

IPL lessons

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AFTER a long wait, the Pakistan Super League is finally on. Given the passion associated with cricket not only in Pakistan, but all over the region one would want PSL to succeed. Though the Indian Premier League has taken a giant leap in South Asia, other countries, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (SLPL) have also made attempts to have their own leagues with varying degrees of success.

Given the commonality associated with the game in South Asia in terms of non-cricket inputs, there is something that Pakistan could learn from the existing regional experiences of holding a cricket league. While inputs may be unsolicited from across the boundary, given the passion for the game cutting across various frontiers in South Asia, an external contribution may have some value!

The first point that one could draw from the experience in South Asia is related to what ultimately becomes the primary content. Despite the discovery of some young talents, the T-20 leagues are more show, business/money and bureaucratic hold. It is an irony that these leagues while having popularised the game, have also taken cricket away from it.

The Pakistan Super League must be clear on the role of foreign players.

The second lesson PSL could draw is to keep away the interference of politics, bureaucracy and even the underworld. Of the many reasons for the failure of SLPL, political interference from the then regime and corruption are considered key factors. Also, there are non-cricketing bureaucrats who have apportioned a role for themselves as officials. Team owners and sponsors are further additions to the non-playing component with crucial impact. Cricket in general and T-20 leagues in particular have become good business; the business schools in India see the IPL as an innovative business model!

But the real issue relates to keeping the game clean. The IPL in India had to let two teams go; despite winning championships, Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals had to be disbanded because of unethical practices. A clean league is also essential from an international perspective. Cricket is the only game outside basketball and football that has huge attraction from a non-European/American continent. Any wrong message will impact seriously on this flow.

Third, PSL must be clear in terms of the role and importance of foreign players. True, young players from Pakistan may be rubbing shoulders and sharing rooms with greats like Gayle, Pietersen, Watson and Sangakkara. Undoubtedly, they are legends, but most are now retired or on the wrong side of 30. The reputation of international players has to be borne in mind, if we look at them as role models for younger players.

Gayle and Pietersen have had issues with their respective national boards, not due to lack of talent, but because of their attitude towards institutions, norms and fellow players. PSL should ensure that the young players avoid imbibing the wrong qualities from cricket's heroes. It is important that PSL doesn't spoil young players. The Akmal and Shehzads have to be harnessed in the right way. The Amirs and Butts should serve as a warning.

Fourth, there is a domino effect that cricket leagues have on other games that are fast losing relevance. Thanks to IPL's success, there are similar franchises today in football, kabaddi, hockey etc. The success of T-20 is likely to trigger a sporting renaissance in South Asia. So the cleaner the PSL, the larger the possibility of it becoming a role model for other leagues.

The fifth issue relates to where the game is played. Though IPL was also played away from India (in South Africa) for a season, it is important that PSL comes to Pakistan. For the game to progress, the players, especially the international ones, have to get along not only with players in their team, but also with the local people and culture. Devoid of this connection, the players will be nothing more than mercenaries, with no attachment to either the team or the people.

Finally, for purists of the game, PSL should ensure that the T-20 format does not aid the demise of the larger versions of the game. The Misbahs and Younis Khans should not become relics and irreplaceable. Young players have to step into their shoes and demonstrate the will and talent to stay long and play an innings of substance. Unless one succeeds in playing all formats of the game, it is unlikely that he will be able to succeed in pitches across the world, whether playing a shorter game or its longer version. Raina and Rohit are yet to emulate Kohli.

All the best, Pakistan. Hope, in the near future, we succeed in crossing the political boundaries and see Peshawar Zalmi playing Kolkata Knight Riders in Chittagong as a part of a South Asia Super League!

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