



# Our own LITTLE MASTER

*Bangladesh cricket, to the joy of its legions of lovers in the country, has continued its endeavour of reaching new heights in 2013. One man, more than any other, deserves credit for the continued ascent. Skipper Mushfiqur Rahim has been the most significant contributor with the bat across formats. He also became the first Bangladeshi to score a Test double-century. Even more than his consistent batting, he has been the lynchpin of Bangladesh's progress, as his intensity in practice and on the field has been a guiding light for the rest of the team. For such rare and valuable qualities, The Daily Star has chosen Mushfiqur as its Sports Personality of 2013.*

NAIMUL KARIM

When Mohammad Ashraful was caught at slip at Galle ten runs short of becoming the first Bangladeshi double centurion, Mushfiqur Rahim at the other end was still a sizeable 43 runs away from achieving the task his partner could not.

And yet not for a moment in that seven-hour innings did the 25-year-old seem overawed by the task at hand. In fact, after having witnessed the sheer class of his innings in that Test, many had actually expected him to be the first to reach 200, almost predicting Ashraful's premature dismissal beforehand.

It was exactly this sort of a confidence that exemplified Mushfiqur this year. To say that the captain takes his training sessions seriously would be an understatement. On a typical day, when the other players arrive to attend the training session in the afternoon, Mushfiqur would already have gone through his morning batting session. When others knocked the ball for 10 overs in the nets, Mushfiqur would play 20. And then the personalised keeping and gym sessions would follow to end an 'ideal' training day for the captain.

That his hard-work off the field paid its dividends was evident throughout the year. It began with his performance in the second season of the Bangladesh Premier League for Sylhet Royals, where he topped the run-scorer's list with 440 runs. The highlight was his 44-ball 86 in the first preliminary finals against the Dhaka Gladiators -- which Sylhet lost by four runs while chasing 197-- that almost overshadowed Chris Gayle's century. The class of the innings was such that chief selector Akram Khan was compelled to state that he had never seen a 'Bangladeshi cricketer play that kind of a knock.'

Mushfiqur's dominance was seen during the Dhaka Premier League as well, where he was the third highest run-scorer -- 624 runs in 12 matches at an average of 69.33 -- despite missing a chunk of the competition due to the New

Zealand series. It was the 25-year-old's bold effort which saw Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club finish second in the competition.

As a captain, his positive influence was not restricted to domestic cricket. And although Bangladesh took part in just three international assignments this year -- Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and New Zealand -- his role as a leader was visibly of paramount importance.

Bangladesh were then at a crossroads. A team recovering from the disappointment of an uninspiring Zimbabwe tour were all of a sudden expected to repeat their ODI whitewash of New Zealand, which they achieved three years ago.

To his immense credit, it was a pressure that Mushfiqur and Co handled with precision. To do so, the side need not have looked further than the example of their captain. Ever the process man, the captain ensured that his side focused at one game at a time and avert any other unnecessary talk, something which eventually led to Bangladesh stretching their unbeaten run against New Zealand by seven games.

The only glitch in Mushfiqur's 2013 this year was his shocking resignation from captaincy in May, following the ODI series defeat to Zimbabwe. The announcement, which he later admitted to be a mistake, had more to do with his undying passion for the game and the exacting standards he set for himself rather than a weak mentality, and it was something that the team as a whole moved on from very quickly.

In a recent interview Mushfiqur stated that ever since he was named captain, his motto has been to treat all players equally. "No matter how many match-winners we have, if there are five players who play well one of them may bowl and get a wicket, but someone else has to catch it," he said.

It's a statement that aptly describes the manner in which the national team has grown over the last year or so, a task which would not have been possible without the glowing example of discipline that Mushfiqur has helped inject in the team. These are the attributes that make him an ideal fit for our Sports Personality of the year.

## Good on the field, bad and ugly off it

BISHWAJIT ROY

Cricket has now become a game of hope and a source of pure entertainment in a troubled country. Fortunately in 2013, the fans were given enough occasions to celebrate the success of their beloved Tigers. Under the motivational leadership of Mushfiqur Rahim, the Tigers not only increased their rate of improvement on the international stage, but also came up with performances that momentarily alleviated their countrymen's pain of living in a politically and economically chaotic climate.

The last 12 months have provided many reasons to smile and take pride in the team, and they take some listing -- Mushfiqur's double-century -- the first by a Bangladeshi; a drawn Test in Sri Lanka and a drawn ODI series to follow that; Mominul Haque's back-to-back Test hundreds; the unique Test record of a hundred and a hattrick in the same match by Shohag Gazi; the drawn Test series against New Zealand followed by a second consecutive ODI whitewash of the Kiwis and Rubel Hossain's six wickets, which included a hattrick, in the first ODI of the whitewash.

The only real cricketing disappointment was the tour of Zimbabwe, where the Tigers lost the first Test embarrassingly before drawing the rubber, but

went on to lose the ODI series 2-1. Regardless, 2013 was a year witness to Bangladesh's journey on the right track -- on the field, that is.

But Alas! All was not rosy in 2013 as Mohammad Ashraful -- Bangladesh cricket's first superstar -- opened the darkest chapter in June by confessing to having indulged in corruption over a 12-year career.

Later in August, the International Cricket Council (ICC) charged seven individuals for involvement in fixing in the second edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and two others for not reporting corrupt

ent inquiry can discover the whole truth behind the BPL's wrongdoings. Can BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon show the courage to form this committee in the New Year as he showed when bringing the ICC's Anti-corruption and Security Unit (ACSU) to unearth the corruption on the field?

Another highly discussed issue over the last year was the election of the BCB. The long-cherished desire of getting an elected president was fulfilled but not without controversy. Many had termed it a 'selection through an election' and thus a true election in sport remains a distant

MATCH	PLAYED	WIN	LOSS	DRAW	ABN
Test	6	1	2	3	0
ODI	9	5	3	0	1
T20I	4	1	3	0	0

approaches. The tribunals formed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) are still conducting the trials of the accused.

The Bangladesh Premier League was supposed to be a golden goose for Bangladesh cricket but it became a disease. Many details behind its failure and reported financial irregularities remain unknown. Only an independ-

reality. Former BCB president Saber Hossain Chowdhury was in the running for the president's post but he suddenly withdrew from the race to make it a one-sided affair.

Mushfiqur's men however ensured that unpalatable events off the field would not remain in the minds of the fans with a stunning show against New Zealand in the home series, their last



international engagement of the year.

Bangladesh had shared the honours in the two-match Test series against the Kiwis with two fully fleshed out draws, underpinning their growing prowess in the longer version.

In the ODI series that followed, the possibility of another whitewash was in the air once the Black Caps arrived in the capital but the way the 3-0 result

panned out simply reinforced the Tigers' reputation as a dangerous team in the 50-over format.

It was a series in which no one could predict who would be the ultimate hero -- a new match-winner emerged in every game, which has been the real beauty about this Bangladesh team, and indeed the defining legacy of the team's performances in 2013.

This new dawn became visible on March 12, when history was made at the picturesque Galle International Cricket Stadium in Sri Lanka. Touring Sri Lanka or playing against them had till then been an unpleasant experience for the Tigers. But this year they scripted a new history, drawing the first Test and sharing the honours in the one-day series.

Expectations were high about their tour to Zimbabwe but Bangladesh possibly played their worst cricket of the year as they surrendered the ODI series to the home side after drawing the two-match Test series. The worst consequence was that an emotional Mushfiqur announced his decision to quit the captaincy in the aftermath of the ODI series loss. Fortunately however, he soon realised the error of his impulsive move and has now been appointed the skipper till the 2015 World Cup.

Success in Zimbabwe and learning the craft of T20 cricket would have made 2013 a perfect year but still there was a lot to cheer in the past year.

But uncertainty lies ahead as at the end of the year the country's dysfunctional politics has started to rear its ugly head. It has not only seen the visiting West Indies Under-19s withdraw from a tour but also placed the New Year's sporting extravaganzas in the country in danger.