

Star  
SPORT

# YEAR-END SPECIAL

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## SHOWCASING 2008



### NUMERO UNO

"I am the first, second and third best player in the world." The cheeky Portuguese all but lived up to his word this year with a sparkling performance that culminated in him leading Manchester United to Champions League glory. Ronaldo was the beacon of light for the glorious Red Devils in a season where he won both the European Golden Shoe and the Ballon d' Or.



### HAMILTON AT THE DEATH

Had it not been for an amazing set of circumstances, the Briton would have finished second for the second year running. But after dominating a season of enthralling races, it took the incredible intervention of Toyota's Timo Glock in the final lap of the final race of the season to hand Hamilton his maiden Formula 1 title.



### THE FINEST HUNDRED

Sachin Tendulkar made sure the best innings of the year came in the last month of 2008. Chasing 387 runs on a crumbling final day wicket against England in Chennai and that too in the backdrop of the Mumbai massacre, the Little Master struck his 41st Test century but more importantly he remained unbeaten, something he had wanted to do since the 1999 debacle against Pakistan, in the same city.



### NADAL ON THE ASCENDANCY

Five-times champion taking on twice-beaten finalist. World number one versus world number two. Federer versus Nadal. Again. A chilly British summer evening. Rain delays. Even lightning delays. Five sets. And a 9:16 pm finish time. That's all that needs to be said. Classic. Out of the world.



### THE DEVILS PAINT EUROPE RED

50 years on from the Munich air crash, that curtailed the growth of a talented team, Manchester commemorated their most shocking disaster with a show of sublime football that helped them trump Chelsea in the final of the Champions League in driving rain in Moscow.

With two quadrennial events in the same year, 2008 could hardly be shorn of glam. The ceaseless build-up, the constant advertising and the intertwined stories of the athletes involved made sure that both the Euros (held in Austria-Switzerland) and the Olympics were events to behold, especially the latter. For the first time, China removed her veil and showcased herself in all her glory to the whole world amidst a sea of gold medals and a rise to the top of the Olympic world (despite the USA's innovative table). But while these two events dominated news in the sporting calendar, the underlying theme of the year was one of drama. From the nail-biting finish in the

'greatest tennis match of all time' to the unparalleled excitement of the Formula 1 circuit in Brazil, sport had us on the edge of our seat all year long. Only Usain Bolt seemed free of tension coasting home in some style, although even the peerless Michael Phelps had to rely on the last 'minute' heroics of teammate Jason Lezak to keep his dreams alive. Cristiano Ronaldo shanked his penalty kick but still managed to win his coveted European Cup while underdogs Rajasthan Royals rode on the nerveless Shane Warne to win the IPL in the very last over of the cricket's new money-spinner. In a sector increasingly affected by commercialism, these are the specific events that continue to bring the fans

back by the droves. The financial crises has left people shorn of money and the willingness to spend on a luxury like sporting events should theoretically go down. But the beauty of sport is such that despite these inclement circumstances, despite the pain and suffering, the drama associated with it is what keeps bringing us back. This year, like many others, sports has offered us an avenue that allows us to escape, if fleetingly, the problems that plague us. It gives us hope and confidence and belief to keep doing the right thing and try as much as you can and then try some more. It's this intangible aspect that tie us to the games we love for, God help us, forever.



### ONE UP FOR BEAUTIFUL FOOTBALL

No mentality, no togetherness, not good enough. Spain proved all their doubters vehemently wrong in Euro 2008 playing an almost perfect six games to win the title by beating Germany 1-0 in the final. Fernando Torres poked the ball home, but the win was more emphatic than the score suggested. It was a victory of beauty over brawn as Spain won their first title for many years. Luis Aragones and his band of merry men -- Torres, David Villa and David Silva -- heralded the start of a new dawn for the Armada.



### CRICKET'S BIG FIGHT

Players from the two countries call each other names and officials blame the opposing boards for wrongdoings. The year was all about India and Australia, both on and off the field. Out on the field, the year belonged to India after they claimed the one-day series down under and beat Australia in the home series later in 2008. Off the field too India triumphed with the emergence of the Indian Premier League and more clout in the ICC. The Sydney controversy saw Harbhajan Singh and Andrew Symonds at each other's throat and then the two countries started to look away from each other.

### LIKE A LIGHTNING BOLT

He came, he saw, he conquered. And you did not even see it happen. Like a streak of lightning that was reminiscent of his name, Usain Bolt took Beijing by storm crushing world records in a proverbial amble. He won the 200m in a canter and cruised home with Jamaica in the relay. But the photo that will remain in the minds of all those who watched the Beijing Olympics was that of Bolt winning the 100m. He was slowing down 10m out from the line. And celebrating. With his shoelace undone. Call it disrespectful arrogance. Call it youth over exuberance. Either way, you have to call it impressive.



### A ROYAL SURPRISE

In first view, they looked like the motley crew but won cricket's richest tournament. The IPL triumph of Rajasthan Royals was surely the underdog story of the year. They had neither an icon player nor any Bollywood star as owner or fan but they had the legend Shane Warne as captain, coach and clearly the biggest inspiration. He brought the best out of Shane Watson and Sohail Tanvir while also making sure the unheralded ones -- Siddharth Trivedi, Swapnil Asnodkar, Ravinder Jadeja and Niraj Patel -- gave him match-winning performances. Warne made sure nothing went wrong in the final and was there when Tanvir hit the winning runs off Laxmi Balaji's final over in Mumbai.



### ALTIUS IS YELENA ISINBAEVA

The Olympic motto asks us to go 'Swifter, Higher and Stronger.' And no-one went higher than the Russian dame Yelena Isinbaeva. Effortlessly soaring above the previously untried barrier of 5.05 metres, Isinbaeva set a new benchmark for pole vaulters worldwide. Just to give you some perspective, the second best mark in Beijing was 4.80 metres.



### GOLD IS SPELT P-H-E-L-P-S

The enormity of Michael Phelps' achievements can be outlined by the sheer number of gold medals that he won in Beijing. 8 out of a possible 8. The perfect score. 7 world records and 5 individual medals. But even that would not do justice to the effort, resilience and sheer drive of the man who broke Mark Spitz's long-standing record in some style. In 2008, Phelps gave us memories worth a lifetime and imprinted himself firmly into Olympic folklore. By sheer statistics, he is the greatest Olympian of all time. Twist your head around that.

