

From orphanage to JUNIOR CHAMPION

ANISUR RAHMAN

When paddler Abul Hashem Hasib should have been under the loving care of his parents at just three years of age, he was instead taken to an orphanage by his single mother and maternal grandfather following his father's death and the family's financial hardship.

That orphanage -- Child Heaven International in Chittagong -- proved a blessing in disguise. The home for parentless, destitute, disabled and underprivileged children supported Hasib for nine years and continues to back his sporting journey by paying his monthly school fees at BKSP. Hasib was admitted to the sports education institute in 2019 through a training camp held in Chittagong and is currently a Grade-12 student.

Years of hardship, patience and perseverance paid off on Friday when Hasib clinched the boys' singles title at the 40th



National Table Tennis Championships, defeating his close rival and BKSP teammate Nafis Iqbal 3-1.

Hasib also won three more titles -- the boys' team and mixed events in the U-19 section, and the mixed event in the senior section. He finished runners-up in both the u-19 boys' doubles and men's doubles, and secured third place in the men's team event.

"I could not have come this far without the support of Child Heaven International," Hasib told The Daily Star yesterday.

Hasib said the orphanage environment helped him cope with his loss. "I never felt the absence of my father because of the surroundings at the orphanage. I wish I could share my success with my father, but instead I share everything with my mother, who supports me a lot," he said.

Winning his maiden national singles title was particularly special for Hasib, although he had previously become junior champion in a ranking tournament last year. "Becoming junior champion at the national championship is a different feeling. Every paddler dreams of winning the singles title," he said. "I targeted it in 2023 but failed. This time, I was determined and trusted the hard work I put in."

BPL PLAYOFFS

- Eliminator** (Jan 20, 1:00pm)
Rangpur vs Sylhet
- Qualifier 1** (Jan 20, 6:00pm)
Rajshahi vs Chattogram
- Qualifier 2** (Jan 21, 6:00pm)
Winner of Eliminator vs Loser of Qualifier 1
- Final** (Jan 23, 7:00pm)
TBA

**All matches at SBNCS in Mirpur



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Saif Hassan, vice-captain of the Bangladesh T20 team, showed glimpses of a return to form after a prolonged lean patch as he helped Dhaka Capitals post a challenging 170 all out in 19.5 overs in their Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) match against Chattogram Royals in Mirpur yesterday. Saif top-scored with a 44-ball 73, having managed five single-digit scores and a highest knock of 22 runs in his previous eight BPL outings.

Hridoy urges faith in national openers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh middle-order batter Tawhid Hridoy has backed the national team's openers to rediscover form despite their struggles in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

Opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim is averaging just over 18 in this edition of the BPL, with a highest score of 76, while Saif Hassan -- the other opener preferred by the team management -- has endured a difficult campaign, averaging below 15.

Hridoy, meanwhile, registered a superb century on Wednesday, following it up after a knock of 62 the previous day. His 63-ball 109 against Noakhali Express helped Rangpur Riders secure third position in the playoffs.

The hundred propelled Hridoy to the top of the BPL run-getters' list, with 378 runs at an average of 42 and a strike rate of 139.48. His surge up the scoring charts coincided with a change in batting position. In his first six matches, batting at three or four, Hridoy averaged just 17.6 with only one fifty. Following that lean run, he was promoted to open the innings and responded with an unbeaten 97 against Rajshahi Warriors.

With national team openers out of form, Hridoy was asked whether he could be considered for an opening role at international level.

"When the team [Rangpur] gave me this opportunity, I told them I had no problem. I am mentally ready to try to contribute to the



team wherever they deploy me," Hridoy said. "Yes, playing in the top order provides an opportunity to build an innings, whereas in the middle or lower order, you focus on

impact innings of 25 to 50 runs." However, speaking about the national team, Hridoy stressed the importance of backing the existing openers.

"I cannot say much about the national team. There are many top-order batters and they have been doing well in the last one year. I don't think I should be in their place right now; we should trust them and we want them to represent the country well going forward," Hridoy remarked.

Saif, who is also the vice-captain of the T20I side, registered his only notable innings of the tournament with a 73 against Chattogram on Wednesday -- a knock that may offer some relief to the selectors ahead of the World Cup. Hridoy, however, cautioned against directly comparing BPL performances with international cricket.

"At this moment, you cannot compare the BPL with international cricket; they are different. We should pray that everyone does well, because that is good for the country," he added.

Hridoy is expected to slot in at number five for the national team. He revealed that skipper Litton Das had emphasised the importance of his role in the middle order.

"He [Litton] told me, 'You will play in the middle order at the World Cup, so if everything is right, try to practise batting there. It's different and not easy,'" Hridoy said. "He reminded me that impact innings in the middle order also count."

Sharmin Akhter's maiden half-century in Women's T20Is -- a 39-ball 63 -- followed by an overall disciplined bowling performance, helped Bangladesh seal a 21-run victory over the USA in their opening Group B encounter of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifier at the Mulpani Cricket Ground in Kathmandu, Nepal, yesterday. Riding on Sharmin's knock, laced with eight fours and a six, Bangladesh posted 159 for 5, while Nahida Akter starred with the ball, claiming 4 for 24 to restrict the USA to 137 for 9. The Tigresses will face Papua New Guinea in Kirtipur tomorrow.

PHOTO: BCB



Arsenal tighten grip at the top



AGENCIES

Arsenal took a seven-point lead at the top of the Premier League after a scoreless draw with Nottingham Forest on Saturday following an exhilarating 2-0 derby victory for Manchester United that dealt a devastating blow to Manchester City's title hopes.

Arsenal could have gone nine points clear with a win at Forest but Sean Dyche's side fought tooth and nail to secure the draw, becoming only the second team to prevent Mikel Arteta's side from scoring in the Premier League this season.

"We tried to at the end find a goal. I don't think we conceded a single shot, again. But that's the margins and we didn't find a way to win it. Credit to them, the manner that they are organised," Arteta said.

Arsenal have 50 points from 22 games with City on 43 from 22.

After lamenting his side's wasteful finishing, Arteta said he was frustrated that they were not awarded a penalty in the 80th minute when the ball struck Ola Aina on the arm, but a VAR review cleared the Forest defender of any wrongdoing.

"A clear penalty in the box that has not been given, so that's the margins," he told broadcaster TNT. "I saw it live, here, and I saw it now again. That is very unnecessary."

NEW ZEALAND REWRITE HISTORY IN INDIA

New Zealand middle-order batter Daryl Mitchell continued his strong impact against India in ODIs, particularly in Indian conditions. Centuries from Mitchell and Glenn Phillips powered New Zealand to a historic series win in Indore yesterday, after sealing the third ODI by 41 runs.

Mitchell, who scored an unbeaten 131 in the previous ODI in Rajkot, finished the series with 352 runs -- the highest aggregate by any New Zealand batter in a three-match bilateral ODI series.

Mitchell averages 74.1 in ODIs against India -- the highest among players with a minimum of 500 runs against the opponent.



** The 2-1 victory in the three-match series marked New Zealand's first ODI series win against India in India, after losing each of their previous seven bilateral ODI series there.

** Mitchell smashed a 131-ball 137 -- his highest ODI score -- surpassing his previous best of 134, which had also come against India. Phillips, meanwhile, struck 106 off 88 deliveries

as New Zealand posted 337 for eight. In reply, despite a 124-run knock from Virat Kohli, India were bundled out for 296 in 46 overs.

** It was Mitchell's ninth ODI century and his fourth against India. It was also his fourth consecutive fifty-plus score and his second century in back-to-back matches against the same opposition.

** Mitchell averages 74.1 in ODIs against India -- the highest among players with a minimum of 500 runs against the opponent.



'A GREAT MOMENT'

Venus Williams fell at the first hurdle but said she was proud of herself after making history as the oldest woman to ever play at the Australian Open on Sunday. The American seven-time Grand Slam champion, 45, was handed a wildcard for Melbourne, five years after she last appeared at the major. She showed she still has what it takes in patches, pushing 24-year-old Serbian Olga Danilovic all the way before losing the last six games to crash out 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4. "It was such a great game, such a great moment," Williams said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 2

AND 5

Australian Open

First round

Live from 6:30 pm

STAR SPORTS

SELECT HD1, HD2

ICC U19 World Cup

Pakistan vs Scotland

Live from 1:30 pm

Ireland vs Sri Lanka

Live from 1:30 pm