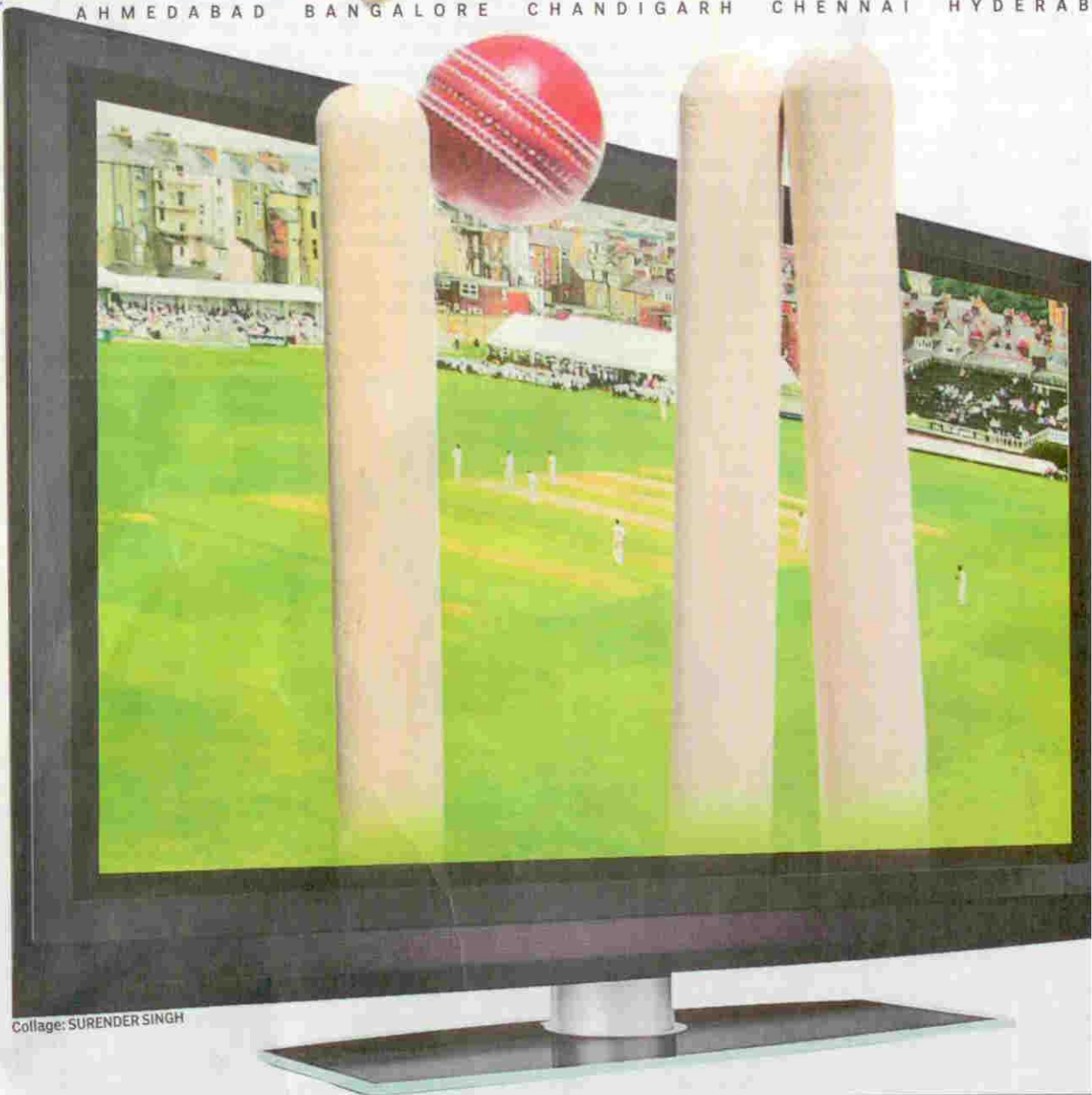


AHMEDABAD BANGALORE CHANDIGARH CHENNAI HYDERAB



Collage: SURENDER SINGH

Too Much!

The Indian cricket calendar is choc-a-bloc with an event happening almost every one and a half month. Will the oversupply of the game dent television viewership and advertising investments?

**Pritha Mitra Dasgupta &
Vivina Vishwanathan**

In an article in the November issue of *The Wisden Cricketer* magazine, the chief executive of the Professional Cricketers Association for England, Sean Morris, has made a desperate call for action to protect international cricket from "unsustainable" fixture scheduling.

Calling for urgent action, Morris has said: "Until now there has not been a rival to the international game and arguably this has seen complacency creep in, with the boards squeezing out every last drop of revenue regardless of the impact on quality, not to mention the players themselves. But with the rise of the Indian Premier League (IPL) and other domestic competitions, which now have the backing to attract the top players,

there is a real threat to internationals. It is time that administrators heed our warnings and understand that less is, in fact, more."

A look at the Indian cricket calendar will, actually, explain what Morris means by "unsustainable" scheduling. The Indian calendar is now set with the Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) globally acclaimed, high profile offering, The Indian Premier League right at the beginning of the year, and the Champions League T20 at the end of the year. In addition, the International Cricket Council's (ICC) properties are scattered throughout the year. This year besides the club tournaments, three international tournaments were held between June and October. These include the India-West Indies one-day series held between June and July, followed by Compaq Cup in September and the ICC Champions Trophy in September-October. The Champions League T20 concluded

on October 23.

The line-up for the coming six months stands like this: India will play against Australia from October 25 to November 11. This will be followed by India-Sri Lanka series in November and December. Then, there will be India-Sri Lanka-Bangladesh tri-series in January 2010. February-March 2010 will witness the India-South Africa tournament, which will be followed by the IPL yet again.

No (eye)balls

While Morris worries about too much cricket relate with players' welfare and also, the impact it will have on international cricket, the marketing fraternity in India is worried whether too much cricket will lead to fatigue among fans, thereby, leading to a decline in television viewership, and thus, dent their returns on the investments in the game.

Too Much!

■ Continued from page 1

To be sure, viewership data from television audience measurement agency TAM Media Research shows that cricket viewership is on the decline. According to TAM, the average television rating points (TRPs), which is the percentage of viewers watching a particular programme at given point in time, of the ICC Champions Trophy 2009 was 1.63. It was only the India-Pakistan match that clocked in a rating of 6.2. The average rating of the Compaq Cup held between India and New Zealand that was aired on Sony MAX was 3.2. The average rating of the ongoing Champions League T20 was 1.6.

To put things in perspective, cricket, till two years ago, was delivering double digit TRPs. Advertisers, for sure, need to worry about the decline in viewership because they dish out top dollars to buy advertising spots on cricket events, which happen to be the most expensive across all television properties.

To cite an example, a 10-second advertising spot on *Bigg Boss*, the high profile prime time reality show on Viacom18's general entertainment channel (GEC) Colors, which is being hosted by Amitabh Bachchan, costs around Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 1.75 lakh. Whereas the average cost of spots on sports channels airing cricket is between Rs 2.5 lakh and Rs 2.75 lakh.

Sixes and sevens

Surprising as it may seem, advertisers aren't fretting about the oversupply of cricket on the tube. They, instead, are betting big on cricket as usual. ESPN Star Sports (ESS), the

broadcaster that aired the recently concluded ICC Champions Trophy 2009 and the Champions League T20 back-to-back, had all big-ticket advertisers on board that included Airtel, Pepsi, Reliance Communications, Hero Honda, Maruti Suzuki, Bajaj, Philips, Adidas, Airtel, Havells, Onida, Coca-Cola and others still willing to ride high on cricket.

Despite an early dismissal of India in Champions Trophy, the broadcaster, which had bought the rights to the events for \$1.1 billion for all ICC properties between 2007 and 2015, sold its 10-second ad spots at an average of Rs 2.5 lakh. According to industry estimates, the broadcaster managed to rake in Rs 500 crore from the two events. "ICC Champions Trophy is a true test of cricketing excellence in one day internationals. The response from advertisers has been encouraging," says RC Venkateish, managing director, ESPN Star Sports.

Interestingly, advertisers stand by ESS despite the not-so-impressive viewership performance of the two events. "In case of the Champions Trophy 2009 the ratings tanked because of the Indian team's early exit. But if one goes match by match then all the India matches delivered high TRPs. The problem with Champions League T20 is that it's a new format and it's complicated," says Shashi Sinha, CEO, Lodestar Universal, a Mumbai-based media buying agency.

Big wins

Advertisers argue that cricket is a high risk, high return investment. While it is expensive to acquire and to be on, and if the Indian team, which generates maximum viewership, is dismissed early, the investments are rendered pointless. But if the Indian team performs well and is able to keep viewers glued to the tube, the returns on the investment are unbeatable. "We are in the business of reaching out to con-



Advertisers' response to the events has been quite encouraging.

RC Venkateish,
MD, ESPN Star Sports



The line up

EVENTS	DATE	CHANNEL
Indian Premier League (IPL)	Apr-May '09	SONY
ICC Twenty20 world cup	Jun '09	ESPN STAR Sports
India in West Indies ODI Series	Jun-Jul '9	Ten Sports
Compaq Cup (triserries)	Sep-09	Ten Sports
ICC Champions Trophy	Sep-Oct '09	ESPN STAR Sports
Twenty20 Champions League	Oct '09	ESPN STAR Sports
India v/s Australia ODI	Oct-Nov	Neo Sports
India v/s Sri Lanka ODI	Nov-Dec	Neo Sports
Ind-Sri Lanka-Bangladesh	Jan '10	Neo Sports
India-South Africa ODI	Feb-Mar '10	Neo Sports
Indian Premier League (IPL)	Mar-Apr	SONY

Source: TAM Media Research

sumers through popular media and cricket allows us to do that," says Pradeep Srivastava, chief marketing officer, Idea Cellular.

Idea Cellular hosted the Idea India-Sri Lanka series in 2008 and recently made a splash because of its association with two IPL teams—Mumbai Indians and Delhi Daredevils. Arguing that in the longer run, advertisers' interests are safe with cricket, Srivastava adds: "Cricket has traditionally delivered large audiences in the past. And like general entertainment shows cricket might have its highs and lows but it will always remain a popular medium."

Adds Sinha: "Cricket is one unique property that hasn't got impacted by the fragmentation of viewership on television. It still delivers mass eyeballs that cuts across all socio-economic groups, demographics, gen-



"Cricket is one unique property that hasn't got impacted by the fragmentation of viewership on television."

Shashi Sinha,
CEO, Lodestar Universal

ders and language." Media planners say going forward cricket will contribute at least 1000 gross rating points, or GRPs, in a month. GRPs are a sum total of viewership garnered by a programme on television over a period of time. That is significant given the monthly GRPs generated by top GECs range between 800 and 1,200.

The score

Enthused by the success of ESS in attracting top advertisers, Neo Sports that will air all upcoming matches excluding IPL is confident of its revenues will grow 100% this year. "We expect that India-Australia series will have good response from the audience. No other channel has ever had such packed series ever. Too much cricket will not wean away the audiences as the series is with different top teams of the world and each game is different," says Abhishek Verma, head marketing, Neo Sports Broadcast.

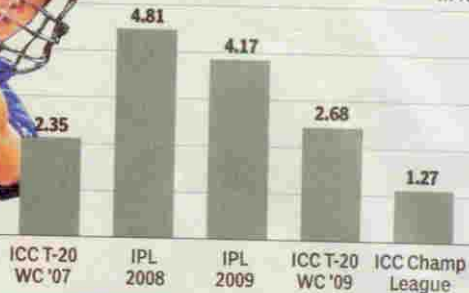
The channel has already inked bulk advertising deals with Tata DoCoMo, Hero Honda, and Hewlett-





Viewership pattern

In %



Source: TAM Media Research



Collage: SURINDER SINGH

Packard for all the upcoming series that will be held between October 2009 and March 2010. "Brands like two-wheelers and financial services will have the highest advertising spend during this time," says Neo's Verma.

Media planners say that ad rates for 2009-10 are unlikely to change. Basab Dutta Chowdhury, CEO of media buying agency Madison Media says: "The rates vary depending on the risk-taking factor and the nature of the tournament. An India-Australia series will have a different ad rate structure compared to a T20 series."

But overall, there seems a consensus among the broadcasters and the advertisers that oversupply of events notwithstanding, cricket will score well

for them in the near term.

BW