

SPORTSPERSON OF THE YEAR: RUMAN SANA



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Hitting the bullseye

This space, where we look back at stars of the year that was, has usually been reserved for cricketers. But at the end of 2019, when it came to naming the Sportsperson of the Year, the Daily Star Sport team could look no further than archer Ruman Sana. While archery may not be the most visible discipline in the Bangladeshi sporting landscape, it is the one that arguably holds the most promise in 2020 in the form of Sana in the Tokyo Olympics.

In 2019, he has won gold in the Asia Cup and, most importantly, became only the second Bangladeshi to gain direct entry into the Olympics when he won bronze in the World Archery Championship. The year ended with

the Khulna lad spearheading Bangladesh's clean sweep of the South Asian Games archery events with three gold medals.

Bangladesh have never won an Olympic medal, but Sana is not content with just participating. "681 is my career-best score in qualification," Sana told The Daily Star in June. "From now on, my target will be to score 690-plus because nearly 10 archers in the world can score 690-plus in competition. If I can score 680-plus points regularly, then I will start believing that I can win an Olympic medal."

That is indeed something to look forward to.

OTHER CANDIDATES



PHOTO: AFP

Shakib Al Hasan put in perhaps the best all-round performance in a single edition of the World Cup in 2019, scoring 606 runs and taking 11 wickets. But Bangladesh's overall poor performance and his ban for not reporting corrupt approaches from a bookie have sullied 2019 for the champion all-rounder.



PHOTO: BFF

Jamal Bhuiyan, Bangladesh's football captain, has been an indispensable agent in enacting coach Jamie Day's vision of a more competitive, organised Bangladesh national team. Jamal has also raised the country's profile with a La Liga commentary stint in November. Again, a generally underwhelming year for Bangladesh militated against Jamal taking top prize.

Promise turns to despair

MAZHAR UDDIN

At the start of 2019, there was much hope and positivity surrounding Bangladesh cricket but disappointments kept building throughout the past 12 months and the year turned out to be one of the more disappointing ones both on and off the field.

Bangladesh were most abject in the games' longest format. The Tigers lost all five Tests in 2019, that too by huge margins. None were more humiliating than the 229-run defeat at home in September against Afghanistan, who were playing just their third Test.

The Tigers also made history in November when they took part in their first day-night Test match against India in Kolkata -- also the first pink-ball Test held in Asia -- in the second game of a two-Test series.

Leaving aside the Tests, the highest expectations in 2019 surrounded Bangladesh's chances in the 2019 World Cup in the UK. A largely successful four years in ODI cricket since the last World Cup and the presence of the five pillars of Bangladesh cricket -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad -- had raised hopes that this would be the Tigers' most successful World Cup. Their maiden multi-team trophy win a fortnight before the World Cup, in the tri-series in Ireland that also featured the West Indies, only added to the positivity.

But after a bright start, winning their first match against South Africa, Bangladesh's campaign petered out as they managed to win just three games out of eight and exited the tournament as the eighth team out of 10.

The lone bright spot was Shakib turning in the greatest all-round performance in World Cup history by hammering 606 runs and taking 11 wickets. He was adjudged the player-of-the-match in each of Bangladesh's three wins -- against South Africa, West Indies and Afghanistan -- and was one of the frontrunners for the player-of-the-tournament trophy, which

eventually went to New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson for his batting and leading the team to within inches of a maiden World Cup win.

A dark chapter in the World Cup was the dismal returns for ODI skipper Mashrafe, who looked a shadow of his former self as he went limping through the campaign with persistent hamstring problems. That fuelled questions about the timing of the 36-year-old's retirement, and with no answers in sight and no ODIs till the Ireland tour in May,

a players' strike on October 21, with domestic and national cricketers issuing a 13-point demand, the main crux of which was an improvement in financial benefits and respect from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB). The BCB promised to meet most of their demands, but it remains to be seen whether that issue could be put to bed.

Bangladesh cricket was further rocked on October 29 when the ICC banned Test and T20I skipper Shakib for two years -- with the second of those



PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh's year took a turn for the worse when Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Co limped out of the World Cup with a dismal performance against Pakistan on July 5.

that is set to be a hangover of 2019 that Bangladesh cricket will suffer in 2020.

Bangladesh went on to finish the 2019 ODI calendar in Sri Lanka in much the abject manner that they had begun the year in New Zealand -- with a humbling 3-0 whitewash.

An underwhelming year on the field was about to get much worse because of events off the field.

PLAYERS' STRIKE AND THE SHAKIB SHOCK
In the last quarter of the year, Bangladesh cricket was first rocked by

suspended -- for not informing the Anti-Corruption Unit of corrupt approaches from a bookmaker.

The wounded Tigers did however bounce back from the Shakib trauma to an extent by beating India in the first T20I in New Delhi on November 3 -- their first win over India in India.

Although Bangladesh went on to lose the series 2-1, it was in T20Is where the Tigers were most successful, winning four of seven games in 2019. Otherwise, 2019 was a year that Bangladesh would be in a hurry to forget.



PHOTO: AFP

Just a fortnight before the World Cup, the future looked rosy for Bangladesh as they won their first multi-team trophy in Ireland on May 17, beating West Indies in the final.

BFF's dysfunction produces mixed bag

ANISUR RAHMAN

Two days after being re-elected for a third term as Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) President in May 2016, Kazi Salahuddin promised to place emphasis on developing district football, strengthening club football and building a strong national football team.

At the end of 2019, with only four months of the legendary striker's tenure left, none of his promises have materialised and Bangladesh's 187th FIFA ranking reveals the sorry state of the country's popular game.

A strong national team remains a distant dream at the end of a year that was a mixed bag for the national team. The booters started with a 1-0 victory over Cambodia in a friendly match in March before facing Laos in the FIFA World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifier play-offs in June.

Bangladesh crossed the Laos hurdle with an aggregate 1-0 win to enter the World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers, a stage they gained direct entry to in last edition's Russia World Cup Qualifiers thanks to a better ranking.

However, the charges of English coach Jamie Day could not impress in the Qualifiers, except in the matches against reigning Asian champions Qatar and India. Bangladesh are currently at the bottom of the five-team table after losing to Afghanistan (1-0), Qatar (2-0) and Oman (4-1) and drawing 1-1 against India.

Bangladesh had also easily beaten Bhutan 4-1 and 2-0 in a two-match friendly series in October but almost the same squad, under the banner of the Bangladesh U-23 team, lost to Bhutan and Nepal in the South Asian (SA) Games, where they also played out a 1-1 draw

against Maldives and beat Sri Lanka 1-0.

The promising form leading into SA Games raised hopes of regaining gold. But expectations proved to be unfounded and a lack of goal-scoring nous was identified as a major reason behind the SA Games failures, for which Salahuddin will have to shoulder blame as he apparently forgot his promise to develop district football and strengthen the club game.

"Real success will come when district football and club football develops," was Salahuddin's realisation after being re-elected, but the BFF could stage the district league

just once in nearly four years while allowing clubs to register five foreigners instead of four, stunting the growth of local players.

AGE-GROUP TEAMS

Having a strong pipeline is thought to be a precondition to strengthening the national side and signs of development come through international successes of age-group teams. Although professional clubs -- with one or two exceptions -- are not interested in their respective youth sides, the game's governing body in association with Fortis Group came forward to build an academy early this year. But the development of those footballers



PHOTO: AFP

The 1-1 draw against India in World Cup qualifiers in Kolkata was the high-point for the national football team.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Booters' meek performance in the SA Games undid all the good work up to that point.

has not yet been noticeable despite the appointment of a couple of foreign coaches. The boys failed to defend the title of the SAFF U-15 Championship in Bhutan as the two-time champions finished third after suffering humiliating defeats to Nepal (4-1) and eventual champions India (4-0).

Virtually the same group failed to lift their performance in the AFC U-16 Championship Qualifiers, finishing third in a four-team group that included Qatar, Yemen and Bhutan. However, they had the final laugh by winning the UEFA-assist four-team tournament in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh U-18 had some consolation in the SAFF U-18 Championship, finishing second behind champions India but they frustrated in the AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers, ending in last place behind Bhutan in a four-team group.

The girls finished runners-up for the second successive time in the SAFF U-15 Championship, but they had the last laugh as they qualified for the final round of the AFC

U-16 Championship for the second successive time. They also earned their first ever point in the final round by holding a strong Australia 2-2, following a disappointing 1-0 loss to hosts Thailand and a 9-0 thrashing at the hands of former champions Japan.

The Bangladesh women's team had a bitter experience in the AFC U-19 Women's Championship in Tajikistan, losing 7-0 and 2-0 to South Korea and Chinese Taipei respectively but a 5-1 win over Tajikistan served as some consolation. They however jointly won the first-ever Bangamata U-19 Women's International tournament along with Laos after the final was called off due to inclement weather.

ABAHANI'S FEAT

Advancing into their maiden AFC Cup inter-zonal semifinals was a stellar achievement for Abahani, who had beaten April 25 of North Korea 4-3 in a thrilling match at home before a 0-2 defeat away ended a dream run.

HIGH ADMINISTRATIVE COST

Even with the continued absence of most lower division leagues, district leagues, age-group tournaments and national competitions, the high administrative cost of the game's governing body was a topic of discussion at the end of 2019.

The BFF, according to audit reports from 2016 to 2018, spent Tk 87.18 crore against a revenue of Tk 83.12 crore. More than 38 percent [Tk 33.39 crore] of the expenditure was part of the BFF's administrative costs, which raised questions about the rationale of spending such huge amounts while overlooking crucial competitions and pushing the country's football downhill year after year.