

SPORT

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Cricket chases the American dream

With a new league, new stadiums and big investment, the game is again trying to crack the vast US market

ABHISHEK PUROHIT
 MUMBAI, AUGUST 12

IN MARCH this year, the owners of Major League Cricket (MLC) announced plans to invest around \$10 million (approx. Rs 875 crore) to build and renovate eight stadiums in the United States of America. In May, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella was announced as a lead investor in a \$44 million fundraise by MLC, with another \$75 million pledged, primarily for cricket infrastructure upgrades across the country. The Knight Riders group is among the early stakeholders in the six-team MLC, planned to begin next year.

The International Cricket Council has been invited to submit a proposal this month for cricket to be considered for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, the expected decision on which is fixed next year at the International Olympic Committee's session in Mumbai. Also, the 2024 T20 World Cup will be co-hosted by the USA and the West Indies.

Cricket has made sporadic attempts to crack the US sports market, but it is only now, with the backing of big names and big money, that the chase appears to have gained pace.

With the proposed new, renovated as well as repurposed stadiums, a significant increase in turf pitches, a 26-team Major League aimed to increase grassroots participation, and attempts to woo the average American, cricket hopes to finally make it

in the land of its bat-and-ball cousin. The main challenge remains daunting - the game still isn't much of a draw in the USA, beyond the South Asian and other cricket-connected diaspora. "The US ranks number two in digital consumption of cricket content, after India. There's a huge market, maybe made up primarily of the diaspora to start with. The best way to describe the US market is that we're looking at the number one media market in the world combined with the second-most watched sport... in the medium to long term, we must get the average American sports fan interested in T20 cricket or cricket in general," Knight Riders CEO Venky Mysore had told *Livemint*.

Tom Dunmore, vice-president (marketing) at MLC, says, "The South Asian expat cricket fan is the obvious No. 1 target but we know that in the long-term holistic view of the game here, we need to develop new audiences and engage new fans into the sport."

"There is still some perception here that cricket is outdated. The biggest barrier is that many people don't understand the fundamentals of the game."

Information and buzz
 From setting up explainer kiosks at grounds to tapping social media influencers, cricket is trying to get the message across, that it is not some stuck-up, quaint British pastime, but something that is good enough



A baseball ground is being repurposed into a cricket facility after MLC acquired a long-term lease.

to compete for eyeballs with popular American sports. "At the Minor League finals in Morrisville, North Carolina, we were able to draw a crowd of new fans. We got it out to the media that this is a fun event, cricket is maybe not what you think it is, it is fast-paced and athletic, T20 cricket is shorter than a baseball match, come and experience it," Dunmore told *The Indian Express*.

"Young Americans are starting to follow international sport more, whether it is soccer, rugby or F1, and cricket fits into this diversity as the second-most popular sport in the world. We are starting to see those audiences engage with the game."

Build and upgrade
 There is still only one ICC-approved international venue in the USA, in Miami, where India recently played a couple of T20s against West Indies. MLC, under a strategic partnership agree-

ment with USA Cricket, the game's governing body in the country, proposes to build new ones in the greater Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle metropolitan areas. The existing grounds in Morrisville and Houston will get added facilities and capacity, but the ground that's been envisaged as the 'home of USA cricket' is the AirHogs Stadium in Grand Prairie, Dallas.

Fittingly, it is a baseball ground that is being repurposed into a cricket facility after MLC acquired a long-term lease. It was home to the Texas AirHogs, a minor league team that folded during the Covid pandemic. "The flagship stadium in Grand Prairie will be ready by next year. It is the first time a baseball venue is being converted into a cricket venue. That will certainly be a fantastic option to host World Cup matches. We will also have the upgrading in North Carolina and Houston and then, of course, the existing venue in Florida which has already hosted high-level international cricket."

"Those four are certainly good options and whether we can get any other venue ready in

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time for 2024 remains to be seen. It is certainly a tight time-line," says Dunmore on the venues that are likely to host T20 World Cup games.

"Construction takes time, especially when you are working with local governments on the land and development. In both San Jose, which is just south of San Francisco, and Orange County in the Greater Los Angeles area, we have agreements in place to finalise development plans with the local government entities."

Pitching it right
 Apart from fan engagement and stadium facilities, a basic requirement for cricket - the pitch - is another challenge. Natural turf surfaces are not just difficult to lay and prepare, maintaining them across seasons can be a nightmare, given that experienced curators are hard to come across in the USA. MLC is going for hybrid pitches instead, under an arrangement with an Australian company. These are a combination of natural soil and synthetic grass, allowing for low upkeep but also maintaining near-usual variation in how the ball behaves after pitching.

Hybrids are proposed to be installed at 20 venues this year across the Bay Area, New Jersey, Chicago, New York City, St Louis, Michigan, Seattle, Philadelphia, Dallas, Orlando, Ohio, Boston and Atlanta. After several false starts this century, cricket seems better prepared to chase the American dream.

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Unhappy WFI to review wrestlers' show at CWG

VEER PLACED THIRD
 NEW DELHI, AUGUST 12

THE NATIONAL Federation is not pleased that four Indian women wrestlers could not take advantage of a weak field at the recently-concluded Commonwealth Games and missed out on gold medals. All 12 Indian wrestlers won medals at the Games, returning with six gold, a silver and five bronze. From among women, only Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik won gold while Anshu Malik, who was also gold medal favourite, returned with silver in 57kg category.

"It was not a great show by our women wrestlers. If you are not winning such a weak field, what it reflects on your performance," said a WFI official. "We are going to sit with the wrestlers and review the performance."

VEER PLACED THIRD

India's Veer Ahlawat continued his love affair with Singapore as he shot a superb 7- under 65 to jump to third place at the inaugural USD 1.5 million International Series Singapore here on Friday. Ahlawat, 26, finished a career-best T-5 at the Singapore Open in January, a week after missing the cut at the Singapore International at Tampines, Tanah Merah, which is hosting the current event.

DURAND CUP SET TO BEGIN

Defending champions FC Goa will face Mohammed Sporting in the opening match of the Durand Cup football tournament at the Salt Lake Stadium here on Tuesday. The two sides will clash in a Group B game in what will be a repeat of last edition's final. Twenty teams are taking part in the tournament.

Sad to see players retire for T20 leagues: Capitals co-owner Jindal

MIHIR VASAVDA
 AUGUST 12

PARTH JINDAL, the co-owner of IPL heavyweights Delhi Capitals, has said the 'cricket lover' within him doesn't 'really like' the direction cricket has taken, vis-à-vis players retiring from international sport prematurely to play T20 leagues. However, as team owner, he is cognizant of the business side of the game as well.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Jindal, the director of JSW Sports, said: "I really find that extremely upsetting. You had the West Indies coach [Phil Simmons] saying, 'I can't make players to play for the West Indies anymore.' It's really sad. I don't know, I'm not very happy to see this happening."

He added: "Because the IPL is two-and-a-half months long, it is very difficult to maintain the engagement with our fans and sponsors. So when we had an opportunity to buy a team in the South African League, and then our partners bought a team in the UAE lead, we felt that this was an opportunity to keep the brand alive and relevant for a longer period of time."

Jindal was talking in the context of the precarious position international cricket finds itself in. With franchises looking to come more powerful and talking up bigger space in the annual calendar, through leagues across the world, and the fact that some of the top cricketers are turning into T20 mercenaries by taking early international retirement, putting into doubt the future of ODI and Test cricket.

Delhi Capitals is one of the teams leading the expansion of cricket's global footprint, with the group adding Dubai Capitals and Pretoria Capitals to its bouquet. They aren't the only ones - the Knight Riders, for instance, have teams in the T20 leagues of the Caribbean, the UAE, South Africa and also the upcoming tournament in the US.

JSW Sports' chief executive Mustafa Ghouse compared the proliferation of the leagues to the sudden mushrooming of 'IPL-style' leagues across sports in India. Ghouse, a former Davis Cupper, was slightly apprehen-

sive about the success of each and every league that's coming up but pointed out two critical factors that could determine the direction cricket takes in the coming years: the sport's ability to generate a mature US sporting market and the potential inclusion in the Olympics at LA 2028.

"I think the Olympic piece is important," Ghouse said. "If cricket does make it into the Olympics, that will globalise the sport in a much, much bigger manner. And yes, the US plays a big piece in all of it because their ability to commercialise and monetise sport is second to none."

Next target, swimming

For Jindal, cricket is just one part of the investment, albeit the most significant given it's also the most profitable. His group spends approximately Rs 60-65 crore per year across sports, Jindal says, and has seen returns, first from Tejaswini Shankar, steeplechaser Avinash Sabar, and long jumper Murali Sreesankar were all backed by the group.

Jindal, 32, said their next frontier is swimming with the programme under South African coach Rushdee Warley - also the CEO of Inspire Institute of Sports - targeting the 2026 CWG and the LA Olympics.

But limiting the Olympic stars hasn't always been smooth sailing with the federations, in particular, expressing apprehension over the involvement of private bodies in running sports. This came to the fore after the Tokyo Olympics in particular, when the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) barred its athletes from communicating directly with private players.

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Jindal plays down those incidents and says the government, federation and private organisations are now on the same page.

"There's a sea of change in the way the government, through its TOP Scheme, as well as the federations are approaching high performance and sport in general. There will always be certain idiosyncrasies but in general, the federations are more professional, consultative and open to suggestions and feedback," Jindal said.

He, however, does not feel the same way about the way football is governed in the country. Jindal owns one of India's most successful clubs, Bengaluru FC, but has been left disillusioned with the way the sport is run. In 2019, he had written a letter to Indian Super League chairperson Nita Ambani, requesting a roadmap to make the league more sustainable financially.

While he says efforts have been made on that front and remains bullish about the US' future, Jindal is concerned about the current state of affairs at the All India Football Federation (AIFF), which doesn't have an elected body and is run by a Court-appointed Committee of Administrators.

"What's happening on the AIFF side is extremely tragic. We talk about professionalism and I can't say for a fact that the worst Olympic federation is better than the AIFF," he said. "I resigned from the Western India Football Association last week because I just don't want to be associated with the governance of football. What's going on is not acceptable. I hope and pray that the Supreme Court, in its wisdom, takes the right decision for Indian football."

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STATEMENT OF STANDALONE AND CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER ENDED JUNE 30, 2022									
S.No	PARTICULARS	STANDALONE				CONSOLIDATED			
		QUARTER ENDED		YEAR ENDED		QUARTER ENDED		YEAR ENDED	
		June 30, 2022	June 30, 2021	March 31, 2022	March 31, 2021	June 30, 2022	June 30, 2021	March 31, 2022	March 31, 2021
1	Total Income	8,445.53	5,825.69	7,561.45	29,802.28	8,502.07	5,845.20	7,627.89	30,106.29
2	Net Profit for the period before tax (before Exceptional Items)	823.80	484.35	802.21	3,250.13	789.02	343.25	785.73	3,058.11
3	Net Profit for the period before tax (after Exceptional Items)	823.80	484.35	802.21	3,250.13	789.02	343.25	785.73	3,058.11
4	Net Profit for the period after tax (before Exceptional Items)	624.52	365.44	627.05	2,473.02	585.58	255.46	620.58	2,329.05
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit for the period (after tax) and other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	623.09	359.91	638.19	2,467.58	559.39	249.48	646.55	2,328.45
6	Equity Share Capital (face value Rs. 2/- per share)	39.96	39.96	39.96	39.96	39.96	39.96	39.96	39.96
7	Reserves (excluding Revolution Reserve)				15,742.86				15,806.69
8	Earnings per share on net profit after tax - face value Rs. 2/- each (In Rupees)	31.25	18.29	31.38	123.78	29.55	12.82	30.59	115.96
	(b) Divided	31.25	18.29	31.37	123.74	29.54	12.82	30.59	115.93

Notes:-
 1 The above is an extract of the detailed format of Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly Financial Results is available on the Company's website www.heromotocorp.com and also on stock exchange websites, www.sebindia.com and www.rsindia.com.
 2 Based on the guiding principles given in Ind AS-108 on 'Operating Segments', the Company's business activity falls within a single operating segment, namely automotive segment. Accordingly, the disclosure requirements of Ind AS 108 are not applicable.
 3 The above results for the quarter ended June 30, 2022 have been reviewed and recommended by the Audit Committee meeting held on August 12, 2022 and approved by Board of Directors in their meeting held on August 12, 2022.

For and on behalf of Board of Directors
DR. PAVAN MUNJAL
 Chairman & CEO
 DIN: 00044223

New Delhi, Date: August 12, 2022

