

THE CRICKET BOARD IN THE 21st CENTURY - A VISION PAPER

Never, perhaps, in the history of the Indian cricket board an election has aroused so much interest and expectation from the vast majority of the game's fans in the country as the recent one has. Some of the happenings during the last few years have grievously dented the board's image. Our first priority should be to restore its pristine glory by creating confidence among the followers of the game that the board is indeed a sincere custodian of Indian cricket. Frankly the question being asked is, as the richest body in world cricket, has it fulfilled its obligations towards the players and paying public? For that we all need to introspect and touch our hearts before saying "yes, we have."

As a premier national sports body, the board had been a model for all others sports organizations, but of late it has invited scorn from the public. In a fast paced world driven by market forces, we have to gear up to meet the ever increasing challenges and aspirations of a cricket-crazy nation. When the country is getting excited about the Right to Information Act, the Board is being ridiculed for its lack of transparency. Unless we believe in the free flow of information, particularly when millions and millions of rupees are involved, we are bound to be misunderstood. There can't be a better start to the new-look board than resolve that everything we do from hereon will be transparent and in the game's and public interest, be it election or allotting television rights or the team selection. The buzz word should be "Transparency."

A beginning has been made towards total transparency by making public the voters list before the recent board election and also the ballot paper with names of contestants for key positions. Our president Mr Sharad Pawar has already unveiled the vision of the board, but he wants all members to actively consider and debate dispassionately the key aspects raised in the accompanying Vision Paper for the betterment of Indian cricket.

1. PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE BOARD:

ACTION PLAN:

Appointment of a CEO / Managers

Appointment of separate General Managers / Executives for International Cricket affairs and Domestic Cricket ,

Director /General manager for Marketing,

Director / General manager for National Cricket Academy,

Separate Directors / Public Relations Managers for Electronic and Print Media.

2. DOMESTIC CRICKET

This will be the board's priority area. Now that international cricket has been more or less streamlined barring certain crucial adjustments, it is time for concentrating on domestic cricket so that the gap between international players and the rest is bridged to such an extent that domestic cricket can be made attractive for stars too.

ACTION PLAN:

To make domestic cricket attractive, make sure at least 4 weeks in the month of October be kept free from international cricket. While finalizing bilateral tours, this Edict is to be kept in mind.

Make it mandatory for international cricketers to play in the Irani Cup, Challenger Series and Duleep Trophy before the commencement of the international programme. Form or lack of it of international cricketers could be seen and the performance of youngsters on the threshold of international cricket could be analyzed in proper perspective.

To make domestic cricket more competitive, the prize money should be revised and there should be substantial prize money for all Domestic competitions.

Prize Money Break-up:

Duleep Trophy: Pool matches: Rs 20 lakhs for winners. Winners of the final: Rs 80 lakhs; Losing finalists Rs 40 lakhs.

Ranji Trophy: Elite Group roundrobin matches: Rs. 10 lakhs for winners only. Nothing for losers.

Losing Semi-finalists: Rs 25 lakhs each; Losing finalists: Rs 50 lakhs; Ranji Trophy Winners: Rs 1 crore.

Plate Group: Roundrobin matches: Rs. 5 lakhs for winners. Losing semi-finalists: 15 lakhs each; Losing finalists: Rs 25 lakhs; Winners: Rs 50 lakh.

The Board will initiate steps to institute the Best India Test and Domestic Cricketers of the Year Award as well as Promising Players Award.

The Best Umpire Award to create competition among the umpires

To encourage competition among the coaches, there should be an award for the coach of the Ranji Trophy winning team.

For determining the prize winners in all categories, objective criteria should be laid down.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The aim is to create infrastructure of international standards throughout the country, more so in smaller states which are fast coming up as centres of cricket. The idea is to make visiting sides as well as teams playing Domestic tournaments little room to complain about logistics as well as infrastructural facilities.

ACTION PLAN:

The State Associations which have their grounds / stadia will undergo periodic checks by technical experts to see if the infrastructure and equipment is well maintained and provide all professional help for fulfilling their requirements.

The BCCI and the president will use their good offices in interacting with state governments where the associations do not have their own grounds / stadia and impress upon them to provide land. Accent will be on new areas

Infrastructure development must begin at grassroots level. Then board would like to help schools and colleges to maintain their cricket grounds

At all the stadia the interests of the paying public must be kept uppermost and create world class facilities. A prototype blueprint can be provided to all the associations going in for new stadia.

The President is very clear that there cannot be any compromise on facilities to players and paid spectators as they are the Gods for cricket administrators. Money cannot be a constraint for providing facilities.

Infrastructural subsidy needs to be increased substantially keeping in view the present day cost for creating infrastructure of international standards.

4. QUALITY OF GROUNDS AND PITCHES:

The board will make a conscious effort to help the state associations to maintain proper grounds and pitches of international standards.

ACTION PLAN:

The Grounds and Pitches Committee will henceforth be responsible for supervising facilities for not only international cricket but also all first-class matches.

Minimum standards for organizing domestic matches will have to be fixed and to start with all Ranji Trophy, Duleep Trophy and Deodhar Trophy matches will have to be played at approved centres for international matches.

All State Associations must appoint qualified curators.

5. MARKETING AND MERCHANDISING:

The Board will try and help state associations to get sponsors for their teams as a part of its marketing strategy. Again in tune with domestic cricket elsewhere in the world of sport, all domestic teams will have brand names that will fetch them sponsorship as well as help them create fan clubs to follow their fortunes.

ACTION PLAN

i) Live coverage of at least Domestic Cup finals. If TV rights are licensed to state/ private broadcasters, such a provision shall be made an integral part of the contract

ii) All avenues for marketing and merchandizing which are exploited internationally in disciplines like Soccer, Golf, Tennis, NBA, NFL, World Series Baseball etc. should be done in respect of Indian Cricket. Some of the areas are:

Corporate hospitality

Clothing and cricketing memorabilia.

Brand and image building including protection of Copyrights and registration of logo in international market.

Exploitation of rights in emerging areas like the Internet, cellular including G-4, broadband etc.

All rights to be allotted in a competitive, transparent, fair and equitable manner.

6. TECHNICAL CONDUCT OF THE GAME:

The board is very much concerned about the technical conduct of the game and it should be vested with cricketers with administrators providing logistical support.

ACTION PLAN:

Posting of umpires on the basis of a pre- conceived policy based on merit and objective criteria.

fool-proof method of assessing and promoting competent umpires at every level from age-group tournaments to ICC nominations.

7. TELEVISION RIGHTS:

The Board wants to end speculation over the selling of television rights. It would like to come up with a transparent method which will not only benefit the Board financially but will also help in restoring its image as an organization which has become the epicenter of international cricket.

The board wants all those who deal with it as its partners in promoting the game
The board believes there cannot be any secrecy in these matters and there should be complete transparency in calling tenders as well as allotting the rights.
Live coverage of Domestic tournaments on terrestrial as well as satellite channels.
d) Immediately explore the possibility of setting up its own dedicated channel.

8. NATIONAL CRICKET ACADEMY:

When it was started the NCA was to be the fulcrum of Indian cricket where every player, be it a Test cricketer or a budding player could go to iron out his flaws and work on his physical fitness. It was to be a players' clinic on the lines of tennis and golf academies.

ACTION PLAN:

Expansion of the academy into a full-fledged cricket institute as envisaged by its founders. The Board will take over the academy lock stock and barrel making the NCA Board of Directors responsible for its running.

It should be a year-round technical institute for players from any state wanting to make use of the facilities periodically with the help of the experts.

d) It should be the epicentre for world class coaching facilities so that players from other countries also make use of them. e) Renowned Indian and overseas cricketers will be part of the faculty.

9. MEDIA FACILITIES:

In recent years, the media has not exactly been happy with the facilities provided to them at various venues. The Board wants to strike a truly professional relationship with the media as it considers both the print and electronic media as part of its endeavour to promote cricket in a much better way.

ACTION PLAN:

The Board realizes that without the active cooperation of the media nothing constructive can be done. With ever increasing number of media people the facilities at all centres have to be top class.

Going by the experience and reports of the match observers, the board will be more media-friendly, making all efforts to reach out with relevant information.

The Board is considering appointing media managers people who have experience in the field and understand the occupational problems.

d) The Board will soon have a website providing all basic information and centralized accreditation facilities.

10. CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS:

The Board desires its constitution, drafted 75 years ago, needs to be in tune with the demands of modern cricket and also in conformity with the constitutions of other major cricket-playing countries.

ACTION PLAN:

The constitutional provisions should jell with the aspirations of Indian cricketers and their followers and it should be based on democratic principles.

A constitutional Reforms Committee to be set up on the lines indicated by the President in his first meet with the media on the 29th November at Kolkata.