



CRICKET

# SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

*By quietly falling in line with the Big Three, the cricketing world has mortgaged the future of the sport, particularly Test cricket, further skewing the existing financial imbalance in favour of the big boys*

**By Subash Jayaraman**

Photographs by DANIEL BEREHULAK/GETTY IMAGES

#### FIRST AMONG EQUALS

The popularity of the sport in India and its economic viability has ensured BCCI the top position, where it's calling the shots in world cricket.



*“There is a sufficiency in the world for man’s need but not for man’s greed.”* Mahatma Gandhi

**W**e live in a finite world with finite amount of resources and it is incompatible with man’s greed for money and power, which are infinite. In a daring display of power grab and self-aggrandisement, the cricket boards of India, England and Australia cajoled and convinced, bargained and bartered their way to the passing of proposals for the restructuring of the International Cricket Council’s (ICC) governance that has skewed further the already existing financial disparity among its member nations.

However, that was only formalising a situation that had been prevalent in the ICC boardroom for the better part of two decades. This goes to the root of how cricket as a sport, and as we know it, will be shaped in the future. The wheeling and dealing that has led to the proposals

to be passed has set a path for cricket that would make Gordon Gecko proud.

The details of the Position Paper are now common knowledge. For the sake of completeness, one draft version of it that was leaked, indicated that it was worked on by the working group of ICC’s Finance & Commercial Affairs (F&CA) committee, with the prime movers behind the document being Sundar Raman (IPL chief operating officer), Dean Kino (general manager of legal and business affairs, Cricket Australia)—both members of the technical committee of CLT20—John Perera (commercial director, England and Wales Cricket Board) along with respective heads of the three national cricket boards of India, Australia and England, N. Srinivasan, Wally Edwards and Giles Clarke, respectively.

The wide-ranging changes that were proposed in the Position Paper and have been passed since in a slightly modified form, deal with the ICC’s current revenue distribution

model (BCCI wasn’t satisfied with its share), administrative structures (BCCI wasn’t happy with the ICC) and the Future Tours Programme (which wasn’t legally binding in the first place), scrapping of the proposed Test Championship in favour of reinstating the more broadcaster-friendly Champions Trophy, among other things.

Unsurprisingly, there were sops included in the changes, such as Test Match Fund, and a possible way for nations beyond the current ICC Full Members to play Test cricket, but that was mostly to pull the wool over the eyes

of those that would have been outraged at the audaciousness of these changes. Make no mistake; almost every change that has been passed is designed to give a larger share of control of world cricket to BCCI, CA and ECB, and, consequently, a larger share of revenues.

One might ask how it is any different from the situation earlier, but as one cricket correspondent said, when casual racism is institutionalised, it’s called Apartheid. A BCCI official was reported to have called these moves, aptly, as “formalising *dadagiri*”.

#### ROLE OF OTHER BOARDS

As much as the proposed changes in the Position Paper were blatant in their attempt to concentrate power and money with three of the largest cricket boards in the world, it still needed to pass the ICC Board, comprising of 10 Full Member nation representatives. Some of the changes required more than a three-fourth majority to pass. So there was still a chance that some of the cricket boards

**“IF WE OBJECT TO THE PROPOSALS, OUR CRICKET WILL SUFFER. THOSE WHO TALK OF PRINCIPLES WON’T GIVE MONEY.”**



#### IN BLACK AND WHITE

The ICC proposal, passed at a meeting in Singapore (facing page), encourages all cricket boards to schedule Tests with the Big Three as that will help draw in the money.

cluded from the powerbrokers group even as South Africa is a top cricketing nation (on the field), lack of ICC events until 2023, and the pending ICC legal enquiry into their chief executive, Haroon Lorgat. On the eve of the meeting in Singapore, Srinivasan was reported to have had long discussions with Chris Nenzani, president CSA, where certain concessions and compromises were made, and the eighth “Aye” was guaranteed.

There is every possibility that the reinstated Champions Trophy (2017) will find its way to South Africa; in all likelihood, all or most of IPL 2014 will be held in South Africa; the Test fund, which, initially, excluded South Africa, now has them as one of the possible beneficiaries; there are also indications that there will be a thawing of the cold shoulder that BCCI has been dealing to Mr. Lorgat.

The dramatic turnaround in CSA’s stance came as a rude surprise to both SLC and PCB but even they were convinced to not vote “Nay” and, instead, save face back home by abstaining from it, which also left some wriggle room for them to come back to the negotiating table. Since then, the SLC executive committee has “unanimously approved” the changes (on Feb. 17) settling for guaranteed income than publicly averred principles. In the next seven years, Sri Lanka is due to get an income of \$60 million from bilateral tours. Nishantha Ranatunga, SLC secretary, laid it all in black and white, or rather in green. “If we are going to object to their proposals our cricket is going to suffer. People who talk about principles and all that will not give us the money. We have to make our money from these tours.”

If you’re keeping track, that’s nine boards warm and cozy, and just one still out in the cold—PCB. Even they will have a price. Perhaps, a series with India in the UAE?

#### FTP, WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

The Big Three boards have shown tremendous amount of resourcefulness and expedience in a swift move to concentrate power and increase their revenue shares, but one thing they can never change is the number of days on a calendar. If it were up to the boards, with their diktat to maximise their revenue generation capabilities, they would schedule T20 tournaments and domestic leagues to

would grow a backbone in a matter of weeks and prevent the oligarchy taking over cricket. Alas, it wasn’t to be.

From the outset, the cricket boards of Zimbabwe, New Zealand and West Indies were in favour of the changes. The reasons propounded by the respective representatives all underlined a fundamental single point of self-preservation and survival. To quote Martin Snedden, the director of New Zealand Cricket (NZC): “Do we have power at the ICC table? No, not a hell of a lot. Do we have the ability to influence and persuade? A little bit. The critical thing is to identify the things most important to us. That means ensuring the stability of our playing programme and revenue generation.”

This essentially lays bare the situation faced by the national boards outside of those that cobbled the Position Paper together and the stark reality facing them. BCCI is the top dog. England and Australia can handle themselves, but the rest were almost entirely dependent on handouts in the form of incoming tours from these nations (more so India than England or Australia) to fill up their coffers. Sink or swim? The smaller boards decided to swim.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was originally opposed to the changes, primarily due to the sticking point of promotion/relegation that was proposed. Once they were guaranteed that they were in no real danger

of losing their Full Member voting rights and share of ICC revenue, they chose to go along. Of course, they have been promised tours from the Big Three as well, but that came as no real surprise to anyone following the situation.

Thus, at the end of the ICC Executive Board meeting held across Jan. 28–29 in Dubai, the proposal was in need of just one more vote to pass through. Which of the remaining three—Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Cricket South Africa (CSA) and Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC)—would be the one that would make the deal and change the cricket landscape forever? As it turned out, it was CSA, as PCB and SLC “abstained” from voting at the meeting in Singapore on Feb. 8.

In the interim nine-day period between the two meetings, CSA, PCB and SLC were opposed to the changes publicly, on various counts, even calling the changes “constitutionally flawed” and questioning the legality of the process by which the proposal was drawn up, among other things. CSA sent a missive invoking the spirit of the great Nelson Mandela, urging “the adherence to democratic principles and respect for the rights of all”. They expressed “hurt and disappointment” in the original proposal, pled for “equality and democracy” but also listed a few issues that were of significance to them, as a cricketing nation and board. Those concerns were primarily of being ex-

**SHOW ME THE MONEY**

Doing away with the FTP will help cut back on international commitments, freeing up time for the more financially-viable T20 leagues, the IPL and the BBL.

run the entire year, as T20s have proven to be money-spinners compared to Tests in most of the Test world.

As of now, the Indian Premier League (IPL) and the Big Bash League (BBL), two of the more successful franchise-based T20 leagues, run for roughly two months, while the other 10 months are used by the BCCI and CA to honour international obligations. The obvious way to provide more calendar space for their domestic T20 leagues is to cut back on international commitments and that is exactly what scrapping the existing FTP structure achieves, with inclusion of clauses that do not force any nation to play any other nation unless bilaterally agreed.

The Position Paper also indicated that the “FTP must provide members with a clear path to sustainability and engagement with their domestic stakeholders”. The proposal, even though claims that its goals are to ensure Test cricket remained “competitive and relevant” and the “primary form of the game”, takes a rather patronising stance towards that format and, at every turn, drives home the point that it is “financially unviable” for most members, while also encouraging boards to schedule Tests only versus the Big Three, as they are no longer required to host tours that aren’t going to make the home board money!

Even with mutually agreed bilateral series, the proposed changes allow for teams to renege on it with clauses such as “No obligation of member to tour if home board has its primary media rights deal in the territory of the tourist member with a broadcaster that is then involved in material litigious court matter with that touring member or the ICC”. Former ICC president Ehsan Mani pointed out the dispute BCCI has been having with Zee (through Ten Sports), which has been the broadcast rights holder in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, in a strongly worded review of the Position Paper.

**THE FUTURE OF CRICKET**

The ICC declares on its website that its mission is to promote the “global game” and its strategic direction is the growth of “men’s and women’s international cricket”. The ICC has not been the shining beacon in terms of cricketing governance over the years, as it is nothing but a conglomerate of member



**NO AMOUNT OF MONEY WILL BE ENOUGH IF MAXIMISATION, AS THE PROPOSAL ESPOUSES, IS THE GOAL**

PAUL KANE/GETTY IMAGES (IPL)

MANJUNATH KIRAN/AFP (BBL)

nations. By adopting the devious proposals “unanimously”, the member nations have mortgaged the future of the sport, especially the format that is considered the pinnacle of the sport but according to the proposal “financially debilitating” Test cricket.

When does sport stop being a sport and become a business? Is cricket a sport, or business? Those two cannot, by definition, coexist. If the boards are in place to “govern” the sport in their respective nations, they cannot be driven solely by the need to maximise the revenues and increase the profit margins. Then, they become corporations. And corporations are driven by the singular objective of profit, the basic tenet of capitalism.

It must be expressly registered here that the boards of Big Three nations laid down the law stating that all member nations ought to become “financially strong and independent” and “self-sufficient”. This does awfully sound like the rich exhorting the poor to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” without actually making the means available. The Big Three have, hence, made financial profits the foremost goal for every cricketing board, and the other boards have agreed unanimously, with tacit approval from the PCB, and this officially changes the objective of every board from governing a sport, to maximising returns on their cricketing investments.

**THE KEY CHANGES AND WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN**

● **Opportunity for all members to play all formats of cricket on merit, with participation based on meritocracy; no immunity to any country, and no change to membership status**

This sounds like a good change but with no penalty of loss of membership, this isn’t really a push towards meritocracy. If Ireland or Afghanistan were to work their way in to the top 10 of the Test rankings, would they be awarded Full Member status? No clarity on that. One would assume no, as that would shrink the revenue available to the existing Full Members.

● **A Test Cricket Fund paid equally on an annual basis to all Full Members (except the BCCI, CA and ECB) to encourage and support Test cricket**

This, in theory, is a good concept which could allow “financially unviable Test series” to happen. But if the motivation is to make the most money, why would a board even schedule a series for which they know they will have to dip in to their fund? This only encourages the behaviour of boards to look even more unfavourably at the not-so-profitable tours that don’t feature India, England and Australia.

● **A larger percentage from the increasing Associate Members’ surplus will be distributed to the higher performing non-Full Members**

Teams may not perform as well as they would like to, for many reasons, including the fact that they do not have sufficient funds to develop the game at the grassroots and pay for facilities. If a non-Full Member who may not be “performing higher” is going to be crippled further, what are the chances they would ever get to better the performances? This is classic Catch-22. You need the money to perform better but you don’t get the money till you perform better!

● **Mutually agreed bilateral FTP Agreements**

This is the most significant change proposed as there is no central FTP that governed the schedule over a four-year cycle. The fallout from this is discussed in detail in the main story.

● **A need to recognise the varying contribution of Full Members to the value of ICC events through the payment of ‘contribution costs’**

A cost model whose real basis was never truly revealed but has its foundations in “rich getting richer, and poor get-

ting poorer”, further widening the economic inequality of cricketing nations. Several calculations published indicate that BCCI stands to accrue an additional \$450 million from the proposed model, while ECB and CA will take home an additional \$55 million and \$13 million, respectively. The remaining seven Full Member nations stand to lose approximately \$260 million cumulatively, and the funds available to the Associate nations would be dented to the tune of \$312 million.

● **The establishment of an Executive Committee [ExCo] and Financial & Commercial Affairs Committee [F&CA] to provide leadership at an operational level, with five members, including BCCI, CA and ECB representatives. Anybody from within the Board can be elected to chair the Board and anybody from within ExCo and F&CA can be elected to Chair those Committees**

If BCCI, ECB and CA, the permanent members on the ExCo, were to display any of the cunning, cleverness and collusion with which the Position Paper was put together, the promises of “anybody can be elected” will remain just a myth.

The obvious question to be asked next is, “How much money is enough money for a board?” Words like “independent” and “self-sufficient” are nebulous words that can mean many things to many people. To paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi, no amount of money would be sufficient, if maximisation is the goal.

It is easy to see that the most bang for the buck is in T20 cricket. It is the most attractive format to the broadcasters and sponsors. Franchise-based domestic T20 leagues provide the most scope for immediate revenue growth as more space in the calendar becomes available with reduction in international commitments. The hypocrisy that jumps out of the pages of the proposal is staggering. While lip service is paid to the sanctity and the primacy of Test cricket, the amount of time available to play it is

squashed by the need to maximise profit, Test championship is dropped, and the lesser seven members are encouraged to avoid playing uneconomical cricket, even as a “Test fund” is instituted.

The CSA president, Mr. Nenzani, said in an interview after casting the deciding vote that “it’s not a perfect world” when asked about their change in stance. Certainly. We are all aware that we do not live in a perfect world. But, our goal should be to make it more perfect than we found it. By going along with the proposed changes, the boards have ensured that cricket has become far less perfect than it was. □

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