

From spectators to participants

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If any ardent cricket follower afflicted with a bout of nostalgia ponders upon the history of Bangladesh cricket, he or she, without any hesitation still goes down the memory lane of what happened in Kuala Lumpur in March-April 1997: an event that laid the foundation for Bangladesh cricket to usher in a new era. The success in that tournament paved the way for the country to fulfil their long-cherished dream of playing in a World Cup. Since their

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baptism in the 1999 World Cup in England, Bangladesh's basket, while not being full of glory, was not totally devoid of success in cricket's biggest extravaganza.

But what if they want to reminisce about their involvement in the second biggest 50-over global event – the ICC Champions Trophy – ahead of their prominent presence in this year's competition in England and Wales?

Is there any memory from their previous appearances that can inspire the current bunch of Tigers?

They are few and far between. Bangladesh made their debut in



South Africa captain Hansi Cronje holds aloft the ICC Knockout World Cup trophy, which was presented by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, after beating the West Indies in the final at the then Dhaka Stadium on November 1, 1998.

2000 but failed to make it to the main tournament after losing to England in a preliminary quarterfinal. Across preliminary qualifiers and full tournament games, Bangladesh has played eight games and their only noteworthy success was to beat Zimbabwe in their most recent appearance in 2006. Then followed a long hibernation since the tournament was reduced to only the top eight teams in 2009; the tale of just making up the numbers was thus ended.

But when we look back at how

cricket has become a great commodity in the country, we cannot ignore the first edition of this tournament in Dhaka in 1998.

After the ICC Trophy success, there was a mission to show the cricket world that we have a passion for the game. The massive celebration after the ICC Trophy brought belief within the country's cricket fraternity. But everybody knew that without international colours the country's cricket would not move forward and as we were then not in a position to showcase our talent, it

was up to the organisers to showcase our potential as a future cricketing nation.

In this regard the first stepping-stone was to successfully organise the Silver Jubilee Independence Cup in 1997/98 involving India, Pakistan and hosts Bangladesh. Bangladesh failed to make a mark as a team but the spectators were seen, heard and drew the attention of the cricket world.

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To promote cricket in an Associate Nation, the International Cricket Council (ICC) had decided to launch the event, then named the ICC Knock Out Tournament and popularly known as Mini World Cup, and Bangladesh capitalised on the opportunities with both hands despite the country suffering its worst floods in living memory, inundating two-thirds of the country for an unprecedented eleven weeks.

The madness toward the game had started to build but instead of just being happy with the tag of good hosts, they needed to establish their claim as a team, they needed their own stars and thus their own market to flourish. Gradually quality players entered the team and much has happened and been achieved since Bangladesh played their last Champions Trophy in 2006.

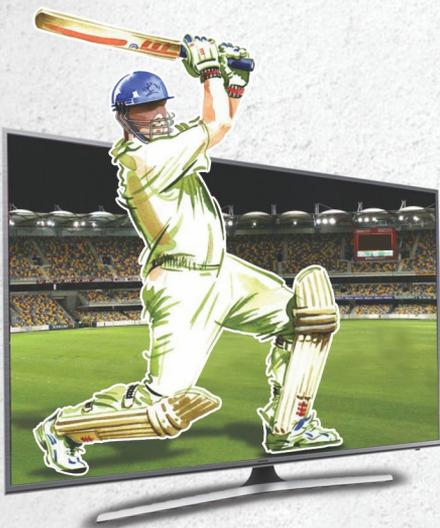
The fans now have their own heroes like Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad – affectionately called the super five – apart from some new stars like Mustafizur Rahman and Mehedi Hasan who have paved the way to a welcome return to the ICC Champions Trophy after an absence of more than 10 years.

It took time but now they are no longer the whipping boys of the international stage as they earned the right to play the 2017 event by ranking among the top eight ODI teams of the world. They will take the field as the sixth-ranked side, above both Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

So the story of Bangladesh in the 2017 Champions Trophy is of a team that has become a true force in world cricket; not one that is just making up the numbers.

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