



# 25000 people, 1 beating heart

There is something, not quite sure what it is, but something special—maybe the ecstatic hullabaloo of the crowd, the shrieks following sixes and fours, or even just seeing the players upfront—about watching a game at the stadium. Maybe it's all of it.

I personally never thought much of stadiums. Until, of course, I went myself. What I felt, I'm not quite sure. What I do know is that it was a feeling like no other, a feeling I'll never forget. It is a feeling I sometimes crave for.

I remember the day quite clearly. It was during India's tour of Bangladesh. Like always, I kept my schedule free on the days of the games. I had asked my friends to come over during the game with some delectable munchies to enjoy the first match together, when one of them suggested going to the stadium for at least one game throughout the 3-match series.

"Nope. No way. Do you have any idea how hot it is? Do you have any idea how many people will be there? I hate crowds, you know that!" None of that worked, of course, and I was forced, lest I watch alone, to go and join them in their so called 'exciting' experience.

Throughout the ride to Sher-e-Bangla stadium, I was what one would call a 'negative Nelly'. Even until the last minute I tried to convince them to turn back. But there we were, at the entrance gate. I looked at the swarm of people and instantly turned around and started towards the car. Being pulled back and shoved into the crowd, I was literally pushed inside the gallery. I hated it already. And I was determined to hate it the whole time.

My friends dragged me to our seat and with my already squinted eyes under angry,

wrinkled brows I looked towards the vast field before me— 186m x 136m.

'Woah.' I thought. 'I can hardly guess how big it really is when I watch from home.

There must be a longer stretch of land between the wickets than I had assumed.'

The toss took place, the commentators spoke inaudibly and, trying to listen very hard over the shrieks of unknown people, I heard a portion of my brain say, 'I could have watched it so much better at home—too many screaming people!'

But then, the batsmen walk in one by one. And I instantly feel something fluttering in my stomach. 'Can't be a butterfly, I'm not that excited!' I thought.

The game took a while to start, and as it began the fluttering kept becoming more and more intense. The first Indian wicket fell and almost involuntarily, I stood on my toes, screamed, at the top of my lungs, my spine erect and hands in flung into the air, in absolute unison with 25,000 other people!

I've never shared a sentiment with so many other people before! But then we did share— one after the other, with every falling wicket. And throughout the next inning, every time a ball flew over the boundary for a six, or raced towards the dugout, we shared the exact same thrill.

Screams, shouts, slurs, cheers, Mexican waves, high-fives with strangers, shrieks of laughter with friends— I was a part of it all! It was the most exhilarating experience of watching cricket. It was like never before.

And it was all over too soon. Even a seven hour long game at the stadium seemed too short to be real.

I came back home panting and shaking with excitement, still in a daze— the images of the thronging crowd still floating afresh before my eyes. It was nothing short of surreal. 25,000 people, probably even more, with one single beating heart.

Since then, many times I have still tried convincing myself to watch in the comfort of my own house—lazy is as lazy does. There will be no pushing and shoving, I tell myself. I can see what's happening clearer from TV, I keep saying. I can barely even follow the ball from where I'll be seated! Pfft, I continue. But without a single argument, the other half of my heart always wins. The half that belongs to one of the empty seats at the stadium, where I know my breaths of excitement still linger.

**By Naziba Basher**

**Photo: Star Sports Archive**

