



TEAM TIGERS

take a bow

DESPAIR TO ECSTASY: In 2012 the cricketers went from crushing disappointment to eventual elation. (ABOVE) The entire team are shown in a celebratory huddle after pulling off a 3-2 ODI series victory over the much-fancied West Indies on December 8 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, where less than nine months ago Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim (BELOW) were in tears after a rousing performance in the Asia Cup went in vain through a 2-run defeat to Pakistan in the final on March 22.

PHOTOS: STAR FILE

BISHWAJIT ROY

The image of Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim in tears after the Asia Cup final in March is one that springs readily to mind when looking at the Bangladesh cricket team's performance in the year just going by. The chance to achieve their biggest success was shattered following a two-run defeat to Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in March, but the crying cricketers won the hearts of millions through their outstanding performance in the region's showpiece event.

The rousing performance also served notice of a much improved side, especially in the one-day version of the game, and the seeds sown in the Asia Cup came out in full bloom in the latter part of the year when they won a one-day series 3-2 against a fancied and in-form West Indies.

The Tigers, as they are affectionately called, made the best of the few opportunities they were handed in 2012. It is a reality of the times that at the end of each year the cricketers hog the spotlight as far as sports in the country go. It is much the same this year but the crucial and pleasant difference is that while in previous years the spotlight was trained on

one or two cricketers because of their exceptional performances, in 2012 the object of congratulation is the entire team as Bangladesh played as a 'unit' to achieve great success in ODI cricket. 2012 was the only year in their history that Bangladesh have more wins than losses against full-strength, top sides in the ODI format.

The Tigers' performances did not only depend on contributions from one or two cricketers, rather everyone in the playing eleven and the squad did their part to make sure they won five ODIs out of nine. The bowling unit, which has always been considered a weak link, deserves special praise for the way they played their part. One instance is enough to exemplify the Tigers' improved bowling discipline and stomach -- Shafiqur Islam came in place of injured Mashrafe Bin Mortaza in the series-deciding one-dayer against West Indies and the lanky paceman did exactly what the injured Mashrafe was doing in the previous matches by tying down and then taking the crucial wicket of dangerman Chris Gayle.

That example speaks of the excellent team that translated into spirited and disciplined on-field displays, for which the team manage-



ment deserves substantial credit.

It is a common feeling that the best must come from Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal if Bangladesh want to do well against top international sides. The contribution of the two world-class players were doubtless immense in Bangladesh's success in the year, but players like captain Mushfiqur Rahim, all-rounder Nasir Hossain and vice-captain Mahmudullah Riyad stepped up at various crucial junctures to give the lie to the long-held dependence on the two stal-

warts. What was most refreshing for Bangladesh cricket was that young cricketers like off-spinner Shohag Gazi, -- a real revelation for Bangladesh cricket -- Anamul Haque and Mominul Haque have provided real signs that good times lie ahead.

One cannot forget the form of Tamim, who had hit four fifties in a row in the Asia Cup to silence the critical storm that was building before the tournament. Shakib's 31-ball 49 played a big part in swinging the game Bangladesh's way against India, but one must also praise the

three top-order batsmen -- Tamim, Nasir and Jahanul Islam -- for their half-centuries and Mushfiqur's 25-ball 46 when looking back at the successful chase of a 289-run target. In the game against Sri Lanka, Nasir and Riyad kept their cool after Shakib's fifty to set up the final against Pakistan.

And then the Tigers showed how much they had grown as an international side by winning the end-of-year ODI series against the West Indies without their talisman, Shakib, who missed the ODI series because of a shin bone injury, especially as the pre-series prediction in many quarters was a 5-0 whitewash in favour of the Caribbeans.

Shohag had a series to remember for a long time as he carried his impressive form of the Test matches into the ODIs to make matters difficult for the tourists along with veteran left-arm spinner Abdur Razzaq. Anamul's maiden hundred was another brilliant highlight in the series. The impression of Bangladesh becoming a true team in 2012 is only strengthened by the fact that Tamim was not in his best form during the series.

Bangladesh played nine ODIs, the fewest since 2001, but the figure was

more pathetic in Test cricket as they got to play only two Tests in the entire year. The Tigers played their first Test in almost a year when they took on the West Indians in the first of two matches. Mushfiqur's men might not have taken as big a step forward in the Test arena as they did in the ODI format, but they had some notable positives in the two defeats against West Indies.

In Tests the Tigers somewhat overcame almost a year's gap by racking up their highest score of 556 in the first match against the West Indies in November. Although the series was lost 2-0, there were encouraging performances from various members -- Naeem Islam's patient hundred in the first Test, Shohag's bowling, and Abul Hasan's debut hundred batting at number ten in the second Test -- but the team has a ways to go to be competitive in the longest form.

In T20s it was an ordinary year, with defeats to Scotland, the Netherlands and an early exit from the World Twenty20 in Sri Lanka.

But the year will still be remembered for the Tigers' achievement in ODI cricket, and most of all for the teamwork that brought about those successes.

Controversially 2012

SAKIB SUBHAN

In 2012 Bangladesh have made some strides in the sports sphere -- the playing of FIFA international friendlies and the general elevation of the cricket team's standard in ODI cricket come to mind. But if there is one thing that can be expected from organised sports in Bangladesh, it is that there will be controversies, and 2012 supplied a steady stream of the same. Here's a look back at some of the off-field scandals:

HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN

Well, it was not a warm gun thankfully, but Arif Khan Joy did take a firearm out onto the football field during the Federation Cup quarterfinal between Mohammedan and Team BJMC on October 16. Carrying a firearm into a sporting scene was not his only offence however. Executive members of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) are not allowed to be with their teams during match hours, and that is the first rule Joy, BFF vice-president and director of BJMC, broke when he went out onto the field of play during the half-time break to remonstrate with the referees with his licensed gun clearly visible holstered in his trousers.

Funnily enough, the provision for firearms is so unprecedented that the BFF tournament rules make no mention of it. A FIFA clause however states that firearms

can be brought into football grounds in exceptional circumstances and only by security personnel. The circumstance was neither exceptional nor was Joy a security personnel, and he was duly handed a one-year suspended ban and a 50,000-taka fine.

IT WASN'T BROKE, BUT THEY'VE FIXED IT

Regrettably, the spectre of match- and spot-fixing raised its ugly head all too often in the year, in both the favourite sports of cricket and football.

The inaugural edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20 had a shadow cast over it when police arrested a suspected bookie, Pakistani national Sajid Khan, during a match on February 26. Sajid had the bank details of Chittagong Kings' Pakistani recruit Nasir Jamshed and Dhaka Gladiators' Pakistan player Rana Naved in his mobile phone inbox.

Then Bangladesh's cricketing establishment was thrown into disarray in October when Bangladesh's international panel umpire Nadir Shah was implicated in a sting operation by Indian television channel India TV in a spot-fixing scandal that also involved six other umpires from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In the footage aired on October 8, Nadir was shown to have been willing to give doctored decisions in lieu of money. The umpire maintains his innocence.

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NAIMUL KARIM

While the Tigers have undoubtedly gained high honours this year with their brilliant run in One-Day Internationals (ODIs), 2012 however witnessed various other highlights in Bangladesh's sporting arena.

FAHIM'S FAIRYTALE

11-year old Bangladeshi chess prodigy Fahim Alam won France's under-12 chess championship in April but was facing expulsion because he arrived illegally in France in October 2008 with his father Nura and in 2010 was issued

with an order to leave the country. After his case received widespread media attention, Alam's father was granted a work and residency permit in May after obtaining a job as a dishwasher and social housing in Paris.

SHAKIB & SHISHIR

Even though Shakib Al Hasan may not have been on the field during his country's epic win against the West Indies, he managed to grab the headlines as he got married to Umme Ahmed Shishir, a Bangladeshi American. It was an event that broke millions of hearts across the country; the number of

'teary-eyed' responses that The Daily Star received to the story breaking the news perhaps best described the reaction of the public, or more accurately half of them.

TIGRESSSES ON FIRE

With all the frenzy surrounding the men's cricket team, it should not be forgotten that the 'women in green' made vital strides this year as well. They battled a more professional South African unit neck and neck at home and reached the semifinals of the T20 Asia Cup this year by beating Sri Lanka. These are tasks that took the men's side a much longer time to achieve.

EVEREST CONQUERERS

This year witnessed not one but three Bangladeshis achieve the daunting task of scaling the highest peak in the world. Nishat Majumdar, an employee of WASA, became the first ever Bangladeshi woman, followed soon after by Wasfia Nazreen, to achieve this feat whereas MA Mohit gained the personal distinction of having climbed the peak from both sides.