

SPORT



ATIQUE ANAM AND SAKEB SUBHAN

2016's biggest success story was the Bangladesh Under-16 women's football team, who dominated the seven other teams in the AFC Under-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers in August. Before that, most of the Under-16 girls, each of whom emerged from underprivileged backgrounds, were also involved in the AFC Under-14 Championship Qualifiers triumph in March, all of which earns them the title of The Daily Star's Team of the Year 2016. Elsewhere, a familiar tale unfolded, with cricket ruling the roost and football plumbing new depths. Here is a brief look at Bangladesh's year in sports.

CRICKET

HIGHS: The high point of 2016, and almost certainly the high point of Bangladesh's cricket, was the 108-run Test win over England on October 30 in Dhaka. It was Bangladesh's first Test win over a higher-ranked, full-strength opposition and resulted in a creditable 1-1 draw in the two-Test series. The win saw the emergence of a spin superstar in Mehedi Hasan Miraz who took 19 wickets in his debut series, including 12 for 159 in Dhaka, the best bowling figures by a Bangladeshi.

LOWS: A perfectly fine selection process was unnecessarily transformed into a convoluted one which involved the coach, manager and cricket operations committee apart from the three selectors. The effects of that can be seen in some strange selections, some of which have contributed to the Tigers' disappointing performance so far in New Zealand.

FOOTBALL

HIGHS: The Under-16 women's team is a unique story of Bangladeshi resilience manifested in one of the most disadvantaged groups -- underprivileged teen-aged girls in rural communities. Their spirit is only part of the story -- the professionalism, skill and stamina they displayed puts their older male counterparts to shame.

LOWS: Years of underperformance finally came to a head when the Bangladesh men's national team suffered a 3-1 defeat against Bhutan in the Asian Cup Qualifying Playoffs on October 10.

HOCKEY

HIGHS: The under-18 team narrowly lost the final against defending champions India in the Youth Asia Cup in Dhaka in September. The senior national team, meanwhile, successfully defended the title of the AHF Cup -- a second-tier competition in Asia -- for the second consecutive time later in the year.

Domestic hockey also got a lift after the hockey officials got the premier division league back on the ground after a two-season sabbatical.



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP L): The most iconic moment of 2016 was Shakib Al Hasan's 'thank you for coming' salute to the England dressing room after he castled Ben Stokes to bring the historic Test win closer in Mirpur on October 30; Bangladesh's football players are shell-shocked after suffering a 3-1 defeat to Bhutan in their Asian Cup Qualifying Playoffs in Thimphu on October 10; swimmer Mahfuza Khatun Shila won two gold medals from the South Asian Games in January this year in India; FIDE Master Fahad Rahman poses in front of the winning board in the 14th Dubai Junior Chess Tournament; and golfer Siddikur Rahman carries the national flag at the Rio Olympics.



LOWS: While Mariner Youngs Club won their first premier league title in history, it was the manner in which they won the title on the deciding day -- its officials vandalising the VIP box at the Maulana Bhasani Stadium and thereby instilling fear among the foreign players of their title-rivals Usha KC -- that went down like a dark spot for the year of resurgence of the game.

GOLF

HIGHS: Siddikur Rahman broke his long title drought by beating compatriot Sajib Ali in an exciting play-off in the PGTI's BTI Open at home in April. The high point of his career, though, came when the 32-year-old golfer carried the Bangladesh flag at the Rio Olympics in August, after becoming the first Bangladeshi sportsman to earn direct qualification for the biggest sports carnival in the world.

LOWS: However, Siddikur's performance in Rio left a lot to be desired. And the golfer from Madaripur also suffered a heartbreak when he fluffed a three-stroke lead over the last three holes of the Mauritius Open to spurn a glorious opportunity to win a maiden European Tour title.

CHESS

HIGHS: FIDE Master Fahad Rahman's triumph in the 14th Dubai Junior Chess Tournament remains the only bright spot for Bangladesh chess in the international arena this year.

LOWS: With the all five grandmasters of the country on board, Bangladesh embarked on their 42nd Chess Olympiad mission with



The Bangladesh volleyball team pose for a team photo after clinching the Asian Senior Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship at home on December 26.

a target of eclipsing their previous best effort. Yet they came home from Azerbaijan with their worst ever result -- finishing 76th among 180 teams. The women's team followed suit, finishing 77th among 140 teams.

ATHLETICS

HIGHS: There is absolutely nothing positive to write about athletics when it comes to either achieving international success or making a mark at the local scene.

LOWS: The national athletics championships, for the third consecutive time, failed to find a new record set in any of the track and field events. Mezbahuddin Ahmed and Shirin Akter, the country's fastest sprinters -- hardly faced any competition in retaining their

crowns, something which probably is more due to the lack of emergence of promising sprinters than the excellence of these two sprinters. Both the sprinters represented the country in the Olympics, and as expected, ended their campaign with a whimper.

SWIMMING

HIGHS: Mahfuza Khatun Shila won two gold medals from the South Asian Games in January this year in India, one of those golds coming in at a record time. The country's best male swimmer, Mahfizur Rahman Sagar, won seven bronze medals in the meet. Later in the year, young Ariful Islam won two gold medals in the South Asian Aquatic Championships in Sri Lanka.

LOWS: Bangladesh team coach Park Tae Gun lost some of his valuables as his room at the Mirpur Krira Palli was robbed twice. While some may brush it off calling it a random burglary incident, the non-cooperation towards the Korean by some of the swimming federation officials and coaching panel indicate otherwise.

SHOOTING

HIGHS: Shakeel Ahmed won a gold medal in the 50m pistol event at the South Asian Games earlier in the year. That was the only gold medal from the discipline, which has historically proved to be a goldmine for Bangladesh.

LOWS: Abdullahel Baki wasted an excellent start in the 10m air rifle event in the Olympics by eventually finishing 25th among 50 participants.

KABADDI

HIGHS: The women's team earned a silver medal in the South Asian Games while the men's team had to settle for a bronze.

LOWS: The inactivity and internal feud of the federation officials got to such a state that the national championship was scrapped on the day it was scheduled to take off.

VOLLEYBALL

Last but not the least Bangladesh volleyball team clinched the title of the Asian Senior Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship at home on December 26, beating pre-tournament favourites Kyrgyzstan in the final as the year was wrapped up on a positive note.



(TOP) Mushfiqur Rahim's premature celebration after hitting a four against India in the World T20 left a bitter taste in the mouth as they lost the match by one run. (BOTTOM) The Bangladesh national hockey team celebrate after beating Sri Lanka to clinch their third successive AHF Cup in Hong Kong on November 27.