

Old Hats and New Balls

Remember the past, play for the present, adapt for the future was the message at the ICC's Centenary History Conference, write SHANTANU GUHA RAY and BORJA MAJUMDAR



PHOTOS: MANOJ JOSHI

Legends Bishan Singh Bedi, Haroon Lorgat and David Morgan releasing Tehelka's special ICC centenary edition

ON A rain-soaked afternoon, as Sourav Ganguly drove his BMW into the parking bay of St Antony's College in Oxford, UK, to attend the International Cricket Council (ICC) Centenary History Conference, the former Indian skipper was besieged by pesky students seeking autographs. Some even rushed with paper napkins from the college kitchen.

Around the same time, Caribbean legend Clive Lloyd, currently chairman of the ICC's Cricket Committee, was close to a departmental store where a handful of boisterous students mistook him for boxing promoter Don King. Seconds later, the students realised their gaffe and apologised profusely. Lloyd merely laughed.

Those deliberating and moderating at the three-day conference found the incidents amusing. To them, it seemed the two events, one of a player in denial and one of a player in recognition, reflected phases of the game — the Test and the shorter versions (ODI and T20). The organizers were trying to bridge this gap so that conservative and radical



In step Performers during the IPL's opening ceremony in Cape Town

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followers of cricket can share the same bed.

By every yardstick, it's probably the world's most difficult bridge to build. The cash is coming mostly from the shortest version of the game, thanks to its appeal to the television viewer. Those who wish to retain its traditional white flannel charm and flavour (read: the originators) are in deep thought.

The other difficult challenge for the contemporary cricket administrator, as Ten Sports top man Peter Hutton pointed out, is the fragile nature of the apparent cricket-television bonhomie. Hutton noted alarming figures that placed ratings for matches involving national teams below ratings for the cash-rich Indian Premier League (IPL), a statistic the ICC must combat in order to move the game forward.

When Test match cricket started in 1877, some things were taken for granted. Visions of a batsman lazily walking across for a single, which the fielding side was happy to concede while the crowd was busy sipping beer, were

part of cricket's romantic, ethereal charm. It was tailor-made for the retired and the young who could afford long hours in the morning and afternoon sun.

The ICC still needs cricket played over five Test days, but the 540 deliveries bowled on most of these days must encapsulate innumerable mini-contests. It needs to cater to the modern MBA and not the old clerk. This is doable, Oxford Vice Chancellor John Hood said, if the ICC limits Test cricket to the top Test sides of the world, teams that will provide intense and passionate competition.

Yet herein lies the problem. Such a solution goes against the ICC's professed ideal of globalisation. No wonder ICC Chairman David Morgan said in his inaugural speech: "It is time all cricketing nations must get involved in this process to move the game forward, even as we use 2009 as an opportunity to look back at the game's rich history and honour past greats and recognise milestones."

ICC CEO Haroon Lorgat

Blue skies A view of Lord's on Day 5 of the 2009 Ashes Test

said he drew a lot of courage from the packed crowds during the recent Ashes series between England and Australia. At the same time, he insisted that a balance between the three formats is the way forward.

Lorgat was candid in saying that T20 has added a new constituency to the global game and it is now up to the ICC to blend the old and the new in making sure that the sport remains robust and resilient. The attendees at the conference agreed with his conclusion.

What was good to see was that everyone, from the veteran to the new star, agreed that Test cricket – the base of the willow game – must survive and is still the real test. Sourav Ganguly even drew attention to the fact that it is only the established Test stars who have landed lucrative IPL contracts, showing the importance of success at the Test level.

BUT HOW does one ensure that Test matches continue to have takers? This seems a near-impossible feat. Former greats like Bob Willis and Angus Fraser and Indian legend Bishan Singh Bedi agreed it is important to get back to the roots of the game, while righting some past wrongs.

At the turn of the twentieth century, for example, those powerful in international cricket did not show enough initiative in developing cricket traditions in Argentina and Philadelphia, both major bases of the game then. This is because the Imperial Cricket Confer-

ence, the ICC's initial incarnation, consisted of England, South Africa and Australia as its sole members. Its was interested as much in playing cricket as in strengthening the British Empire. Outside the Empire, Argentina first played international cricket in 1868, against Uruguay, while an international competition against Brazil was held in 1888. It would be a fatal mistake to repeat cricket's past insularity, especially at a time when cricket in the Americas is poised for a takeoff, a point driven home by Dreamcricket.com co-founder Venu Palaparthi.

For former ICC President Ehsan Mani, the game's other challenges are perhaps much bigger than solving the Test versus ODI riddle or spreading the game in nations like the United States, China and even Japan. And bigger, for that matter, than determining whether the big-bang IPL needs to restrain itself. No one, honestly, is discussing how Pakistan can still find a way to host the 2011 World Cup and whether the cash-rich Indian cricket board is trying to behave in a more socially responsible manner.

Mani stressed that even when India and Pakistan were engaged in a war over Kargil, Jagmohan Dalmiya and Mani were still the best of mates at the ICC tables. It was fascinating to hear him discuss how administrators on the subcontinent were able to move the 1996 World Cup to India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka despite a strong challenge from Eng-



World game (top) Artwork specially drawn for the centenary by Suvaprasanna

Animated (right) Bedi in action as Mihir Bose and Clive Lloyd look on

Changes (middle) Bob Willis, Sourav Ganguly and Angus Fraser discuss cricket's future

Ideas (far right) Mani with David Richards and Roger Knight



'It is important for players to get on the other side of the fence and understand what it means to run the show', says Ganguly

land and Australia.

That the ICC is serious about turning a few leaves is evident. It is openly encouraging more and more cricketers to get involved in behind-the-scenes strategy, even in these different and difficult times, said Sourav Ganguly. "It is important for players to get on the other side of the fence and under-

stand what it means to run the show", he said. "If you can handle a team, you can surely handle the politics of cricket management, right?"

The former Indian skipper, who once took pride in his mind game and kept the iconic Steve Waugh waiting in the sun before a match toss-up, wants to tread carefully and cautiously. After all,

it is shaping policies for the game that will ultimately decide whether cricket remains among India's biggest money-spinners. Ironically, Ganguly's panel was aptly titled "It's Not Like It Used To Be — The Changing Game".

That, in many ways, is the challenge before the ICC, as elucidated by the game's legends, historians, statisticians and administrators (both past and present) at the deliberations at St Antony's. "We passed through some of the biggest challenges the game faced in the Bodyline

few billion pounds.

Richards found instant support from Lorgat, who felt that while it was important to remain connected with the game through strong emotional and historical links, it is also important to understand what the game needs to sustain its growth. "More important than getting back to the roots is to strengthen the roots in newer and more innovative ways so that the game can flourish", he said.

This was perhaps a hint to the irrevocable Bedi, who



series that messed the show between England and Australia, and getting South Africa back into the mainstream after the dark days of apartheid. Now, the ICC is poised to spread the game beyond its 104 members and take it to glorious heights", said David Richards, the first CEO of the ICC.

Richards, it is interesting to note, had £305,000 as his annual budget and operated with a team of five employees. The number of ICC employees has now swelled to 170 and it has a budget of a

disagrees with the changes that are sweeping the modern version of the game. He said specifically that it is time those who run the show (ie, the ICC) step in with some sort of corrective measures.

The legendary spinner was overtly critical when he said the much-hyped *doosra*, which Muralitharan and others have propagated across the world, is illegitimate. "It's like having a second wife through illegal means. I wonder what is this *doosra* all about. Why are we

allowing the basics to be tampered with?" asked Bedi to some agreement.

THROUGHOUT THE conference's analysis of cricket history, most speakers attempted to show how knowing the game's heritage could offer usable knowledge for national and

hoe-Flint, who lifted the inaugural women's World Cup in 1973, was present, as well as current England captain Charlotte Edwards and her teammate Ebony Rainford-Brent, who helped England win this year's T20 World Cup and the Ashes.

In the end, Morgan and the ICC can take much en-

Says Bedi of doosra: 'It's like having a second wife through illegal means. Why are we allowing the basics to be tampered with?'



international administrators in meeting contemporary challenges. The best thing about the conference was that it was a forum where critical views were aired without apprehension.

The conference explored key episodes such as the Packer era and discussed the social construction of the game through the media, with special regard to class, race, gender and nationality. Among the panels that stood out was one on women's cricket, its development and its expansion. Rachael Hey-

couragement from a wonderfully successful conference. The History Conference, which the ICC is now looking to make a more regular event on the world cricket calendar, was certainly an occasion to remember and a highlight of the ICC centenary year.

While reflecting on the past, the participants reaffirmed that the game continues to provide the basis for consuming passions, lifelong friendships and the promotion of greater global cultural understanding. ●