

## Taijul finds his 'own place' in Bangladesh cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

In his 11 years as a Test cricketer, left-arm spinner Taijul Islam has carved out a great career, especially in the context of Bangladesh cricket.

As a left-arm spinner who always played within himself, Taijul has put up effective performances especially in favourable home conditions for a long time and as of Friday, is the country's joint highest wicket-taker alongside Shakib Al Hasan.

Taijul bagged four wickets on Day 3 of the second Test against Ireland in Mirpur, equaling Shakib as the highest wicket-taker for Bangladesh in Tests with 246 scalps. Shakib achieved the feat in 71 Tests while Taijul is playing his 56th.

"It's difficult to say," Taijul said at the post-day press conference about when he first thought he could become Bangladesh's highest wicket-taker in Tests.

"When I became consistent, and gained experience, I grew a conviction that maybe Bangladesh cricket will afford me opportunities for a long time. That's when I first thought that one day I could amass a lot of wickets."

It's ironic that Taijul currently shares the top spot alongside Shakib, a fellow left-arm spinner who has overshadowed his career for years. Taijul started receiving his deserved praise only when Shakib gradually began to step away from the red-ball format.

At the press conference, the 33 year-old said that he wants to leave behind the 'underrated' tag often used in the media especially because of comparisons to Shakib.

"Whenever I face the press, the word underrated is brought up repeatedly. I

fifth-highest wicket-taker amongst spinners in Tests with 88 wickets in 19 matches. Australia's Nathan Lyon tops the list with 124 wickets but has played 11 more matches. India's Ravindra Jadeja, second in that list, has 100 wickets and has played nine more Tests.

In the last 12 months, he is the highest wicket-taker among all spinners in Test cricket. In eight Tests, he has bagged 37 wickets. Lyon, second in that list, has 32 wickets and has played three more Tests than Taijul.

Amongst all bowlers, in the space of 12 months, Taijul is the sixth highest wicket-taker. Indian pacers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj have been phenomenal with 59 and 57 wickets respectively but the former played three more matches than Taijul and the latter has played seven more.

With his numbers speaking for themselves, Taijul is now more assured about where he stands as a senior player and is eager to give back to the team.

"Taijul is in his own place... When you become a senior player, there are many things you can give back to the team. Just talking about your experiences helps a lot of junior players or upcoming players. We got this from Shakib bhai."

"The name Taijul will only come up in discussions if I perform. The main thing is my performance. When I stop performing, maybe, my name will stop coming up."

think it would be better if it didn't come up frequently. Because this issue is not raised for anyone else."

The left-arm spinner has quietly become one of the most successful spinners going around in Test cricket in the past few years without anyone really taking notice.

In the last three years, Taijul is the



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## NATIONAL FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP Dinajpur, Sirajganj battle for maiden title

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Football Championship reaches its climax as Dinajpur district and Sirajganj district clash in the grand final at Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Dhaka today.

The high-stakes encounter caps a long home-and-away tournament that saw 64 districts battle across 112 matches, involving nearly 1,500 players over three-and-a-half months.

Despite ongoing financial hurdles in developing district-level football, the Bangladesh Football Federation secured Tk 10 crore in funding from the Youth and Sports Ministry and the National Sports Council, enabling the smooth organisation of this year's championship.

Excitement is at fever pitch in Dinajpur and Sirajganj, with supporters from both districts travelling to Dhaka in hired buses to cheer their teams. Both sides are eyeing their first-ever title in the tournament, which has been held 25 times previously under the banner of the Sher-

e-Bangla National Football Championship. "Initially, assembling the squad and arranging proper training was a challenge, but reaching the final for the first time is a huge achievement," said Dinajpur coach Shamim Ahmed at a pre-match press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

"We are confident of lifting the trophy with our youthful side, which features seven to eight players from the Dhaka Senior Division Football League."

Sirajganj coach Mahbubul Alam added: "This is our first national championship final, and we want to make it memorable. While we do not have current Dhaka Senior Division players, six to seven

of our squad have previous experience playing in Dhaka."

AFC president Salman Bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa was due to attend and distribute prizes, but his four-day tour was cancelled due to personal reasons. Youth and Sports adviser Asif Mahmud will now grace the occasion as chief guest.



## Opening-day meltdown rocks Ashes

STAR SPORTS DESK

Nineteen wickets tumbled on a chaotic opening day of the Ashes in Perth yesterday, with England holding a narrow advantage after both sides crumbled against high-class fast bowling. Opting to bat first, England were blown away for 172 as Mitchell Starc produced a career-best 7-58, striking in the first over, dismantling the top order, and returning after lunch to finish off the tail. The hosts' reply, however, unravelled even faster. Jofra Archer removed Jake Weatherald for a second-ball duck and bowled Marnus Labuschagne for nine, before Ben Stokes tore through the lower order with a fiery 5-23. Australia closed on 123-9, still 49 runs behind.

### HIGHLIGHTS

19 wickets: most on an Ashes opening day in 100 years

Starc 7-58: best Test figures of his career

Starc reaches 100 Ashes wickets; first left-arm seamer to do so

24th first-over wicket for Starc in Tests

England's 1st innings lasted just 197 balls -- third shortest in Ashes in Australia



## Bangladesh 'A' overcome Akbar's brain fade to reach final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh 'A' team captain Akbar Ali was a relieved man after his brain fade moment did not lead to a heartbreak exit for his side, who defeated India in the semifinal in a Super Over and booked their place in the final of the Asia Cup Rising Stars in Doha, Qatar on Friday.

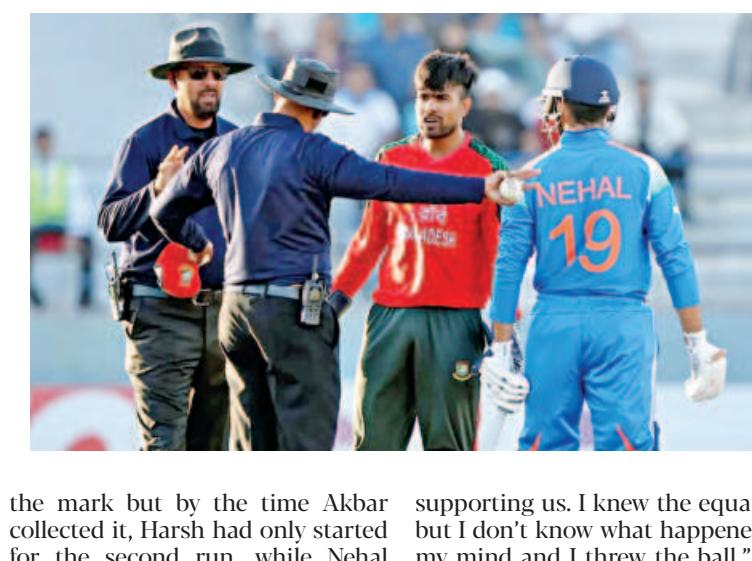
Defending a target of 195, Bangladesh were left with only 21 runs in the tank with two overs to go.

Pacer Ripon Mondal then bowled a brilliant 19th over, where he conceded just five and also claimed the wicket of Ramadeep Singh (17 off 11), leaving 16 runs in the final over for Rakibul Islam.

The left arm spinner conceded 12 off the first five deliveries, which included a dropped catch which went for four and the wicket of Ashutosh Rana (13 off 6).

With four needed off the final ball, he bowled it just outside off, and Harsh Dubey mistimed the slog as the ball went straight to long-on.

The throw from fielder was off



the mark but by the time Akbar collected it, Harsh had only started for the second run, while Nehal Wadhera was still at the striker's end.

Rather than keeping the ball in hand to ensure India does not take more than two runs, Akbar aimed for the stumps, missed and allowed the batters to run a third run on the overthrow to level the scores.

"I should apologise to everyone

supporting us. I knew the equation but I don't know what happened in my mind and I threw the ball," the skipper explained his massive gaffe at the post-match presentation.

"In the Super Over, when we were going in with the ball, I just said whatever happens, I take responsibility," he added.

Akbar's assurance perhaps did the trick as Ripon, who was declared the player of the match, bowled

a searing yorker to uproot Jitesh Sharma's middle-stump first ball and then got Ashutosh Sharma caught the next ball to set up a one-run target.

However, the drama did not end there. Yasir Ali, instead of pushing Suyash Sharma's first delivery to long on to complete the chase, tried to hoick it over the ropes but was brilliantly caught by Ramandeep.

Skipper Akbar then came to the crease to finish the chase, which he didn't have to, as Suyash bowled the next delivery down the leg side for a wide and Akbar breathed a sigh of relief.

Earlier, Habibur Rahman Sohan's 46-ball 65 and a brisk 18-ball 48 not out from SM Meherob powered Bangladesh 'A' to 194-6.

"Still trying to soak it in. Of course, we'll take some rest and go back to the drawing board tomorrow." Bangladesh will face the winner of Friday's second semifinal between Sri Lanka 'A' and Pakistan 'A' in the final on Sunday.

## U-17 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

## Bangladesh face unknown Timor-Leste

SPORTS REPORTER

Hoping to reach the finals after 19 years, the Bangladesh are set to begin their AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign when the men in red and green take on the largely unknown Timor-Leste in the Group A opener in China today.

The match will kick off at 12:00pm Bangladesh time at the Tonglianglong Stadium.

This time placed in a tough group alongside hosts China, Bahrain, Brunei, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste, Bangladesh have previously failed to reach the final round in the last nine editions since their breakthrough qualification in 2006.

However, the SAFF U-17 Championship runners-up team are optimistic this time, boosted by a three-month training camp and participation in two tournaments ahead of the qualifiers.

"We are here to qualify for the finals. China and Bahrain have strong structures, but the rest of the teams, including Bangladesh, are improving," said coach Golam Rabbani Choton at the pre-match press conference.

"Probably we have never played Timor-Leste at age group level and, despite many attempts, we could not find any video footage of them. So we have very little idea about their playing style. Still, we will take the field looking for a win by sticking to our game plan," Choton added.

## No Gill, Rabada as second Ind-SA Test starts today

AFP, Guwahati

South Africa skipper Temba Bavuma struck a confident tone despite seeing fast bowler Kagiso Rabada ruled out of the second and final Test against India on Saturday in Guwahati because of injury.

The World Test champions won the first match and are chasing a first series win on Indian soil since Hansie Cronje's team triumphed there in 2000.

They must again do without Rabada, who also missed the victory in Kolkata with a rib injury.

"Lungi Ngidi has been added. In terms of starting XI we will finalise that tomorrow once we take one last look at the wicket," Bavuma said on Friday.

The tourists won a low-scoring opener at Eden Gardens inside three days after they bundled out India for 93 while chasing 124.

"The mood is buoyant amongst the boys," Bavuma said.

"We're excited to try and replicate our performances as we did in the first Test."

He added: "Everyone is looking forward to it, looking at where the series is at, the whole narrative around it all."

"We'll just try and make sure that we lock in for the next five days."

Meanwhile, India skipper Shubman Gill will miss the must-win second Test because of the neck injury he sustained in the opening match. The hosts will be led by wicketkeeper and deputy Rishabh Pant.