

'Television Was Left On, a Running Tap, from Morning till Night':

THE INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE (IPL)

AS A MARKETING VEHICLE

Vidya Subramanian is completing a PhD at the Centre for Studies in Science Policy, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
email: subramanianvidya@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: There is no sport without television. Television has become vital to the existence and sustenance of all sport, including cricket.

This paper focuses on the broadcast technologies of television and the manner in which they have influenced the sport of cricket (specifically the Indian Premier League), the cricketer and the spectator. With the growing use of second and third screen devices, the idea of sport has become entrenched in a world of information and communication technologies. Televised cricket (and indeed all sport) provides a great channel for marketing, and also provides the stars of the game an enormous opportunity for individual celebrity, allowing it to become a most useful platform for promotion and advertising for several, sometimes unrelated, stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: cricket, Indian Premier League (IPL), sports and technology, television, televised media sport, marketing and sport, sporting platform.

Introduction

Describing the services at the Park Lane Hospital, a hospice for the old and dying in the future in his acclaimed science fiction novel *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley seems to have foreseen our present with an eerie clarity. He describes the facility ('something between a first-class hotel and a feely-palace, if you take my meaning') as having all the modern amenities. 'At the foot of every bed, confronting its moribund occupant, was a television box. Television was left on, a running tap, from morning till night'.¹ Huxley could have been discussing our present situation, where the ubiquity of the television has become an integral part of our lives.

From news and current affairs to gossip and voyeurism, from drama and fiction to music and science, and from cooking and travel to sports and war, the television screen is the thing we turn to for almost all our information and entertainment needs. Unlike the computer and the internet, in which data transfer can be two-way, the television is a machine that merely relays. The most control a user has is in switching to different broadcasts. The TV will brook no discussion, allow no dissent, and entertain no protest.

Sports and television, of course, have now become completely inseparable; so much so that televising of sport has become the *raison d'être* for a sports event—cricket or otherwise. The Olympics are a case in point. As Amit Gupta has pointed out, even a sporting event of the stature and scale of the Olympics is only considered a 'commercial success' when it is held in 'a time zone that is friendly to western television audiences'.² The implication is that unless there are enough people who will watch an event on television, it can no longer be considered a success.

In India, this trend is visible in the manner in which domestic cricket matches, that were once the site of massive fan attention, now go almost completely unwatched. In an article in *The Hindu Business Line*, Vijay Lokapally reflects on how even though some of the biggest names in cricket in India (and indeed the world) play in these matches, stadium audiences are all but non-existent.³ He cites examples of Ranji matches and even domestic T20 matches that are not part of the televised spectacle that is the Indian Premier League (IPL). This is not solely a feature of domestic cricket in India or the subcontinent. The story is much the same in County Cricket matches in the UK. "Two men and a dog" is how English cricket writers often sum up

1 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, HarperCollins, New York, (1932) 2006, p. 292.

2 Amit Gupta, 'The Globalization of Cricket: The Rise of the Non-West', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 257–76.

3 Vijay Lokapally, 'RIP Cricket', *The Hindu Business Line*, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/features/blink/rip-cricket/article5900351.ece>, accessed 11 April 2014.

the audience on the county circuit,' writes Lokapally.⁴

While some observers credit this diminishing crowd interest to the decreasing quality of domestic cricket, it is clear that unless audiences can be engaged via televised entertainment packages, the sport in the stadium is not a drawcard. The lack of enthusiasm for even domestic Twenty20 leagues (not counting the IPL) suggests that it has nothing to do with the length or format of the game. Lokapally cites the example of a North Zone Twenty20 league match in which fan favourites Gautam Gambhir and Virender Sehwag were playing that had practically no stadium audience.⁵

During an interview, G. Rajaraman, a senior sports communication professional and Founder Editor of Horizon Sports Pvt Ltd., directed my attention to the several television screens at the restaurant we were at.⁶ Three of the four screens that we could see were showing sports, one showed cricket and the other two football (it was during the FIFA World Cup of 2014). Rajaraman pointed out that this was, in his opinion, 'a much better way to see the game'. Why would one take the trouble to get to the stadium, put up with uncomfortable seats, terrible toilets, and endless security restrictions to watch a match, when you can get not only much better quality, but also get to see more famous players on the TV— in HD, no less, he argued. 'We no longer watch cricket', he said, 'We are watching cricketers'.

Platforms and Pedestals

The medium of television is one that is highly suitable to the making of stars and individual celebrities. In the words of Gary Whannel, 'The close-up-centred basis of television helped transform sports performers into stars and celebrities. Televised sport made top performers recognizable stars, enhancing their earning potential from endorsements and advertising'.⁷ Televised sport is not just sport. It has become, among other things, 'a branch of the advertising and promotion industry.'

When Indian cricket captain Mahendra Singh (M. S.) Dhoni suddenly announced his retirement from Test cricket at the end of the third and penultimate test in the India-Australia series in December 2014, speculation centred as much around his brand value as it did around the reasons for such a sudden decision. At the time, Dhoni was endorsing more than 20 brands, earning up to 13 crore rupees (almost USD 2 million) per annum for each

4 Lokapally, 'RIP cricket'.

5 Lokapally, 'RIP cricket'.

6 G. Rajaraman, Founder Editor of Horizon Sports Pvt Ltd, interviewed by the author, June 2014

7 Garry Whannel, 'Television and the Transformation of Sport', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 625, 2009, pp. 205–18.

of these. His 'brand value' was speculated to be USD 20 million.⁸ Advertising and marketing gurus commented that Dhoni's 'brand' was in no danger of declining because of his retirement from Test cricket. Prahlad Kakkar, a leading Indian advertising film director, commented that 'Dhoni's brand value was not because of Test matches, it was because of ODIs and T20. So as long he is playing, he should be fine'.⁹ Another advertising professional, Prasoon Joshi observed that:

There is a different dimension (that has been) added to the personality. Every stage of the career brings in different dimensions and attributes. It is not just about cricket for him. He is seen as a story whose life is good enough for a book or a film. ... Every step somebody takes will change the way the brand is consumed. In his case whether it will take a turn for good or worse it remains to be seen.¹⁰

The central criteria that shaped an online article titled 'The World's 50 Most Marketable 2013' were 'value for money, age, home market, charisma, willingness to be marketed and crossover appeal'.¹¹ The only male cricketer on the list was Virat Kohli (number 13). Dhoni, while missing from the 'most marketable' list, made it to the 'most marketed' list.¹² Ellyse Perry, the Australian woman who has represented her country in both football and cricket, was the only other cricket representative of the game on the list. In the 2014 version of the same list, Perry was no longer included and Kohli had moved up to second place.¹³ Given the limited number of countries that play cricket, Kohli's ranking would have been surprising. But as the writers explain, 'no sport, anywhere, holds as big a market as India in such thrall'.

More surprising was the inclusion of Kevin Pietersen, the former English captain who was forcibly retired by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in February 2014. Without a national side to play for, Pietersen's

8 Bharat Sharma, 'MS Dhoni retires from Tests: Retirement from Tests won't affect his brand, believes Prasoon Joshi', Cricketcountry.com., <http://www.cricketcountry.com/news/ms-dhoni-retires-from-tests-retirement-from-tests-wont-affect-his-brand-believes-prasoon-joshi-231024>, accessed 4 January 2015.

9 Sharma, 'MS Dhoni retires'.

10 Sharma, 'MS Dhoni retires'.

11 Michael Long, 'The World's 50 Most Marketable 2013', http://www.sportspromedia.com/notes_and_insights/the_worlds_50_most Marketable_2013/, accessed 20 January 2015.

12 David Cushnan, 'The World's Most Marketed Athletes', http://www.sportspromedia.com/notes_and_insights/the_worlds_most_marketed_athletes, accessed 20 January 2015.

13 Michael Long, 'The World's 50 Most Marketable 2014', <http://www.sportspromedia.com/most Marketable>, accessed 20 January 2015.

entire marketing portfolio (when the article was written) was based on his association with the IPL and other Twenty20 tournaments that do not require to co-ordinate with the ECB. Since having left the English side, Pietersen has written a book,¹⁴ been in several advertising campaigns, captained the Delhi Daredevils in the IPL, played in the Caribbean Premier League for St Lucia Zouks, played in the Big Bash League for the Melbourne Stars, been on the BBC's Test Match Special commentary team for the 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand,¹⁵ and made a viral spoof video of Ashes 2015 predictions, complete with self-deprecating humour about his own absence from the English side.¹⁶

Sport and sportspersons are part of a larger structure of buying and selling. A question to consider at this point is who is the seller? And who the buyer? While it seems as though the 'things' that are being sold are the products advertised during the telecast of a sports event, there do seem to be wheels within wheels. As Gideon Haigh points out, it is cricket boards (especially the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), 'the biggest and the meanest representative' of all cricket boards) that do most of the selling. Haigh writes of a 'seminal shift in the relations of administrators to the administrated, from one in which boards held the game in trust on behalf of their public, to one in which they seek to own the game and sell it to "cricket consumers"'.¹⁷ This transforms what was traditionally known as a fan into a buyer, a consumer. This represents a clear change in the way that cricket, and indeed all sport, is engaged with — what was once merely enjoyed, is now also 'consumed'.

Azhar Habib, owner of the International Cricket Council's (ICC) broadcast partner Wild Track Productions, explained this buying and selling to me:¹⁸

The [broadcast] rights of any series lie with the host board. If an India-Pakistan match is happening in Pakistan, Pakistan Cricket Board would own the rights. India would also get some money out of it, but they're owned by the host boards. And then each host board has their own arrangement in terms of broadcast. They have their rights cycle ... 4 years, 6 years, 7 years, etc. So they would sell

14 Kevin Pietersen. *KP: The Autobiography*. Sphere, London, 2015.

15 BBC Media Centre, 'Kevin Pietersen to Guest on Test Match Special Commentary Team', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2015/cricket-world-cup>, accessed 7 June 2015.

16 'Kevin Pietersen's Ashes Predictions', <https://youtu.be/88lyfXTlw8>, accessed 19 June 2015.

17 Gideon Haigh, 'Controlling the Message', <http://www.espnricinfo.com/magazine/content/story/677319.html>, accessed 15 October 2013.

18 Azhar Habib, Wild Track Productions, interviewed by the author, August 2014.

their rights internationally, and any broadcaster can buy the rights. [A broadcaster] can buy worldwide [rights] or they can buy a certain territory and then sell it to various other territories.

Star bought the worldwide rights for ICC events. So, around the world Star owns the rights and then Star further licenses it to broadcasters around the world. Star has a marketing team and a licensing team which sells these rights around the world. So if Star gives a guarantee money of, say, a billion dollars to [the] ICC, then it is up to them how they raise that one billion dollars. So, from India they might raise 900 million. And the remaining money they might want to recover from various other territories. So they'll sell the rights to a Sky Sports in the UK, Fox in the US, Fox in Australia, Super Sport in South Africa, PTV in Pakistan...and say, '50 million dollars, next seven years, all ICC cricket on Sky Sports in the UK'. So, that 50 million is going to come to Star Sports, not to ICC. Because Star has already bought the worldwide rights.

Advertising time is then sold by these broadcasters to companies that wish to 'buy' airtime to 'sell' their products on air. The audiences are then 'consuming' both the sport and the advertisements.

In the 1970s, Kerry Packer, the Australian newspaper magnate, was the first to transform the cricket fan into a consumer. He was the first to see the massive potential of television for cricket, or to put it another way, the massive potential of cricket for television. A keen businessman and one of the first people to recognise the impact and reach of television, Packer figured out that a new and potentially massive audience awaited cricket on the other side of the TV set, and that cricket could now be 'sold' to this audience making the sport more lucrative than ever before. His World Series Cricket (WSC) was the first cricket tournament to bring in the sort of razzmatazz to cricket that we have now come to accept as *de rigueur*. In spite of having been disparagingly called 'Kerry Packer's flying circus' by former England Captain Tony Lewis, WSC changed the way cricket was seen and enjoyed forever.¹⁹

Selling Sport

WSC was the first time that cricket was 'sold' to the public the way it was. WSC was never just cricket; it was a whole other 'product'. With a blitzkrieg (for those days) of off-field publicity, Packer was making sure that players were projected as stars; as journalist and writer Ayaz Memon put it, 'caricatured and then sold to a public looking to satiate vicarious curiosity and desires

19 Tony Lewis in the *Sunday Telegraph*, quoted in 'The Packer Affair: ACB brushed their friends aside to meet their own ends', in *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* (1980), <http://www.espnccricinfo.com/wisdenalmanack/content/story/152175.html>, accessed on 19 February 2011.

as stereotypes'.²⁰ Packer used his own television network to reinforce the publicity he was generating in other spaces. That was not all. Along with coloured clothes for players (a first for cricket) and matches under floodlights (another first) with an easier to spot white ball, Packer, as Lalit Modi would do several years later, was selling not cricket, but entertainment. Wisden described it thus:

Packer gave the public free parking at Sydney, free transport out to the Waverley ground in Melbourne, and played his matches when spectators have time to watch - at night, and with a white ball which they can see better. In addition, with his television network, he promoted his stars as Hollywood used to theirs in the thirties. They became household names and faces. It was all a personality cult.²¹

Memon agrees with the description of the 'personality cult', emphasising that it was 'nurtured and developed assiduously through television sports shows, or radio interviews or even live appearances at local markets and shopping centres'.²²

Along with promoting cricketers as celebrities, WSC injected the game with technology in an attempt to make it as different as possible to traditional cricket. One of Packer's great ideas was cameras on both ends of the pitch. Until then, every other over was seen from behind the wicketkeeper. Ivo Tennant quotes Packer as having told his production team, 'Who wants to watch a batsman's bum for half the match?'²³ Playing under lights was another one of the several shots of adrenaline that cricket received through WSC.

Catering to audiences at home in front of their TV sets and to spectators in the stadium, both of who could now watch cricket after their work day was over, Packer added what today could be called bling to a game that once was played in white flannels for five days with a stiff upper lip. He was attempting to woo what Memon calls 'the peripheral, the non-traditional cricket fan'. The publicity slogan for night matches was 'Big Boys Play at Night' and it became 'more than just an innuendo' when Playboy bunnies rode out in flashy cars on to the field to serve refreshments during the drinks break.²⁴ This was later mirrored in the IPL's inclusion of cheerleaders for their matches.

20 Ayaz Memon, *Wills Book of Excellence: One-Day Cricket*, Orient Longman, Kolkata, 1992, p. 66.

21 'The Packer Affair'.

22 Memon, *Wills Book*, p. 67.

23 Ivo Tennant, 'The Tentacles of TV', <http://www.espnccricinfo.com/innovation/content/story/503609.html>, accessed on 21 March 2011.

24 Memon, *Wills Book*, p. 68.

The marketing was specifically aimed at acquiring more and more eyeballs for the game. This would ensure a larger audience, which could then result in larger revenues, by providing advertisers with a deeper reach. Women and children — hitherto not the primary target of cricket — became central to Packer's marketing.²⁵ The personality cult and the selling of cricketers as icons and personalities was targeted at getting more women interested in watching cricket, if not for the sport, for the players. The novelty of the night matches, the strategic placement of cricketers as brands, and his ability to work the press all resulted in the recruitment of new audiences for the game, and more importantly, for the advertisers and funders.

The influx of corporate funding and advertising into mainstream sports allowed sporting fixtures, games, uniforms, and even stadia to become advertising billboards. This led to a direct increase in the amount of money within the administration of cricket, which then found its way on to the field by way of increased monetary compensation for cricketers, the influx of support staff for teams and individual players, and the use of more and, as some would argue, 'better' technology in the game.

But the most important of these influxes has been television. The platform that cricket has become has been constructed on the foundation of television, even if it is assembled by bringing together several other, sometimes even unrelated building blocks. The immense profitability of modern day cricket comes from its highly lucrative position as an immeasurably useful platform. No longer just a game, cricket has become the kind of platform that can provide more 'eyeballs' than any other marketing gimmick.²⁶

Consider the example of India Cements. Owners of the Chennai Super Kings franchise, India Cements was among the least known franchise owners when the IPL began in 2007 (Srinivas and Vivek describe the company as 'perceived to be a conservative, publicity-shy, and provincial operator') and therefore most in need of an advertising fillip. Having bought Indian one-day captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (the most expensive player in the first edition of the IPL at \$1.5 million), India cements was all set to use their IPL team as a high-profile 'calling card'.²⁷ N. Srinivasan, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director of India Cements, is quoted:

Even if the company had spent Rs. 1500 crore [approximately USD 225 million] on brand promotion, it wouldn't have got a fraction of

25 Martin Williamson, 'A Brief History: World Series Cricket', <http://www.espnricinfo.com/worldseries/content/story/72632.html>, accessed 21 March 2011.

26 Vidya Subramanian, 'Cricket in the Fast Lane: Politics of Speed', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 December 2012. Pp. 21-4.

27 Alam Srinivas and T.R. Vivek, *IPL an Inside Story: Cricket and Commerce*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2009, p. 68.

the publicity that Super Kings got us. The team's brand equity will help expand our business in north India. We have big plans to be a pan-India corporate group.²⁸

Piggybacking on the popularity of the team, India Cements planned to launch an all-India cement brand, Super Kings, packaged in the instantly recognisable yellow of the team jerseys. Srinivas and Vivek cite another and highly visible example of IPL as a marketing vehicle. Vijay Mallya, 'whose personal PR humbles that of Sir Richard Branson and Donald Trump', they say, was clear from the outset that his team, Royal Challengers Bangalore, was a platform to promote his other business interests such as his airlines and his liquor brands, 'which he couldn't advertise through conventional media because of government restrictions'.²⁹

Advertising even made it into the commentary box in the IPL. Writing of commentators becoming part of the advertising world, Osman Samiuddin remarks on their use of brand names of companies sponsoring sixes, fours, and other moments, 'Each six was a "DLF maximum", each critical point in the game a "Citi moment of success"... This was commentary as PR'.³⁰ Almost every aspect of the game from the field to the commentary box had been appropriated in the assembly of the platform.

The Player as Canvas

The sportsperson too has been co-opted into the canvas of advertising and branding. Rajaraman writes that 'there are ten properties on the player, including the cap'.³¹ Translated, this means that there are, on average, ten spaces for logos, branding, and advertisements on the person of a player at any time. The IPL's 'Clothing and Equipment Regulations' lists in detail the manner and form of logos and advertisements allowed on a player's person.³² Of the 13 listed positions, three are either the IPL logo or the team logo. The others are for sponsors and other logos — six on the playing shirt (or sweater), two on the trousers, and two on the headwear (helmet, baseball cap, or sunhat). Each position is priced differently, such as a logo on the leading arm of a player would, understandably, be worth more than that on the non-leading arm, owing to greater visibility to the television cameras. The 61-point document that covers everything from the colours

28 Srinivas and Vivek, *IPL*, pp. 69.

29 Srinivas and Vivek, *IPL*, p. 73.

30 Osman Samiuddin, 'Sold Out', <http://www.espnricinfo.com/magazine/content/story/354158.html>, accessed on 21 March 2011.

31 Rajaraman, interviewed by the author.

32 BCCI, 'Clothing and Equipment Regulations', <http://www.iplt20.com/about/2014/clothing-and-equipment-regulations/168/colours-and-design>, accessed on 20 August 2014.

to the sizes of logos to be used in kits for teams and players (including those for non-playing members and what players should wear for practice, for matches, and for even media interviews) makes for fascinating reading. Detailed descriptions are provided for everything from the bibs that non players should be wearing to the allowed colours of players' caps and even undershirts.³³ While the IPL logo and team logos are of an exact specified size at specified locations, the regulations leave room (at the 'sole discretion' of the BCCI) for commercial logos to change and alter during the course of the tournament. Conflicts of interest between sponsors of different teams are allowed, but not with those of the host team.³⁴

Bats, pads, socks, shoes, and most other equipment are also allowed to have manufacturer/sponsor logos. The canvas for advertising in an IPL match (as indeed in international matches) is as intricate as it is vast — encompassing players, stadia, broadcast channels, and even the commentary. It is not just players who serve as billboards, it is the commentators and umpires as well. Each slot is numbered, priced and sold, making ad revenue the life blood of the enterprise.

The ICC also has regulations for clothing and equipment (downloadable from the ICC website) that contain detailed rules about the size and number of logos and manufacturer's identity markers on clothing and equipment including stumps (no regulations on colour; event logo or logo of the series or sponsor may be displayed on each stump) and socks (one manufacturer's logo on each sock). The document covers clothing for test matches, One Day Internationals and Twenty20 matches held under the auspices of the ICC (events like the IPL, the Big Bash League, and Champions league T20

33 Article 15 (Caps and Sunhats):

15.1: 'The colours and design of caps and sunhats shall be uniform to all members of the same team save for those who wear the orange and purple caps. The holder of the orange or purple cap must wear the cap whilst fielding.'

15.2: 'Franchises are permitted to have a player's order of representation number on the non — leading side of the playing headwear. For example a player could be the 25th player to represent a franchise and would therefore be permitted to have "25" written on the playing headwear. The number must be written in the alinea font and its height must not exceed 2cm. This number may be different from the player number on the back of the playing shirt'

Article 6: 'Undergarments (worn under playing shirt) shall be of the same colour as the predominant colour (the "base colour") of the playing shirt or colour of the sleeve. Plain white undergarments may be worn provided they do not protrude from the sleeves'

34 Commercial Logos: Article 23: 'Both teams shall abide by any law of the host venue, which restricts advertising of a product. No compensation shall be payable should a team be precluded from displaying its commercial logos on clothing or cricket equipment, and a visiting team shall not pursue any action against the BCCI, host franchise or state association'

are independent of the ICC).

Not only is this a far cry from the white flannel cricket that was once the only cricket seen, it is also a big step forward from the coloured clothing that was introduced in the Packer era. The inclusion of the player in branding opportunities on the field also brings with it a different set of conflicts such as the one about ambush marketing — players not wanting to be seen around prominent logos of brands that are in direct competition to those that they personally endorse. In the months leading up to the World Cup in 2003, much was written about the inability of players to sign contracts with the ICC due to conflicts with personal endorsements. In the 1996 World Cup, for instance, Sachin Tendulkar — one of several Indian players who were signed up by Pepsi — would not even be seen near the drinks cart and would have the 12th man bring him drinks because the cart was built to resemble a large Coca Cola bottle; Coca Cola being the official sponsor of the World Cup.³⁵

But branding opportunities in sport are not just for manufacturers and sponsors. A successful EPL player is himself a brand; the price he commands for an advertisement spot or a public appearance stems directly from his performance and reputation as a cricketer. India's most successful cricket captain, M. S. Dhoni, is one of the players who commands a price as high as some major film stars for an ad spot. It speaks to the 'saleability' and 'dependability' of a player in the eyes of the audience.

So much so that in 2013, in the wake of the much publicised spot fixing scandal, when BCCI President and owner of the Chennai Super Kings IPL franchise had to step down, he insisted that his detractors were 'jealous' of him because he 'had Dhoni'. 'Why do you think people are jealous of CSK?' he is reported to have asked. 'It is because of Dhoni. There was a savage attack on me because I have Dhoni'.³⁶ He was referring to allegations of impropriety after the arrest of his son-in-law Gurunath Meiyappan in the same scandal. 'Having' Dhoni is more than just about 'owning' the captain of the Indian team. Apart from playing for the team in corporate tournaments organised by the BCCI, Dhoni's success as captain is a useful marketing tool in the arsenal of the company he now represents as Vice President (India Cements). Prior to this, Dhoni was an employee of Air India. He was even given a promotion after India's World Cup victory in 2011. Dhoni, along with Yuvraj Singh, Suresh Raina, and Harbhajan Singh

35 Malcolm Conn, 'ICC, players in for a showdown over sponsorships', <http://www.thehindu.com/2002/06/05/stories/2002060503101800.htm>, accessed on 24 December 2014.

36 Firstpost-Sports, 'There was a savage attack on me because I have Dhoni: Srinivasan', <http://www.firstpost.com/sports/there-was-a-savage-attack-on-me-because-i-have-dhoni-srinivasan-990567.html>, accessed 21 August 2014.

were all members of Air India staff, and represented Air India in corporate tournaments³⁷. Dhoni has since moved to India Cements. Other prominent employees of India Cements are all-time great Rahul Dravid, spin bowler R. Ashwin, and wicketkeeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik.³⁸

Making the IPL

In an interview I conducted with Hemant Buch, Vice President of Production at Ten Sports, he described in detail the process of putting together a live telecast of a cricket match.³⁹ Speaking of a fixture in the Caribbean, he heads a 'smaller set-up' of about 35 to 40 people. 'In the IPL, you'd have about 80 people'. Showing me an image of a complicated console that looks more like a space ship navigation system out of a science fiction fantasy movie, he points to his 'Programme Monitor' and the 'Preview Monitor'. Along with a colleague who pushes buttons to instantly relay the shot that he wants relayed, Buch is the Director of the match, and it is his job, as he sees it, 'to tell the story to the audience'.

Buch reports that on average, an international one-day match would have 10 manned cameras and about 10 to 12 unmanned ones. Depending upon needs and budgets, this number can go up to 13 or very rarely even 17 manned cameras. Azhar Habib, of Wild Track Productions, pegged the number of cameras in a single IPL match at about 30 to 34. The fixed cameras, such as the Mat Camera, the Run-out Cameras, and the Beauty Camera don't require to be manned since they have been fixed to record from the same angle continuously. Others such as the Follow Camera are the ones that need to be manually handled. The Follow Camera is, as the name suggests, the one that follows the ball from the moment the batsman hits it to wherever it finally goes.

Once the batsman makes the shot, the two follow cameras on either side of the pitch follow the ball as it either reaches a fielder or makes it to the boundary and beyond. Other cameras such as the Spider Camera are remotely manned. The Spider Camera is a roving camera that moves above the playing field and captures images from a bird's eye view. A team of about 500 people work on the production of the match in the broadcast team alone. Each stadium is 'rigged' with what Habib calls, 'kilometres and kilometres of cabling' and other attending equipment such as the cameras, the slow motion machines, replay machines and audio systems up to two

37 PTI, 'Air India to promote MSD and others', <http://www.hindustantimes.com/news-feed/chunk-ht-ui-cricket-topstories/air-india-to-promote-msd-and-others/article1-680908.aspx>, accessed on 26 August 2014.

38 India Cements Limited, 'Career with a winning team', <http://www.indiacements.co.in/careers.html>, accessed on 10 October 2016.

39 Hemant Buch, Vice President of Production, Ten Sports, interviewed by the author, March 2014

days before match day. Including the pre- and post-match shows that are now an inextricable part of the televised sport experience, a single one-day international is a massive affair by any yardstick. The IPL is, if anything, larger than regular one-day series, and while match times may be shorter, the complications of broadcast only go up.

Speaking of the pace at which the IPL and now other domestic T20 tournaments are played and televised, Buch equates IPL style T20 matches with Formula One, questioning the wisdom of watching the game in a stadium at all:

What is there to watch in Formula One? For me, it's just cars going round and round. You can't see the whole circuit ... you can't see what is happening. [It's] much better to watch [it] on television. You can see every overtake, you can see every bit of the action.⁴⁰

Echoing the thoughts of other cricket connoisseurs, he insists that people who watch a T20 match in a stadium are only there to catch a glimpse of their favourite players.

Assembling the Spectacle

Buch's words invoke the idea of the 'spectacle' that modern sport (especially the televised kind) has come to be described as – be it the Superbowl in the USA, the Olympics, or the FIFA World Cup. The spectacle around the sporting event has become almost as important as, if not more than, the sport itself. The IPL, with its abundance of celebrity, glamour and glitz, is at the pinnacle of the kind of spectacle, or tamasha, that televised sport appears to have now become.

The television set itself is uniquely suited to this spectacular form of entertainment. As Guy Debord points out in *The Society of the Spectacle*, the 'spectacle' requires exactly the sort of passivity (he calls it 'passive acceptance') that television engenders.⁴¹ It requires no response from the viewer except in terms of changing channels via the remote control; and all of those available channels also require the same passive acceptance of the stream of images that they transmit. In *Television and Everyday Life*, Roger Silverstone perhaps explains the phenomenon as he quotes Walter Ong's view that television has a 'peculiar capacity to present presence and to blur

40 Buch, interviewed by the author.

41 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* [trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith], Zone Books, New York, 1994, p. 15. 'The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: "Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear." The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances.'

the live and the staged, the real and the imagined, the spontaneous and the rehearsed'.⁴²

A sporting event is a 'media event' in the way that Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz use the term in their book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, which is to say that it is happening at the very instant of watching it on television, and is necessarily an 'interruption' of a schedule, much like 'holidays that halt everyday routines'.⁴³ The 'live' nature of the broadcast ('the French call this en direct') makes it necessarily unpredictable, and consequently exciting. Typically, Dayan and Katz point out, such media events are:

... organised outside the media and ... at least theoretically, the media only provide a channel for their transmission. By 'outside' we mean both that the events take place outside the studio in what broadcasters call 'remote locations' and that the event is not usually initiated by the broadcasting organisations.⁴⁴

This is, theoretically, true of all sports broadcasts today. The event itself is not initiated or organised by the media that broadcast it; however, it is the broadcast and its attending frills that are the main drivers behind the organisation of the event. The television companies that broadcast the event are not its organisers, but have bought from the Sporting Bodies (FIFA, ICC, BCCI, etc.) that organise the event the right to broadcast it and earn revenue from it. Before television became the primary mode of engagement with sport and sporting events, the event was news, and the media played the role of what has been called 'a witness' to the event. When radio and television first began reporting and broadcasting cricket, observes Gideon Haigh, the cricket historian and writer, it was with a 'sense of privilege and deference. They were honoured guests in the house of sport and remained low-key, polite'.⁴⁵ Haigh contrasts this with the scenario today in which, 'the media runs cricket, (and it has been realised) that cricket owes everything to its electronic availability.' Haigh goes on to say that, 'The media now fancy they are entitled to be their own spectacle, to draw attention to their presence rather than remain silent witnesses.' The broadcast — which automatically means televised broadcast, it now seems, is the reason for the event and not vice versa.

42 Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 135.

43 Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1992.

44 Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, p. 5. Emphasis in the original.

45 Quoted by Samiuddin, 'Sold Out'.

Dayan and Katz theorise that the 'festive viewing of television' (in terms of events that are televised as they occur and 'transfix a nation or the world' such as the Olympics, and the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana) can be classified into three categories: 'contests, conquests, and coronations'. All of these telecasts, they argue, are recognised by audiences as 'an invitation — even a command — to stop their daily routines and join in a holiday experience'.⁴⁶ Reality, Dayan and Katz maintain, is uprooted by media events. The space within which the live event is occurring becomes for the time of the broadcast, 'only a studio.' They further argue:

Thus conquering space in an even more fundamental way, television causes events to move off the ground and "into the air". The era of television events, therefore, may be not only one in which the reproduction is as important as the original, as Benjamin (Walter Benjamin in 1968) proposed, but also one in which the reproduction is more important than the original.⁴⁷

This echoes the thoughts of Debord, who suggests in *The Society of the Spectacle* that the spectacle has become the centre of all life, and meaning that was once derived from being and was 'obvious(ly) downgraded' into having due to the 'economy's domination of social life', has now further shifted from having to 'appearing'. 'The present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from having to appearing: all effective 'having' must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate raison d'être from appearances'.⁴⁸ This foreshadows the present age of social networking, in which even personal life events are measured by the number of 'likes' a post attracts.

It is then not surprising that the primary way in which the popularity of IPL teams and their 'fan engagement' is analysed is through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The number of tweets per match and the number of 'retweets' and 'followers' is today one of the more accepted metrics that advertisers and organisers depend on to gauge the level of fan commitment and interaction.

Conclusion: Networked Media Sport

'Television is dead. Long live television' begins Brett Hutchins and David Rowe's book *Sport Beyond Television*.⁴⁹ The message is clear. While the televised version is still the primary way in which sport is viewed, it is not

46 Samiuddin, 'Sold Out'.

47 Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, p. 17.

48 Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 16.

49 Brett Hutchins and David Rowe, *Sport Beyond Television: The Internet, Digital Media and the Rise of Networked Media Sport*, Routledge, New York, 2012.

necessarily through the TV set in the living room. In fact, media events today are rarely, if ever, planned without a comprehensive strategy for online distribution and broadcast. With the advent of services such as IPTV (Internet Protocol Television), and the increasing popularity of video sharing websites such as YouTube and Vimeo, the distinction between online viewing and viewing sport on the TV set is blurring. As Hutchins and Rowe observe, 'While broadcast television is still a prime attraction for audiences... (there is) evidence of a rich and popular second screen experience for fans and viewers; with mobile phones and devices, evidence of a third screen'. They refer to this 'appearance and operation of media sport in the digital age' as 'networked media sport'.⁵⁰ This analysis, while acknowledging the changes to televised broadcast sport, considers all screens of viewing still a television phenomenon. This is reasonable since most online or mobile phone viewing is almost exactly the same as the televised content. While experiments with differing camera angles and other add-ons for online viewing are being tried out, largely the viewing experience remains the same, with the added dimension of viewed comments, 'likes' and sharing possibilities through social networking.

The IPL too is available for viewing on second as well as third screens. In 2010, in what was referred to as a 'path-breaking partnership with Google', the IPL broadcast stream was made available online through the video streaming behemoth YouTube.⁵¹ The IPL Tournament Handbook describes a:

... revolutionary tie-up [that] puts the fan in the driver seat – s/he can now decide when to watch games, irrespective of broadcast timings. All games will be available online and accessible at all times, giving the fan the freedom to create his/her own schedule.⁵²

In 2015, all IPL matches were available for live streaming on the mobile phone application Hotstar. This move is, in a way, revolutionary, because traditionally (or what stands for tradition in the fast paced, ever changing ICT-enabled media landscape) online viewing has always been seen as a threat to the broadcast televised presence of sport. The open and networked mode of functioning in an online universe has always been viewed as a threat to the 'closed, centrally controlled models of content production and distribution characteristic of the analogue-broadcast era'.⁵³ The IPL-Google tie-up carried the IPL live to an estimated 50 million viewers in 2010, and also attracted several high-profile advertisers such as

50 Hutchins and Rowe, *Sport Beyond Television*, p. 4.

51 *Indian Premier League Tournament Handbook 2010*, p. 87. Copy held by the author.

52 *Tournament Handbook*, p. 87.

53 Hutchins and Rowe, *Sport Beyond Television*, pp. 20-2.

Hewlett-Packard and Coca-Cola.⁵⁴

In conclusion, it would be fair to surmise that sport — a highly perishable commodity — is first a media event, and second a televised event. The 'networked media sport' landscape provides a suitable substrate for the development and perpetuation of events such as the Indian Premier League, giving advertisers and audiences alike a relatively new consumption pattern, that can be moulded to enhance individual celebrity, brand identification, advertising revenues, and indeed the visibility of high-profile sports and sportspersons.

54 Hutchins and Rowe, *Sport Beyond Television*, p. 29.