

# Star SPORT YEAR-END SPECIAL

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## Loyalties divided



There is no right, there is no wrong, there is only popular opinion  
- Anonymous

Deriving a quotation from a thirteen-year-old Hollywood movie to make sense of the prevalent situation in Bangladesh cricket may look surprising but nothing else describes the current prevalent situation as aptly as the aforementioned phrase. Bangladesh is a nation divided down the middle, in more ways than one. While the electoral debates have been settled through a historic vote just a couple of days ago, the jury is still very much out on the actions of the cricketers who so shocked the nation by handing in their resignation and defaulting to the Indian Cricket League (ICL). The September walkout took place amidst tumultuous circumstances and the pieces are still being picked up, some three months on. The ICL has been played, the Tigers have moved on, but one thing that will remain is the key question: Were they right? Or were they wrong?

### Feeling conned

Quazi Zulquarnain Islam

They were wrong of course. Making sense of the hue and cry that followed the defect of the so-called Tigers into the wilderness of the Indian Cricket League, is a difficult task. Why is it that people are upset? Why exactly are they raising the question of integrity? Why have so many made their own little stands by boycotting the 'Dhaka Warriors'? And then again, why have so many else done the exact opposite? The latter is bemusing to say the least. Why would we (the public) not hold a grudge against the players who abandoned us without a thought? Why would we not raise our opposition as the likes of Shahriar Nafees and Aftab Ahmed deserted us -- men for whom we have toiled day and night under the steamy Dhaka sun to cheer on to that

elusive glory. In other words we oppose because we care. So why was it wrong? Going to represent your nation or much less just playing in a different country is an opportunity. People in the corporate world of life do it all the time. We don't blame the players for choosing to play in the ICL, we blame them for the reasons they gave. Reasons which betray a poor regard for the public's intelligence. It would have been simple enough for one of them to come forward to point out the monetary terms that effected their decision-making. But no-one was brave enough, instead pointing fingers at the draconian measures of the BCB, the selectors penchant to dropping underperforming 'stars' (imagine the audacity!) and in the case of some the use of education as an excuse.

Also, as Bashar said, "ICL never asked us not to play for our country." But the players decided to do so anyway pushing through their own agenda in the process. This was not a stand of some revolutionary men it was the face-saving gesture of a band of cowards for whom the going got too hot. And for those who absolve them of all blame, why though? These men deserted their country at the start of a tour, choosing the ICL over representing New Zealand, forgetting that the ICL demanded them only because they were national stars in the first place. How is that forgivable? Finally, even in the current economic climate, just because you get enough money doesn't make everything right. Money isn't everything, nor the only thing. But don't expect the ICL brigade to understand.

### Devil's Advocate

Mohammad Isam

When a professional chooses a different employer for a better opportunity, he is usually called a smart man. Although the situation is different in this context, it is still the same search of a professional for a prospect that is better than the prevalent one. The fourteen Bangladeshi players who have been contracted by the Indian Cricket League have just taken a decision that will broaden their livelihood. International cricket is a game of a lucky few. You do well, you play. To get to that level, a player must go through thousands of hours of rigorous training and meticulous preparation and in essence, give himself up to the game. Of course one must love the game more than anything else, but when one becomes a professional and gives up a

perfect opportunity to see off an eventful and glorious careers. It may be correct to point out that some of the younger players who have moved to the ICL had very little idea about the league's status in world cricket but their move was purely based on attaining a secured future for themselves. Why else would Aftab Ahmed go? He still harbours dream of playing for Bangladesh but will he be given a considerably long run if he has a lean patch? Elementary as it may sound, it is the right of every sportsman to earn money. At the end of the day when these players tend to settle in life very early, harsh reality in managing professional life and personal life comes in to play. Supporting their family becomes priority. So from a purely professional point of view, this was the correct decision.

few things in life, it is necessary to think of the present condition as well as keeping an eye on the future. The toughest part of top-level cricket is the luck factor. One bad shot could put an indelible mark on one's career. The 10-year ban that has been enforced by the Bangladesh Cricket Board could be the storm of the moment but what will become of it once the all-important BCCI nudges the ICC in favour of the ICL? They have said that Bangladeshi clubs and players will have a piece of the rich IPL pie. What if the money is gobbled up by the club officials themselves? Has the cricket board thought about that? For players like Mahbubul Karim and Golam Mabud, this is the best opportunity to showcase their talent to the world. For men like Mohammad Rafique and Habibur Bashar this is the

### Article of the Year

From the witty to the sarcastic, the dry to the juicy writers from inside and outside the borders of our land strived to bring us the best possible coverage of sports across the calendar year. Be it cricket, football, the Olympics or any of the numerous other razzmatazz that went on throughout the year, your favourite writers were there while it happened doing either hard reports, opinion stories or perspective pieces. We at The Daily Star Sport, decided that this was the best of the lot.

AMERICAN PROPAGANDA!  
TIMESONLINE

It was the perfect end to a perfect Olympic Games for China as the Olympic flame was handed over to London in one of the world's greatest stadiums last night. As memories of a sensational Games faded, China celebrated achieving its ultimate aim of heading the Olympic medals table for the first time. Unless you are in America, where you will discover that Team USA remain the force in world sport.

The race for the Olympic title is measured in medals, it just depends on which medals you consult. The IOC issues its league table based on the number of golds won, which gives China the honours, but then admits that there is no official system in place to decide who is top dog. So the American public is reading tables counting the total number of medals, including silver and bronze, won at the Games. On that measure, the US keep the whip hand over the home nation. The undeniable fact, though, is that this has been China's Games in every sense. A century ago at the 1908 Games in London, China did not even field a team. Now they have overtaken Russia and loom in the US's sights. In Beijing, China contested almost every event and, even where they could not win medals, showed signs that they will be a formidable force in London. Even in their weakest sports, there were breakthroughs. In sailing, for example, Yin Jian won China's first medal when she took windsurfing gold. She is just the start: in Qingdao, the venue for the Olympic sailing regatta, there are already 80 yacht clubs with 42 schools offering specific courses in sailing for more than 2,000 children. China plans to take over from Britain in ruling the



Olympic waves.

Whatever way they count, the fact remains that Beijing was the first time in 16 years that the US have not headed the gold-medal standings - and it has clearly hurt, never more so than on the track, where US officials were talking up the team's performance while quietly launching an internal inquiry into what went wrong. The answer was Usain Bolt, of course, the phenomenon who ended America's grip on the 100 metres. Jamaica blasted the US off the podium at Beijing's Bird's Nest stadium and claimed dominance of the high-speed events for men and women. Six golds and a total of 11 medals was an impressive performance from a country with a population of three million, a fifth of the number of residents of Beijing. Like Australia, who sank from fourth in Athens to sixth in Beijing on the IOC medals table, the US will have to accept that the rest of the world is catching up fast and that they will not be able to flex their sporting muscles for much longer. The US may feign ignorance, but there is a new Olympic order led by China, whichever league table you read.

### Quotable Quotes

- "Commit all your crimes when Sachin is batting. They will go unnoticed because even the Lord is watching." A placard at the SCG when Sachin Tendulkar was on his way to a magnificent century.
- "We have agreed to sell Robinho for human and footballing reasons, and for a substantial amount of money." Ramon Calderon, president of Real Madrid after the Brazilian striker's transfer to Manchester City.
- "With so many people saying it couldn't be done, all it takes is an imagination" -- U.S. swimmer Michael Phelps after winning an unprecedented eight gold medals at a single Games.
- "I'm Lightning Bolt. I'm not Flash Gordon or anybody. My name is Lightning Bolt" -- Usain Bolt, after setting a world record in the 200 metres final, one of three records he set in Beijing.
- "It's very pleasant to beat Maria... Why? Well, I don't like her outfit" -- Alla Kudryavtseva explains what spurred her to a shock victory over Maria Sharapova in Wimbledon's second round.
- "I couldn't have got any fatter, I was running out of clothes" -- Brazilian striker Ronaldo bemoans his battle with the bulge after spending most of the year injured.
- "I have impressed upon them the advantages of a Mediterranean diet over ketchup and chips." Fabio Capello after imposing a strict regimen on the England team.
- "I never had breakfast. I woke up around 11, I watched television and then I had some (chicken) nuggets for lunch. I went back to my room, I slept for two hours, I went back for some more nuggets and came to the track." Usain Bolt explains what helped him break the world record.
- "It's about the driver with the biggest balls who can get closest to the barriers." Lewis Hamilton talks cajones before having to rely on Timo Glock for his World Championship title.
- "Who doesn't want a million? You got to be crazy!" Money does matter, according to Chris Gayle.
- "Just one last thing, lads." Sourav Ganguly keeps the news of his retirement under wraps until the very end of a routine press conference.

### Sportsman of the Year

We have skewed between good and downright shoddy this year with cricket proving as always the beacon of light in an otherwise pitch dark international sporting calendar. Football has been edgy with Bangladesh jumping a few spots in the rankings while Asif Hossain Khan gave us a fleeting moment of brilliance albeit against a very mediocre field. However, while cricket shone brightest, the one player who managed to make so possible was the versatile all-rounder who coach Jamie Siddons just recently branded 'world-class.' Quick of wit, effective with the bat and sharp as nails with the ball, Shakib Al Hasan has been the ray of light for Bangladesh. For his sterling performances all year long The Daily Star Sport rewards Shakib as our 'Player of the Year.'



The smiling boy from Magura, who learned his trait in the sports institute BKSP, played all-rounder to the core in 2008. In the first quarter of the year, Shakib made sure he fixed his place in the Bangladesh team as a batsman. His hundred against Pakistan in Multan confirmed that the left-hander had grit and the eye for the big score. The hundred came on the back of a 75 against the same opponents during a series in which nothing worked for Bangladesh. After a forgettable Australia tour, came the watershed series against New Zealand at home. Here, Shakib grew from strength to strength. Pitched as the team's 'main spinner' by coach Jamie Siddons, Shakib destroyed the Kiwis with 7 for 36, a Bangladesh record, and scored runs regularly. He took his form to South Africa and against Sri Lanka at home to claim more wickets to take his haul to four five-fors peppered with a vita 96. In between, he found some time to knock off a first-class century for Khulna in the NCL. In 2008, there was none better than Shakib Al Hasan.