, ODIs and T20Is respectively.

The approach didn't bear fruit at that time and Bangladesh soon had to appoint Shakib as skipper for Tests and T20Is while Tamim retained ODI captaincy only until Shakib got it back in a dramatic fashion ahead of the ODI World Cup in India in 2023.

In February last year, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) handed Najmul Hossain Shanto captaincy in all three formats despite Shakib's

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interest to continue the role in ODI format. By that time, Shakib had already expressed his desire to quit Tests and T20Is.

However, after a few setbacks in the T20Is, Shanto expressed his reluctance in continuing with the duty in the shortest format in order to concentrate more on his batting, and the BCB opted to pick Litton Das as skipper until 2026 T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

Having different captains in different formats isn't completely new in world cricket as India recently opted for this approach. However, other major teams like Australia, South Africa, England and New Zealand have two skippers, with most of these teams preferring one skipper for red ball format and another for white-ball format, something that Bangladesh could also go with, feels former skipper Rajin Saleh.

“I think it would be better if there were two captains in three formats,” Rajin told The Daily Star yesterday. “Looking into the kind of situation in Bangladesh cricket, there might be an ego problem among the captains.”

“Three captains can have three different opinions and will try to form three different types of teams. But if someone leads in both limited overs teams, he can have his own assessment of players,” Rajin added.

Meanwhile, Roquibul Hassan, another former skipper, feels that this is the way to go in modern cricket as there are so many international matches nowadays and having different captains can take pressure off of one individual, both physically and mentally.

“We have to play a lot of bilateral series and tournaments in different formats these days. Apart from that, the players also go to franchise leagues,” said Roquibul. “People not only get tired physically, they also get tired mentally. Since we are still an underdog, the pressure such on technical, mental and physical aspects of the game is immense.”

“If the responsibility remains on one man's shoulder, it becomes difficult for him to cope with the situations,” opined Roquibul.

Liverpool agree British-record deal for Wirtz

AGENCIES

Liverpool have agreed a British-record deal worth up to £116.5 million to sign German attacking midfielder Florian Wirtz from Bayer Leverkusen, marking a bold statement of intent ahead of Arne Slot's second season in charge.

The 22-year-old, widely regarded as one of Europe's most exciting young talents, will join the Premier League champions after returning from holiday to complete his medical. The Reds will pay an initial £100 million, with £16.5 million in performance-related add-ons potentially making it the most expensive deal in British football history – surpassing Chelsea's fee for Moises Caicedo (£115 million to Brighton in 2023).

Wirtz's arrival follows that of former Leverkusen teammate Jeremie Frimpong, who signed earlier this summer for £29.5 million. Liverpool are also close to sealing a deal for Bournemouth left-back Milos Kerkez as Slot seeks to reinforce every area of the pitch.

After staying relatively quiet in the transfer market during his debut



campaign, Slot guided Liverpool to their 20th English top-flight title, equalling Manchester United's record. Now, the Dutch manager is focused on building a squad capable of defending the crown and also push for continental glory.

Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson had described Wirtz as an “exciting talent”.

Robertson played against Wirtz when Liverpool faced Leverkusen in the Champions League this past season, but says he realised the playmaker was headed for stardom when Germany beat Scotland 5-1 at Euro 2024.

“He was excellent against us,” Robertson told Sky Sports News at the AR26 annual Captain's Cup Golf Day fundraiser before the signing was confirmed. “That was enough for me to see he's going to be a top player. He will be an exciting talent.”

Wirtz scored 10 goals and provided 13 assists in 31 Bundesliga appearances last season and was crowned Bundesliga Player of the Year in 2023/24. His versatility gives Slot additional options in an already competitive forward line featuring Mohamed Salah, Luis Diaz, Cody Gakpo, Diogo Jota, and Darwin Nunez.



Australia's Mitchell Starc celebrates with teammates after nicking off South Africa's Ryan Rickelton in the second session on Day 3 of the World Test Championship final at Lords yesterday. Earlier, Starc's unbeaten 58, which included a 59-run 10th wicket stand with Josh Hazlewood (17), pushed Australia's second innings total to 207 and helped them set a 282-run target. Starc then struck twice post-Lunch, but the Proteas reached 95-2 after 25 overs, with Aiden Markram completing a half-century and skipper Temba Bavuma batting on 11, as the contest was seemingly heading towards an exciting finish.

PHOTO: REUTERS/AFP



Miraz's peculiar first day as ODI captain

SPORTS REPORTER

Less than 24 hours after Najmul Hossain Shanto had spoken about the importance of long-term captaincy during a press conference at the BCB headquarters, Mehidy Hasan Miraz on Friday sat in the same room for his first media interaction since replacing Shanto as skipper in ODIs.

The decision to appoint Miraz as captain was taken on Thursday evening after an emergency Zoom meeting between BCB board directors and the all-rounder will begin his year-long tenure with the three-match ODI series in Sri Lanka this month.

Shanto had reportedly been left in the dark about the development and was unaware that his ODI tenure would be coming to an end when he spoke to the media on Thursday as the Test skipper before the side's departure for Sri Lanka.

The left hander was reportedly in talks with head coach Phil Simmons on Thursday about the ODI series when he learnt he is not the captain anymore.

The unusual manner of Shanto losing his captaincy has roused more interest than who he has lost it to and it was reflected in Miraz's first press conference, as the new captain had to field more questions related to Shanto than what he intended to do as skipper in ODIs.

“He [Shanto] was the ODI captain for a term, which had ended [after the Champions Trophy]. They probably had conversations about the Test team. I am not sure if they spoke about the ODI



team,” Miraz said at the press conference yesterday about captaining a squad in Sri Lanka which was picked when Shanto was in charge.

“Fahim [Nazmul Abedeen] sir called me and said that they are going to give me the responsibility. He said that they don't have much time since we have to set up the ODI team quickly as the matches are not far away,” he added.

The board's heavy-handed handling of the matter risks ruining the dressing room environment. But Miraz negated that possibility.

“I don't think it will have an effect in the dressing room. We are all playing for the country. These things won't bother Shanto and me. I helped him a lot during his captaincy. He will do the same. He will help me. We want to take Bangladesh forward,” he said.

The captaincy change has laid bare that proper processes are not being followed in the board and is also a

reflection of the instability that has crept in everywhere in cricket.

But Miraz said he and the other players are now prepared for any eventuality and also corroborated what Shanto had said about long-term captaincy a day before.

“I don't know how [the captaincy] was decided. It is usually done in a board meeting. Nobody can decide on their own. I think all of us are usually prepared mentally for any situation we may have to face.

“Longer term captaincy is always ideal, but I think it is up to the board [whether or not to extend his tenure till 2027 World Cup]. The thinking is to get the team out of the current struggle,” he said in a peculiar first day as captain.



Messi gears up for CWC opener

Egyptian Premier League champions Al Ahly head to the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida to face Major League Soccer side Inter Miami in the opening match of the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup. The match will be live telecast at 6:00 am on Sunday Bangladesh time. Lionel Messi-led Miami also stars big names like Luis Suarez, Sergio Busquets, and Jordi Alba but they face not only Egypt's finest but also the best side in the African continent.

🌟 Messi will play in his fourth FIFA Club World Cup, including the previous format of the competition. He's won the trophy in all three of his previous participations (2009, 2011 and 2015), scoring five goals in five appearances, including goals in all three finals.

🌟 Al Ahly have won more Egyptian top-flight titles (44) and more CAF Champions League titles (12) than any other club.

🌟 Al Ahly's Hussein El Shahat holds the record for the most matches played under the previous format of the FIFA Club World Cup (17).

🌟 FIFA slashed ticket prices to encourage fans to come to the tournament opener after thousands of seats remained unsold last week, with prices being as low as \$4. Miami Dade College students have gotten offers for five seats to the opener for \$20, breaking down to just \$4 per ticket to see Messi's Inter Miami squad.

Real sign River Plate starlet Mastantuono

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have agreed a deal to sign teenage playmaker Franco Mastantuono from River Plate, the Spanish giants announced on Friday.

The 17-year-old attacking midfielder cost Madrid just over 63 million euros (\$72 million), according to a statement by River Plate.

Mastantuono will play in the Club World Cup in the United States this summer with the Argentine club before moving to the Spanish capital.

“Mastantuono will be a player at our club for the next six seasons, from 14 August 2025 to 30 June 2031,” said Los Blancos in a statement.

“At 17, he is also the youngest player to play an official match for the Argentina national team.”

He made his national team debut earlier this month against Chile in a World Cup 2026 qualifier.

“Mastantuono executed his release fee clause, along with Real Madrid,” explained River Plate, providing full financial details of the deal which earns them 45 million euros, with the rest of the money largely distributed on taxes.

“Thank you Franco for your performance and talent, it has been a pride to see you grow at the club,” the statement continued.

The midfielder came through the River academy and made his first team debut for the club in January 2024.

He is Real Madrid's third signing this summer behind Trent Alexander-Arnold from Liverpool and Dean Huijsen from Bournemouth.

Taskin uncertain for SL white-ball series

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are unlikely to get the services of pacer Taskin Ahmed in the limited-over part of their upcoming full tour of Sri Lanka, as according to a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) physician, the board will only review his case after this month.

Taskin, who has been out of competitive cricket since March, is currently undergoing conservative treatment during his rehab, after he had issues with his Achilles tendon, for which he also had gone to London to receive expert opinions.

Bangladesh are set to play three ODIs and as many T20Is following their two-match Test series against Sri Lanka. The ODIs will begin on July 2, and according to BCB's chief physician, Debashis Chowdhury, it might take longer than expected for his comeback.

“Taskin wasn't in a situation to play Tests,” Debashis told The Daily Star yesterday. “His rehab is ongoing. But we aren't sure whether he can make it to the side within this time. We will be assessing his rehab until the end of this month. Then we will review his case.”

Meanwhile, Debashis was confident about the recovery of the other two pacers – Shoriful Islam and Mustafizur Rahman – before the series. While Shoriful missed the last T20I against Pakistan due to a muscle spasm he suffered in the previous game of the series last month, Mustafizur was sidelined for the entire three-match series due to a finger injury he picked up during his Indian Premier League stint.

“Shoriful has started bowling. There are no complaints about his injury,” Debashis said.

“Mustafizur would have taken 21 days to regain his fitness, and 15 days have already passed. So, we expect him to recover within the time frame,” he added.

