

Senior-treatment compromises auction integrity

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

Twelve years -- that's how long the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) went without an auction. And with unexpected surprises, unprecedented requests, and an overall underwhelming foreign-player pool, Sunday's return to the auction table was, in many ways, reflective of the BPL's fragile reputation.

While Mohammad Naim fetching Tk 1.1 crore for Chattogram Royals and Bangladesh T20I skipper Litton Das joining Rangpur Riders for Tk 70 lakh added to the usual unpredictability, what truly stole the spotlight was a request for a change in rule mid-auction -- and an instant approval -- to prevent veterans Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad from being demoted despite both going unsold in the first call.

According to the by-laws, if players from a specific category go unsold in the first call, they are automatically moved down to a lower category, reducing their base price.

None of the six franchises showed interest in Mushfiqur or Mahmudullah -- both placed in Category B with a base price of Tk 35 lakh -- during the first call. After the local player segment ended, the duo were set to join other unsold players in Category C. But a Rangpur Riders official, who is also a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB)



Bangladesh captain Litton Das watches Mustafizur Rahman bowl during a training session at the Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Chattogram yesterday, ahead of today's series-decider against Ireland. Litton will be counting on his premier pace weapon to deliver in the crucial match, especially after Mustafizur's expensive spell in the second game.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

A decider with World Cup in sight

EKUSH TAPADER *from Ctg*

The Bangladesh-Ireland T20I series -- the Tigers' final T20 assignment before February-March's T20 World Cup -- was expected to be straightforward for the hosts. The plan was simple: secure the series in the first two matches and use the final game to test new options ahead of the global event.

But Ireland proved far more challenging. They dominated the opening match with a convincing win and pushed Bangladesh hard in the second, which the hosts clinched by four wickets. As a result, today's final game in Chattogram has become a series decider.

For Ireland, the approach remains unchanged. Head coach Heinrich Malan has stressed continuing their aggressive style and treating the series as "part of the build-up to the World Cup".

Bangladesh's plans, however, shifted after their opening defeat. Shamim Hossain -- left out of the squad for the first two T20Is despite skipper Litton Das wanting him included -- has been recalled for the final match.

Mahidul Islam Ankon, who was included for the first two games, has retained his place. The team management justified his selection by saying he would be given at least one match to test his readiness for



the middle order, a known problem area for Bangladesh ahead of the World Cup. Yet a debut for the 26-year-old wicketkeeper-batter now appears unlikely.

Ankon was barely involved in training yesterday, spending most of the session seated in the dugout. The other wicketkeeper-batter options are Nurul Hasan Sohan and Jaker Ali.

During throwdowns in the nets, Jaker struggled -- beaten while stepping out once, then bowled attempting a cut on the next ball. Frustrated, he muttered, "Patu [Patwary], you come," stepping aside as Shamim took strike. Jaker's walkaway felt symbolic.

He had been sharing the net with Shamim, while Sohan -- dropped

for the second game after making just five in the opener -- waited. He eventually batted at the end with the tail-enders, making it clear he was not in the team management's plans.

Even if an injury forced Ankon into the XI today, assessing him on a single match would hardly be meaningful with the World Cup approaching. Yet there was no one available to address these uncertainties. The selectors have remained silent, and head coach Phil Simmons has kept his distance from the media. Instead, pace bowling coach Shaun Tait attended the pre-match briefing.

Tait spoke clearly about his department, urging his pacers to seize their "next opportunity" and correct their inconsistencies. Aside from Mustafizur Rahman, most Bangladesh pacers conceded over 10 an over in the first two games.

He added that the team is keeping things simple, "hoping to build on the last victory and take that into the final game" to enter the pre-World Cup break with "momentum". But while Tait offered clarity, and Ireland seemed certain of their direction, the same could not be said for Bangladesh -- whose unsettled combinations and unclear plans appear to be the bigger concern ahead of the showcase T20 tournament.

Amite, Galib shine in Sylhet; Hasan fires in Cox's Bazar

SPORTS REPORTER

Amite Hasan had been searching for a big score in this season's National Cricket League (NCL), and on Monday it finally came.

Batting at number five for Sylhet at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, he produced a commanding unbeaten 172 on the second day against Rajshahi.

His early strokes were fluent, with crisp cover drives and confident back-foot shots helping him race to 35 at a run-a-ball. Even the pace of Nahid Rana could not unsettle him.

"Yes, there was challenge but our bowlers too did very well, so you have to face that kind of challenge," Amite told The Daily Star. With the pitch offering solid support to batters, he hoped to push past 200.

At the other end, Asadullah Al Galib also shone, reaching an unbeaten century as Sylhet closed the day on a strong 370 for three, leading Rajshahi by 134 runs.

In Cox's Bazar, Hasan Mahmud dominated for Chattogram as Rangpur were forced to follow on. After Chattogram made 350, Rangpur resumed at six without loss at lunch but fell apart quickly, eventually being dismissed for 126. Hasan finished



with figures of five for 31, and Rangpur ended the day at four without loss in their second innings.

At Sylhet Academy Ground, Mymensingh stayed on top after posting 354 and bowling Barishal out for 217, with Fazle Rabbi scoring 92 and Asadullah Galib taking four for 45. Mymensingh ended the day on nine without loss.

In Khulna, Dhaka reached 235 for five, led by Royals Ahmed Rayhan's 77 and Jishan Alam's 57, while Ziaur Rahman and Afif Hossain claimed two wickets each for Khulna.

SHORT CORNER

Where cricket is a family language

Cricket runs in the Tector family's veins. From their father to all four siblings, the sport has shaped their lives, and their dinner-table conversations. Now, Harry and Tim Tector are carrying Ireland's men's batting on their shoulders, while their sister Alice represents the women's team, and eldest brother Jack captained Ireland's age-group sides.

Boycott urges England to 'use their brains' ahead of Brisbane Test

Geoffrey Boycott has urged England to "use their brains" as Ben Stokes's men go in search of an Ashes series-levelling win in this week's second Test in Brisbane. England fell 1-0 down in the five-match series following a humiliating eight-wicket loss to Australia inside two days in last month's first Test in Perth.

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‘Catching China was not impossible’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh men's U-17 football team returned home from China yesterday with heavy hearts, having failed to realise their dream of qualifying for the AFC U-17 Asian Cup finals. Their 4-0 loss to a strong China in the final match of the qualifiers ended their campaign on Sunday.

The team has not qualified for the finals in the last 10 editions, with their last final-round appearance dating back to 2006. After 19 years, there was renewed hope, backed by extensive preparation and participation in several tournaments. Bangladesh showed consistent form in their opening four matches against Timor-Leste, Brunei, Sri Lanka and Bahrain, but fell short in the decisive clash against China.

Despite the disappointment, captain Nazmul Huda Faisal found positives in the campaign, though he admitted surprise at conceding the first two goals against China.

"We are not satisfied with the results in the qualifiers, but we must admit China were a stronger side in terms of fitness, physicality and skill. Still, it was not impossible to catch them," Faisal told The Daily Star over the phone.

He noted most goals were conceded due to "our own mistakes," including the surprising



first two. Faisal, who scored five goals in as many matches, said the early setbacks pushed the team onto the back foot, preventing a comeback.

Reflecting on the disparity with China, Faisal noted the lack of proper football infrastructure in Bangladesh.

"China's U-17 team have been together for the last two years, and they have 300 to 400 venues like the one we played in. In Bangladesh, we don't even have enough stadiums or proper grounds in rural areas. Without this, how can footballers develop?"

Despite the setback, he sees hope. BFF development committee chairman Nasser Shahrear Zahedee promised to keep this group together with a new training camp, following a small reception at the BFF house yesterday.

Reflecting on progress, Faisal noted improvements at junior and senior levels: the senior team beat India after 22 years, the U-17s defeated Bahrain for the first time, and they narrowly lost the SAFF U-17 final in a tiebreaker.

Still, Faisal carries regret. Leading both the U-17 and U-19 sides this year, he had hoped to deliver a trophy or reach a final round. "I couldn't deliver a trophy in the SAFF Championship or take Bangladesh to the AFC finals," he said, acknowledging the disappointment shared by all.



BANGLADESH SEEK SPARK

Bangladesh women's team players go through their paces during training at the National Stadium yesterday, gearing up for a far brighter showing in today's Infinix Tri-Nation Series finale against a strong Azerbaijan side. After a subdued 1-0 defeat to Malaysia, Peter Butler's charges know they must click as a unit to trouble the Europeans, who beat Malaysia 2-0 and sit 30 spots above Bangladesh in the FIFA rankings. A positive result tonight, kicking off at 7:00pm, would lift confidence ahead of next year's AFC Women's Asian Cup campaign.

PHOTO: BFF