

'Boring' Mushfiqur drives team-first approach

Mushfiqur Rahim appeared for a press conference after Day 2 of the second Test against Ireland, already making the landmark 100th Test feel more special with a ton yesterday. The dedication to succeed and keep improving, qualities that make Mushfiqur's Test career so special in Bangladesh cricket, were reflected in his talk with the press; the excerpts of which are as follows:

Question: You've played 100 Tests and celebrated it with a century. If you could tell us how you're feeling?
Mushfiqur Rahim

(MR): I actually can't believe that, being a player, especially from Bangladesh, I would play 100 Tests. So, it's really a huge achievement. That's not only because it's my name; I think for any cricketer, for any nation, it's a proud moment.

Q: When you look back at the 20-year journey, do you have any regrets in Test cricket?

MR: No, but being a senior player, I have one wish that, hopefully, by the time I leave this

team, Bangladesh can at least be in the top six.

Q: You have experienced many things in your career. What are the highlights for you in your career?

MR: The way I improved each and every day... In the last 20 years, I haven't batted for a whole day and been 99 not out, which is a new experience and something I really enjoyed last night as well. Cricket is a game where, even after 20 years, you can experience many new things.

Q: What were your plans for the 100th Test and what expectations did you put on yourself?

MR: I always try in every match to give my best effort and to contribute as much as possible for the team's winning cause. And yesterday, at the beginning of the match, I said something in the huddle that, whether it's the 100th match or any milestone for me or anyone else, it's always 'team comes first'. And I said that, for Bangladesh, I, Mushfiqur Rahim, feel

like a couple of drops of water in an ocean. Bangladesh always comes first, team come first, and winning this match will be my biggest gift.

Q: How much further do you have the urge to go?

MR: Playing every Test for Bangladesh is very special for me... As long as my team management wants me or the team wants me, and as long as I feel

Whether I score 100 or I score zero, that's not my success, it's not in my hand, but the effort, the process, the honesty is in my hand. So, that's my only motto in life. At the huddle [before the game] I said that I feel like I am playing my first game today. I was that eager and excited.

Q: Your Test cap has stayed with you all these years. Did you think you would be able to carry this cap for so long?

MR: For a player, I think, as I said, the ultimate format among the three formats is Test. And the biggest thing in Test is your baggy green cap. So, if a player doesn't understand the honour of this, it cannot be explained to him.

Q: What sacrifice do you think brought you here today?

MR: I think the biggest sacrifice is the support my wife has given me. You also know, or maybe see, that I practise more than others. And that would never have been possible if I didn't have such an environment at home.

Q: To whom do you want to dedicate this achievement?

MR: To my grandparents... They were actually my biggest fans when they were alive.

Mushfiqur became the 11th cricketer to score a century in 100th Test. He joined the likes of Colin Cowdrey, Alec Stewart, Joe Root, Javed Miandad, Inzamam-ul-Haq, Gordon Greenidge, Ricky Ponting, David Warner, Graeme Smith, and Hashim Amla.

from inside that, yes, my team needs me, I intend to continue.

Q: How have you maintained yourself throughout this long journey?

MR: To be honest, I am actually a boring person. I can do exactly the same thing over and over in practice... I don't compromise on professionalism.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Rangatungi Football Academy girls 'want to play without fear'

MD. QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT
from Thakurgaon

Thakurgaon's Rangatungi United Female Football Academy – an institution that has produced several national-level players – is now facing uncertainty, as a section of locals is attempting to halt its activities citing religious objections.

Established in 2014, the academy is located in Rangatungi village, about three kilometres from the Ranishankoil upazila headquarters.

Local children of different ages regularly train on the academy's playground, which takes up a part of an approximately 25-bigha (15.625-acre) piece of government khas land.

Outside the field, portions on the south-eastern and south-western corners are used by locals as a graveyard.

When talking to the academy's female members on Saturday afternoon, they said that over a decade after the academy was founded, a group of locals is now claiming it is inappropriate for girls to play football near a graveyard and is trying to stop its activities.

Among them, Joya Kisku, 15, said



about two weeks ago a group of locals dug up parts of the ground and tried to uproot the goalposts to stop football practice.

"Nowadays, we are practicing in fear, worried that they may attack again," she said.

Academy sources also added that the group demolished the foundation stone laid by the deputy commissioner for the construction of a boundary wall to separate the graveyard from the playground.

Appealing to the authorities, Joya

added, "Give us a playground, and we will deliver good football."

Suborna, 14, another member of the academy, said, "We want to play without fear. For this, we seek security from the local administration."

Tajul Islam, founder and director of the academy and a retired teacher of Ranishankoil Degree College, said that 18 girls from the academy have gone on to play for the Bangladesh women's football team and various other national age-level sides.

Currently, academy students

Mosammat Sagorika, Swapna Rani, and Kohati Kisku are in the Bangladesh national women's football team squad, while Reshmi Akter, and Protima Rani are part of the Under-17 team.

Former national players Sohagi Kisku and Anjana Rani also began their football careers at the academy, he added.

Responding to a query, Tajul said that in order for the academy to carry on with its activities and provide rural girls with opportunities to develop their talents, the concerned authorities could allocate around 7-8 bighas (4.4-5 acres) of land exclusively to the academy to resolve the crisis.

Acknowledging the incident at the academy, Officer-in-Charge of Ranishankoil Police Station Arshedul Haque said a tense situation had arisen among locals in the village over the graveyard and playground. "The situation is being closely monitored to prevent any untoward incidents," he added.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Khadiza Begum said, "We will discuss the matter with the local residents and the academy authorities to find a way out of the situation."

SHORT CORNER



Italy to face Northern Ireland in 2026 WC playoffs

Four-time World Cup winners Italy will face Northern Ireland in the semi-finals of the European playoffs for the 2026 tournament, following the draw on Thursday. If Italy get through that match on March 26 next year, they will play the winner of Wales's semi-final against Bosnia-Herzegovina five days later.

India's Gill doubtful for 2nd SA Test

India will not play skipper Shubman Gill in the second Test against South Africa on Saturday if it risks aggravating his neck injury, a team coach said. Gill suffered neck spasms in the first innings of the opening Test and pulled out of the remainder of the match. "If he is fully recovered and it is a guarantee that he won't have this issue again then he will play. If there is doubt, then I am sure he will take rest (for) one more game," batting coach Sitanshu Kotak said on Thursday.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

Australia roll the dice as England eye history

AGENCIES

Australia and England completed their Ashes preparations on Thursday, the hosts revealing their intentions while the visitors kept their final XI hidden away ahead of Friday's first Test in Perth.

Injuries have twice shredded Australia's plans in recent weeks, yet stand-in captain Steve Smith remained composed as he confirmed that debutants Jake Weatherald and Brendan Doggett would be thrust straight into the furnace at Perth Stadium.

Both 31 years old, the pair do little to lower Australia's ageing squad profile but offer England contrasting challenges. Weatherald, an aggressive left-hander, will open alongside the patient Usman Khawaja, having forced his way past Sam Konstas through sheer domestic weight of runs.

Doggett, once firmly sixth in line among Australia's fast bowlers, has been summoned because Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Sean Abbott are all sidelined. Their baptism of fire will come against an England team steered by captain Ben Stokes, who insists the urn surrendered eight years ago is within reach.

"We've got an opportunity over the next two and a half months to write our own history," Stokes said. "We've come with the goal to board that plane in mid-January as Ashes winners."

The Perth pitch has been promised as



green, fast and bouncy, but Stokes gave nothing away about whether England would counter it with four quicks or include specialist spinner Shoab Bashir.

Australia, meanwhile, had no hesitation picking Nathan Lyon, who turned 38 on Thursday and begins his eighth Ashes campaign. Nicknamed "Goat" for his Australian record 562 Test wickets as an off-spinner, Lyon boasts 29 wickets at 20.86 at Perth Stadium. "He's

done really well out here," Smith said. "So we'll see how it pans out." Smith will also have Cummins nearby, offering calm counsel.

England's travelling fans return for the first time since they were barred during the COVID-affected 2021-22 tour, a bruising 4-0 defeat that left few survivors in today's squad. A tighter contest is expected, though Prime Minister Anthony Albanese couldn't hide

England have won only three series in Australia in the last 50 years, most recently in 2010-11, and have not won a single Test there since. Only three England captains have won the urn in Australia in the last 50 years, with Andrew Strauss the most recent (2010-11).

England are unbeaten in their last three men's Tests vs Australia (W2, D1) after losing six of the previous seven (one draw).

Playing his 140th Test, Nathan Lyon has taken 268 of his 562 wickets in Australia at 31.08. He needs two more wickets to pass Glenn McGrath and become the sixth-highest wicket-taker in history.

Jake Weatherald and Brendan Doggett will debut in the first Test in Perth, marking the first time since early 2019 Australia have picked multiple debutants. Doggett's inclusion means Australia will field two Indigenous players in a Test for the first time, alongside Scott Boland.

his hopes: "When battle lines are drawn on Friday, I'll be hoping for a 5-0 result in Australia's favour."

England face a steep climb to reclaim the urn on Australian soil for the first time since 2010-11, all while absorbing flak from home critics. The Western Australian even mocked them as "arrogant Bazballing Poms." Stokes remained undeterred: "We know we're going to be outnumbered... and that's going to be good fun."



Paris Saint-Germain's Moroccan defender Ahrif Hakimi and Al-Hilal forward Ghizlane Chebbak pose with their trophies during the 2025 Confederation of African Football Awards ceremony in Sale, Morocco, after being named African men's and women's players of the year on Wednesday. Hakimi beat Mohamed Salah and Victor Osimhen, while Chebbak topped Sanaa Mssoudy and Rasheedat Ajibade to seal their continental awards success. PHOTO: FACEBOOK