



The Tigers tasted glory towards the end of a bleak year as they posted their best ever Test result after whitewashing Zimbabwe 3-0.

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STAR



Shakib Al Hasan overcame a two-and-a-half month long ban and became the third player in Test cricket to score a century and take ten wickets in a game.

Football's rise; cricket's comeback

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WITH two mega events and three crucial bilateral series', you would have thought 2014 was going to be a year of cricket for Bangladesh. After all, it's not every year that a nation gets the opportunity to host a World Cup and the Asia Cup in consecutive months.

The other aspect that, in a way, further fuelled the prediction was the national cricket team's impressive performance in the previous year.

However, contrary to all those expectations, it was Bangladesh's footballers who turned out to be the highlight of 2014. A part of the reason behind that was the Tigers' horrendous form this year, which saw them fail to eke out a win against a top-tier nation until a month ago.

But then again, that does not take anything away from the way the footballing outfit of Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club mesmerised Bangladesh's football fans. In a single year, the new powerhouse of Bangladesh's football won the Bangladesh Premier League, the prestigious Kings Cup in Bhutan and finished second in the IFA Shield, the fourth oldest club competition in the world.

Their emphatic journey came to light when they surprised their South Asian opponents to reach the finals of the IFA shield in February. It was the team's attacking intent that perhaps gained maximum attention.

With Haitian Sony Nordey leading the three-man attack and Bangladesh captain Mamunul Islam pouring in the passes from the mid-field, the team played in a sort of rhythm rarely seen in Bangladesh's club football.

In fact, they were favourites to beat Kolkata's Mohammedan in the final of the Shield. The end however, was bitter as they were beaten in a penalty shootout.

While they did end up losing, it created quite a stir in the sporting community in Bangladesh. Mohammad Lincoln's dismay after missing the penalty was a picture carried out by a majority of Bangladesh's papers. For once, cricket was not dominating the headlines.

Their momentum continued from there. The Dhanmondi-based outfit



Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club ruled football in South Asia as they reached the finals of three coveted club football competitions: the IFA shield, the Kings Cup and the Bangladesh Premier League.

PHOTO: STAR



The girls of Bangladesh U-16 football did the nation proud as they fought neck-and-neck against much stronger opponents in the AFC Cup.

PHOTO: STAR

stepped up a notch and were crowned champions of the Bangladesh Premier League. Their star player, Sony Nordey, left the club soon after the triumph. It was a move that many predicted would bring an end to Sheikh Jamal's glorious run, but that was not to be.

They regrouped, signed new players and under coach Mahruful Haque's wand, wielded their magic yet again. A 25th minute header from Yasin Khan was enough for Sheikh Jamal to edge past Pune FC at

Thimpu and lift their third trophy of the year.

It wasn't that just the rarity of the feat that impressed, but also the unique hunger to win displayed by a Bangladeshi football club, that encouraged spectators to pour in and revive their enthusiasm for a game that once ruled the country; and that's why Sheikh Jamal DC is The Daily Star's performer of the year.

A football fiesta

Sheikh Jamal's success was not the only highlight this year. Bangladesh's under 16

women's football team waved the country's flag high by putting in a fighting performance in the AFC U-16 Women's championship.

They beat Jordan and fought hard against both India and Iran, all three teams who were a lot stronger than Bangladesh's teenagers on paper. Their performance actually brought in more spectators at the Stadium than in a club match.

A tantalising football World Cup, which kept a huge section of the up all night, was the other major highlight. From Suarez's bite to Maria Gotze's emphatic finish, from Brazil's 7-1 thumping to Lionel Messi's tears in the final, it was an event which lived up to every bit of its expectation.

Cricketing comeback

While the year began on a sour note, the Tigers managed to make a recovery right on time. Sure enough, defeats against the likes of Hong Kong and Afghanistan may haunt Bangladesh's cricket fans for a while, but the way they secured an '8-0' victory over Zimbabwe at the end of the year, should win some hearts.

Like the team, Shakib Al Hasan began the year on a bad note. From getting banned for lewd gestures to being suspended for disciplinary issues the first half was a rough ride for the left-hander. However, he came back in style by becoming only the third player in the history of Test cricket to score a hundred and pick up a ten-wicket haul.

Even apart from Shakib, a majority of the other players seemed to have had regained their confidence. Tamim Iqbal batted out an entire day for the first time in his career and scored his first Test century in four years, Mominul Haque became only the seventh player to score nine consecutive Test 50s, while Taijul Islam packed a punch with his slow left-armers.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's takeover from Mushfiqur Rahim in the ODI format was also relatively smooth. One would hope that the Tigers can carry on the momentum gained from these wins into the land of Kangaroos next year, during the most prized tournament of the game, the 50-over World Cup.

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