

DISSECTION OF A KILLER T20 OUTFIT

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With the advent of flashy tournaments such as the Big Bash or the IPL, cricket, the global sport, has started to attain a new dimension and there has been revolutionary changes as to how the game is being played in a rather short span of time.

So how to reflect on these franchise-based domestic T20 tournaments? Have they infected the spirit of the gentlemen's game with all the money that keeps flying around? Or the drastic modifications of gameplay, that are essential to be made, added new flare to the sport? Well, that's for orthodox critics like Geoffrey Boycott or Richard Hadlee to brood over – but here are some thoughts from an innocuous lover of the sport.

Let's now delve into the analysis as to what makes an invincible T20 side. From the very outset, there was an idea that your T20 success will be determined by how many all-rounders you have i.e., players who can bat as well as bowl. Yes, all-rounders are gems to have in the team. But will that strategy always take you home? Will including a bunch of underperforming all-rounders always win you a match? Perhaps, no.

Also there's the idea of including monster impact players in your dugout. Well, yes, Chris Gayle or Kieron Pollard or more miserably, Shahid Afridi can win you a match out of nowhere with their devastating hitting skills, but what's wrong with them is their inconsistency. They will score a T20 hundred one match and get dismissed in the single figures for maybe 5/6 matches to follow. Then flash again. And flop again. But does including these players will enable your side to win

matches consistently? Perhaps, no.

You need to have players who perform consistently. You need all-rounders, but not all eleven all-rounders. Only genuine batsmen and genuine bowlers can make substantial impact for a side to win consistently. You need players who don't just slog or scoop deliveries, but can play proper cricketing shots as well. You don't need batsmen who try to hit every ball out of the stadium, but who respect good deliveries and take singles or couples rather than giving away dot deliveries trying to hit a six. That's where players like Virat Kohli or Mahmudullah can be a better gamble than Gayle or Afridi.

You need pace bowlers who don't just bowl fast, but can bowl in good line and length just like other formats of the game. You have to be cunning not to get hit for 4s or 6s every other ball. Variations are the key. Bowl a slower cutter one ball, a yorker next and a bouncer the following ball. Mix up your deliveries. That's why Mustafizur Rahman has been such a success in this form of the game.

Yes, T20 cricket has changed the face of the game. Some call it "Picnic Cricket" for good reasons. But the thing is, you can't change the basic gameplay. Do your basics right, and add a flair of innovation and improvisation to it – and there's the recipe for a killer T20 outfit.

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WHY CRICKET COMMENTARY HAS TAKEN A PLUNGE

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Commentary is suffering these days because the commentators are bad. Most commentary panels these days are filled with ex-players, who despite having excellent on-field careers, still have a lot to prove when it comes to showing their mettle in the commentary box. What many would disagree with here would be the fact if commentary actually requires showing much mettle, isn't commentary simply the description of events taking place on field, designed to mask the silence that'd otherwise be very awkward? Well, no. Legendary Australian commentator, the late Richie Benaud explains, "The key thing was to learn the value of economy with words and to never insult the viewer by telling them what they can already see."

Cricket is not a game that's packed full of action every second of the way. Every time a six is hit, it takes a considerable amount of time to get the ball back in the bowler's hand who takes his time to start his run up. From a commentator's point

of view, these seconds need to be filled with words that provide insight into the game, and cricket sometimes require a lot of explaining. The mistake commentators make is to 'insult the viewer by telling them what they can already see,' instead of explaining the intricacies of the game that most viewers probably don't understand. The cricket seasons are long nowadays, and we see the same players in action over and over again. Listening to the commentators lose their marbles about a perfect Virat Kohli cover drive time and over again does get annoying, but it wouldn't if they took time to explain why it was perfect and what he does different.

While you can attribute repetitiveness and lack of analysis to lack of skills, one

thing supporters can't to tolerate is bias. This begs to ask the question: does this bias really exist or if it's just something the hardcore (and sensitive) fans are making up inside their head? It will never be possible to answer the question with complete confidence but the source of this suspicion can certainly be pointed out. Once again, if we look at a list of current commentators in cricket, almost all of them are ex-players with little or no journalistic experience. And that poses a problem when these players rely on pulling on their on-field experience from years back to provide insight on different teams now. Ramiz Raza doesn't know Bangladeshi cricket nearly as deeply as he knows Pakistani cricket, and because of his lack of journalistic experience, he has

to ramble on about Shahid Afridi's all-round capabilities in a Bangladesh vs India match which has at least one all-rounder many times better than him. Sanjay Manjrekar has no option but to talk about Ravindra Jadeja in a similar situation because he simply doesn't know enough. This problem extends to commentators of every nationality, and unless fair representation and/or a strong journalistic approach to commentary can be ensured, this can't be corrected.

Commentary is a difficult skill, the famous Christopher Martin-Jenkins knew that when he wrote to another legend of the art, Brian Johnston, as a schoolboy asking for advice on how to be a commentator. With the recent passing of Tony Cozier, who followed Tony Greig and Richie Benaud, cricket is fast losing all the famous voices behind the microphone, and struggling to replace them.

When he's not obsessing over football, Azmin Azran spends his time devising ways to avoid getting mugged, only to fail miserably. Give him advice at fb.com/azminazran

