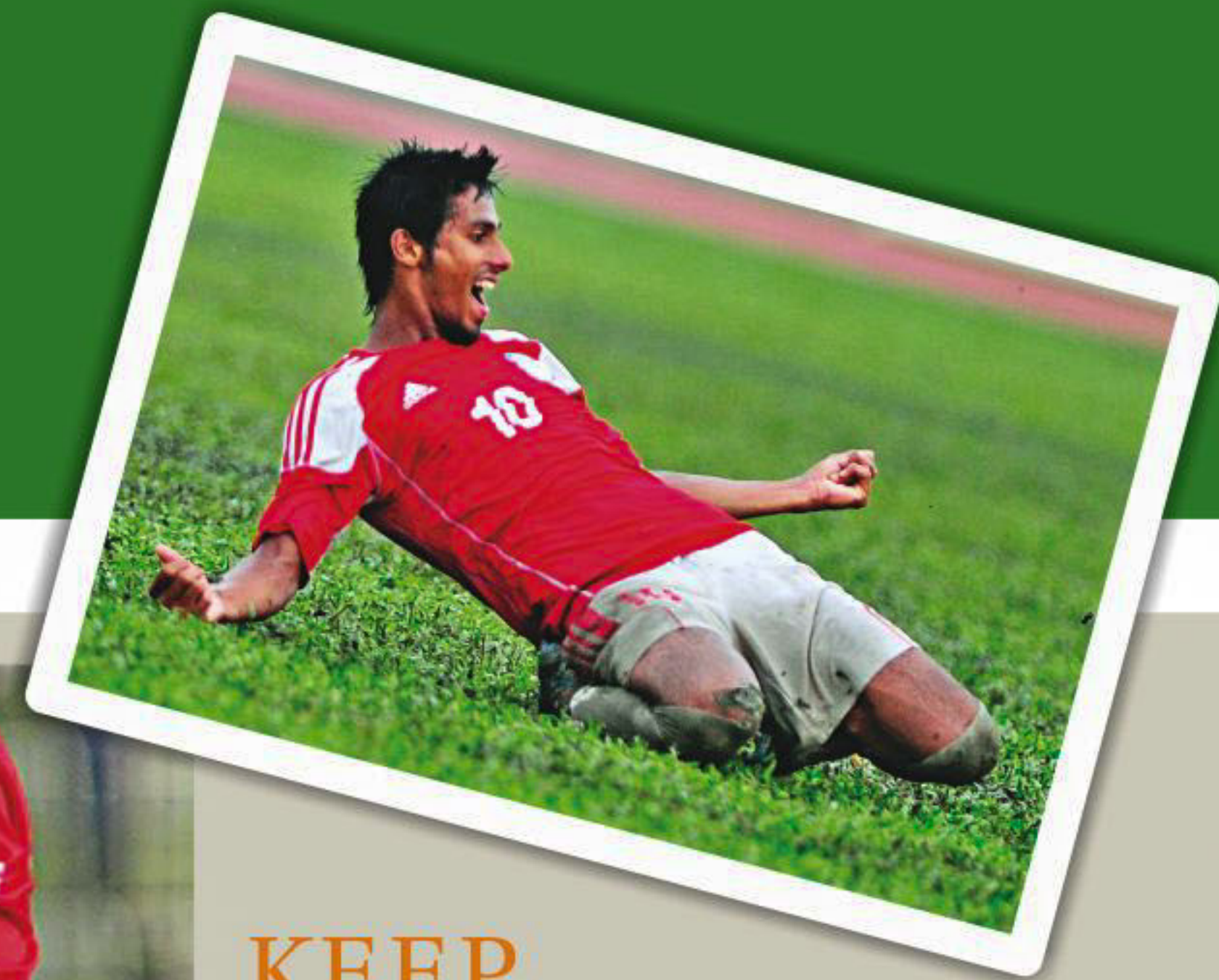


SPORT



KEEP Smiling

If you are a sports fan and you want to enjoy your first morning of the new year with something pleasing from the year that has gone by, the Daily Star Sports presents you two fine sporting moments of 2014. (L) Bangladesh left-arm spinner Taijul Islam is the toast of his teammates after becoming the only player to take a hat-trick on ODI debut in a match against Zimbabwe in Mirpur on December 1; (Top) Bangladesh U-23 midfielder Sohel Rana slides on the greens of Army Stadium after his winning goal against Nepal U-23 on August 26.

PHOTOS: STAR FILE

A year to right the wrongs

SPORTS REPORTER

For Bangladesh cricketers, the traditional 'look-back' throughout the last year won't be one that they would be too fond of. If it was not for a joyous series wins against Zimbabwe at the fag end of the year, pictures of a gloomy Mushfiqur Rahim with his head down during each of the post-match press conference would have probably been the ideal 'iconic collage' of the year for the Tigers.

With Bangladesh hosting two major global cricketing events in consecutive months, one would have expected 2014 to be a golden year for Bangladesh cricket. A long winless streak, however, spoilt all the fun. And make no mistake, the Tigers faced plenty of heat; so much so that Mushfiqur 'apologised to the nation' on more than one occasion.

The Twenty20 World Cup and the Asia Cup brought Bangladesh fans from all over the world on a single

platform and made them dance to the same song. The Tigers', unfortunately, were not on the same tune.

It was a year of transition too with a complete reshuffle in the team management. From the head coach to the physio, almost every position of the national team management saw a new face.

The changes might not have been ideal, especially with the 50-over World Cup months away, but they were required nonetheless.

In came Chandika Hathurusingha, an inexperienced coach at the international circuit, yet one with a laudable profile in Australia's domestic competition.

A seemingly shrewd tactician, some of the strategies Hathurusingha employed were quite rare in Bangladesh cricket. Preparing pacy wickets to run through India's strong batting line-up in the second and third matches of the three-match ODI series, was one of them. While it did end up backfiring, it displayed a new line of thought and to a certain

extent depicted the Sri Lankan's aggressive mindset.

There were changes in the personnel too as far as the national team is concerned, Abdur Razzak was left out of the India series; Shakib Al Hasan was banned after an argument with the coach while Nasir Hossain was dropped for the Zimbabwe series. It just showed that the Sri Lankan is a no-nonsense tactician.

Having failed to beat a Test nation throughout the year, the Zimbabwe series, Bangladesh's last series before the World Cup, was always going to be crucial. In fact, nothing less than perfect result would have pacified the fans and detractors alike.

After eking out a hard-fought win in the first Test, the cog wheels suddenly seemed to be churning again. From Shakib's double to Taijul Islam's hat-trick on debut, from Mominul Islam's ninth-consecutive 50-plus score to Tamim Iqbal's batting out a day for just 70-odd runs; suddenly everyone was having a bite of the cherry.

While the year did end well, the Tigers know there is a lot more that they need to do before they can put on the blanket. If 2014 is considered as a year of wasted opportunities, 2015 can be dubbed as the year to rectify those mistakes. Because there will be plenty on the menu for the Tigers as they host Pakistan, India, South Africa and Australia after the World Cup.

At the end of the Test series against Zimbabwe, Hathurusingha was asked if he was happy with the 3-0 win. His reply seemed slightly ambitious enough. "We play Pakistan, Australia and South Africa next year. If we can remain unbeaten after that, I'll be happy."

As pushy as it may sound, maybe that's the sort of result that Bangladesh cricket needs. If the victories against Zimbabwe provided an ounce of hope, wins against these top-ranked nations will perhaps even erase some of the painful memories of last year; like the defeats at the hands of Hong Kong and Afghanistan.

'Dhoni sends shockwaves'

AFF, New Delhi

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni's sudden decision to quit Test cricket caught the country's media and former players by surprise Wednesday, even though many felt his time at the top was over.

Dhoni's retirement from the longer format on Tuesday soon after the drawn third Test in Melbourne was the lead front-page story in most newspapers.

But headlines like 'Dhoni takes the highway, Mahi (Dhoni's nickname) way', 'Dhoni drops a bomb' and 'Dhoni retires Dhoni style' indicated how the media-wary skipper had managed to fool the usually alert press pack.

"Dhoni's Test career came to an end in the same way that he has often played his cricket -- with a quirky, inscrutable move that seemed to defy logic and left eyebrows raised all around," wrote the Times of India.

Former captain Sourav Ganguly, who is in Australia as a television commentator, also appeared stunned by Dhoni's retirement before the final Test had been

played in Sydney.

"I am surprised by the decision in the middle of the series," Ganguly wrote in the Hindustan Times. "Three Tests are over and it was a question of one more. He could have finished it off."

The same paper said: "Losing a player during the heat of battle can unsettle any team. Here, India have lost their commander-in-chief."

Dhoni will continue to lead in limited-overs cricket starting with the defence of the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand from February 14.

Former teammate Rahul Dravid called Dhoni an "inspiration", saying he was a captain who led "more by example than by rhetoric or by words".

"He was a captain I enjoyed playing under," Dravid told the Cricinfo website. "One of the things I liked about MS was that what you saw was what you got. Very uncomplicated, always led by example."

Former Test batsman Mohinder Amarnath, who was sacked as selector in 2012 after demanding that Dhoni be removed as Test captain, said the player had taken the right decision.



BFF not trimming local coaches

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite insistence by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin to cut the number of development coaches in half, the number of coaches is set to remain at 20, based on the suggestion of a review committee to the development committee yesterday.

The BFF president, during a meeting with development committee chairman Badal Roy on December 21, had urged him to reduce the number of coaches employed by the BFF and salaried from AFC fund from 20 to 10, as he felt that more than 10 coaches were not needed for development purpose and that many of the coaches remained idle for most of the calendar year.

"I think 10 coaches is enough for development purpose. I would like to see the number of local coaches reduced to 10 and by the money saved from reducing

local coaches, we can hire a foreign coach for the academy," the BFF president told reporters yesterday.

While the development committee suggested hiring a foreign coach to guide local coaches and especially for the academy, it also decided to keep 19 of the current coaches, while relieving Mong Kru Marma for alleged negligence of his duties and included goalkeeping coach Mizanur Rahman Minar in the roster.

The review committee, while admitting that the some of the currently employed coaches have question marks regarding their quality and performance, proposed an evaluation of their performances every four months and to start a category system on the basis of performance.

The meeting also informed that the coach and manager of the BFF U-12 team, which took part in a football festival in Malaysia earlier this month, have been served show-cause notices after it was alleged that some of the players of the squad did not meet the required criteria.

Siddikur extends lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman extended his lead to fourteen shots after a third round score of one-under (71) in the Gemcon Players Championship held at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday. The 30-year-old golfer took his three-round tally to 15-under (201), fourteen shots ahead of Jakiruzzaman Jakir, who jumped to second position with a three-under (69) for an aggregate score of two-under (214).

Dulal Hossain dropped to third position at one-under (215), followed by Jamal Hossain Mollah at par (216).

SA eye series

AFF, Cape Town

South Africa will literally be trying to make up for lost time when they take on the West Indies in the third and final Test at Newlands on Friday.

Although the West Indies put up an improved performance, South African captain Hashim Amla stopped short of acknowledging their credentials in his post-match comments after the rain-hit second Test in Port Elizabeth ended in a draw.

Amla suggested that South Africa's first innings total of 417 for eight could have been bigger had his team not been trying to force the pace after most of the second day's play was washed out.

He also pointed out that the West Indian reply of 275 for nine was largely due to a third wicket partnership of 176 between Kraigg Brathwaite and Marlon Samuels, who both hit centuries. The next highest West Indian score was 22 by Devon Smith.

According to Amla, the South African bowlers performed well on an unresponsive pitch in Port Elizabeth.

Amla clearly felt that South Africa would have been favourites to win if the weather had not cut more than half the playing time from the second Test.

THE UNMATCHED entertainer

AFF, Karachi

If fan following was a yardstick of greatness in cricket, Pakistan's colourful all-rounder Shahid Afridi would probably be ranked his country's greatest ever player.

Ever since he hit a 37-ball hundred in only his second one-day international -- against Sri Lanka in Nairobi in 1996 -- Afridi has been a cult figure in Pakistan.

His announcement last week that he was quitting one-day cricket after next year's World Cup has left his millions of fans pondering: who to watch after him?

No cricketer in Pakistan has had the persona and the box office pull of the hyperactive, big-hitting Afridi, who filled stadiums throughout his career -- and often emptied them when he was out.

The fervour for watching him bat was such that when he was dismissed first ball by an unknown Zimbabwe bowler in Peshawar a few days after his world record hundred, the crowd chanted: "Try ball, let Afridi bat again!"

Girls swooned for a glimpse of him and many wanted to marry him. In 2004 two women came in bridal dress to a ground and were only convinced to leave after meeting him face to face.

Afridi won hearts with his unorthodox, buccaneering style -- ignoring the coaching manual to rely on swagger and raw talent.

It was an approach tailor-made for TV and Afridi's career coincided with the explosion of Pakistani media that followed General Pervez Musharraf's liberalisation of the sector in 2002.

Pakistani cricket writer and historian Osman Samiuddin said the exposure meant Afridi's popularity became virtually unmatched, in any era.

"He has played in the right age for sure, when a booming electronic media has made him a bigger public presence than previous stars such as Imran Khan, Wasim Akram or Waqar Younis," Samiuddin told AFP.

The Afridi effect can be seen in any street game in Pakistan, where millions of children copy his style -- trying to smash every other ball out of the park.

Afridi's superstardom on the field made him the face of Pakistan off it, and his likeness is plastered across billboards and TV ads everywhere in the country.

Even now, in the twilight of his career, Afridi advertises everything from shampoo, banking and skin cream to chewing gum, with a ubiquity

With age catching up and form sliding, Afridi's fan following started to diminish two years ago.

He was dropped from the one-day side for the tour of India in December 2012 and then for the Champions Trophy a year later.

But in typical style, he won back hearts with a blistering 18-ball 34 against India to help Pakistan reach the final of the Asia Cup in March.

Two sixes off Ravichandran Ashwin in the last over against arch-rivals India silenced the critics.

"When Afridi wins a game in that manner it feels much more than just an ordinary win," said Samiuddin, author of "The Unquiet Ones", a new history of Pakistani cricket.

There are those who became exasperated with Afridi in recent years, seeing a player whose love for the spectacular often came at the expense of his teammates.

But Samiuddin says that for all his occasional failures, Afridi would be remembered as "a very very good limited overs player, among the greatest Pakistan has seen."

"He has changed the course of matches with his bowling many times and does so with his batting as well," he said.

Despite bagging 391 wickets in 389 ODIs with his brisk leg-spin, Afridi agrees fans largely come to watch him bat.

"I know my contributions as a bowler count for little. They want sixes flying all the time from my bat and I always try to do that," said Afridi, whose 342 sixes in 389 matches is a world record.

Whatever his performance at next year's World Cup, it will be a long time before cricket sees another performer quite like Shahid Afridi.

CMG outlines Bangladesh Super Soccer

SPORTS REPORTER

Celebrity Management Group, the Indian sports management company which proposed for an eight-team franchise football league in Bangladesh, sent an e-mail to Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday, outlining the structure of the proposed league.

As per the proposal, the league will be called 'Bangladesh Super Soccer', and would feature eight teams -- seven divisions and one district team. Each team would play against each other twice on home and away basis and a total of 61 matches, including two semifinals each and a final, will be held during the entire league, confirmed BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag.

The proposal also outlined the ownership structure -- Bangladeshi enterprises would own 75 per cent of the franchise while foreign clubs would hold 25 per cent ownership of each franchise. There will be a maximum of seven foreign players allowed in each of the eight teams, the proposal contained.

The proposed league is also supposed to have Argentine legend Diego Maradona as its league committee chairman.

The CMG had earlier helped BFF host the Argentina versus Nigeria FIFA Friendly in Dhaka in September, 2011.

The CMG officials, who made the initial proposal to BFF on December 23, are scheduled to meet the BFF high-ups for a second meeting on January 5.