

A LOOK BACK AT 2025

The year Hamza and football came home

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

In 2025, Bangladesh witnessed a dramatic homecoming – one that, even a few years back, few believed would be possible.

A man loved by legions returned to Bangladesh from England, bearing a massive burden of expectations. His arrival made headlines, became the talk of the town, galvanising masses who believed he could ignite change and usher in a new era.

And no, the man in question is not a high-profile political figure who returned to the country a few days back, it is Hamza Choudhury.

Hamza – a Leicester City midfielder – switched national allegiance and arrived to join the national team in March and proved to be the catalyst that rekindled the nation's love-affair with football, marking 2025 as the year Bangladesh footballled again.

Result-wise, Hamza's arrival did not lead to any remarkable change. The men's national team won only two of their eight matches, and unsurprisingly missed out on qualification for the Asian Cup.

Other than some gutsy performances against Singapore and Hong Kong, which ended in narrow defeats, their most notable feat was beating India, 1-0, for the first time in 22 years in Dhaka on November 18.

But in the midst of all of it, the Bangladesh football team managed to do something it hadn't quite done in years – making people care.

The fans cared enough to sell out the National Stadium in minutes, fill up the stands wearing the Bangladesh jersey, and cheer on their players through ecstasy and heartbreak.

They cared enough to bring out protests, bordering on hooliganism, against coach Javier Cabrera, blast him for some of his selections and demand the



inclusion of overseas returnees who they felt would make the difference.

The older generation felt nostalgic, as they reminisced the days when football reigned supreme in the country, while the younger generation started dreaming of finally having a national team they can get behind.

Hamza is the face of this change. He has won hearts by pouring his soul on the field and fighting for the flag in every match, his passion further endearing him to the fans.

His arrival has also seemingly opened the floodgates with other Bangladesh-origin players from overseas like Shamit Shome, Fahamedul Islam, and Zayan Ahmed following in his footsteps and more are reportedly in line.

While the men's team rediscovered relevance, the most concrete success of Bangladesh football in 2025 unfolded on the women's front.

After winning back-to-back SAFF Championships, the women's team achieved historic success in June-July by qualifying for the AFC Women's Asian Cup for the first time, with Ritu Porna Chakma and Co outperforming teams ranked miles ahead of them.

This was the year when fans really paid attention to Bangladesh football and for the first time, in years, cricket's unparalleled dominance came under threat.

Bangladesh cricket was in turmoil off the field for much of the year, from the clash between the cricket board and a faction of Dhaka-based clubs over the board elections to the allegations of sexual harassment made by women's team cricketer Jahanara Alam. On the field, the men's and the women's teams overall disappointed.

Compared to cricket, Bangladesh did better in some other, lesser talked about

sports.

The Under-21 men's hockey team won the Challenger Trophy for finishing best among the bottom eight sides in the 24-team FIH Hockey Junior World Cup. Archers won gold and silver in Asia Cup Stage-2, a bronze at the Asian Archery Championships. Zarif Abrar became the first Bangladeshi to win an ITF World Tennis Tour Juniors J-30 singles title and the Women's kabaddi team won bronze in Asian Championship and World Cup.

When the year 2025 is looked back in hindsight, the emergence of Hamza and the women's team's qualification for the Asian meet will stick out as the biggest positives. With the Women's Asian Cup coming up in February in Australia and the SAFF Championship expected to take place in June-July, Bangladesh football is set up for another eventful year – one that, like 2025, could once again belong to the game.

SPORTS MOURN KHALEDA ZIA'S DEMISE

SPORTS REPORTER

Sporting activities across Bangladesh came to a standstill on Tuesday following the death of former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia, with most federations postponing scheduled events as a mark of respect.

The country's first female prime minister passed away at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka at around 6:00am. She was 80.

In a media release, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced the postponement of Tuesday's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) matches.

Later in the day, the BPL governing council confirmed that the postponed matches, originally scheduled for December 30, will now be played on January 4.

All remaining matches of the Sylhet phase will continue as per the original schedule. Meanwhile, the BPL Governing Council informed it will issue a revised itinerary covering matches scheduled from January 5 onwards in due course.

As per BPL schedule, the Chattogram phase was supposed to begin on January 5, but it is now set to be deferred.

Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) also postponed Dhaka First Division League matches from December 30 to January 1. The revised schedule will be announced later.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) also expressed its condolences and confirmed the suspension of all football matches scheduled for the day.

"Due to unavoidable circumstances, today's scheduled matches under the Bangladesh Football Federation have been postponed. Revised fixtures will be announced as soon as possible," the BFF said in a statement.

The postponed fixtures included two Federation Cup matches, three Women's Football League matches, Dhaka Senior Division League matches, and the final of the UCB-BFF Under-15 Football League.

The Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation also postponed the men's and women's semifinals of the National Kabaddi Championship.

Other sporting bodies, along with sports journalists' associations, expressed their condolences on the passing of the two-time prime minister and announced the postponement of sporting events across the country.

DEFINING MOMENTS OF 2025

STAR SPORTS DESK

Records fell, new champions emerged, and old orders were overturned. From a runaway in Paris to cricket fields in the subcontinent, 2025 delivered moments that reminded the sporting world how swiftly history can be rewritten – sometimes in a single leap, sometimes across an entire season.

No one flew higher than Armand Duplantis, who kept redefining human limits by clearing 6.30 metres, breaking the pole vault world record for a 14th time. On the tennis courts, the young rivalry between Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik

Sinner took centre stage as the duo shared the Grand Slam spoils, two majors each, stamping their authority over the circuit.

Speed belonged to Oblique Seville, the Jamaican clocking a personal-best 9.77 seconds to become the first from his country in a decade to win the men's 100m world title, while Formula 1 finally saw a shift in power as Lando Norris dethroned Max Verstappen to become world champion.

Football was painted Parisian blue. Paris Saint-Germain claimed six trophies in a single calendar year, crowned by their maiden UEFA Champions League, with

Ousmane Dembele sweeping the Ballon d'Or and FIFA The Best awards to underline their dominance.

Cricket, too, offered long-awaited joy. South Africa's Proteas finally shed decades of pain by winning their first ICC trophy in 27 years with the Test Championship, while India's men added the Champions Trophy to their 2024 T20 crown. And in a landmark triumph, India's women, led by Harmanpreet Kaur, lifted their first-ever WODI World Cup – a fitting finale to a year that belonged to the bold.

