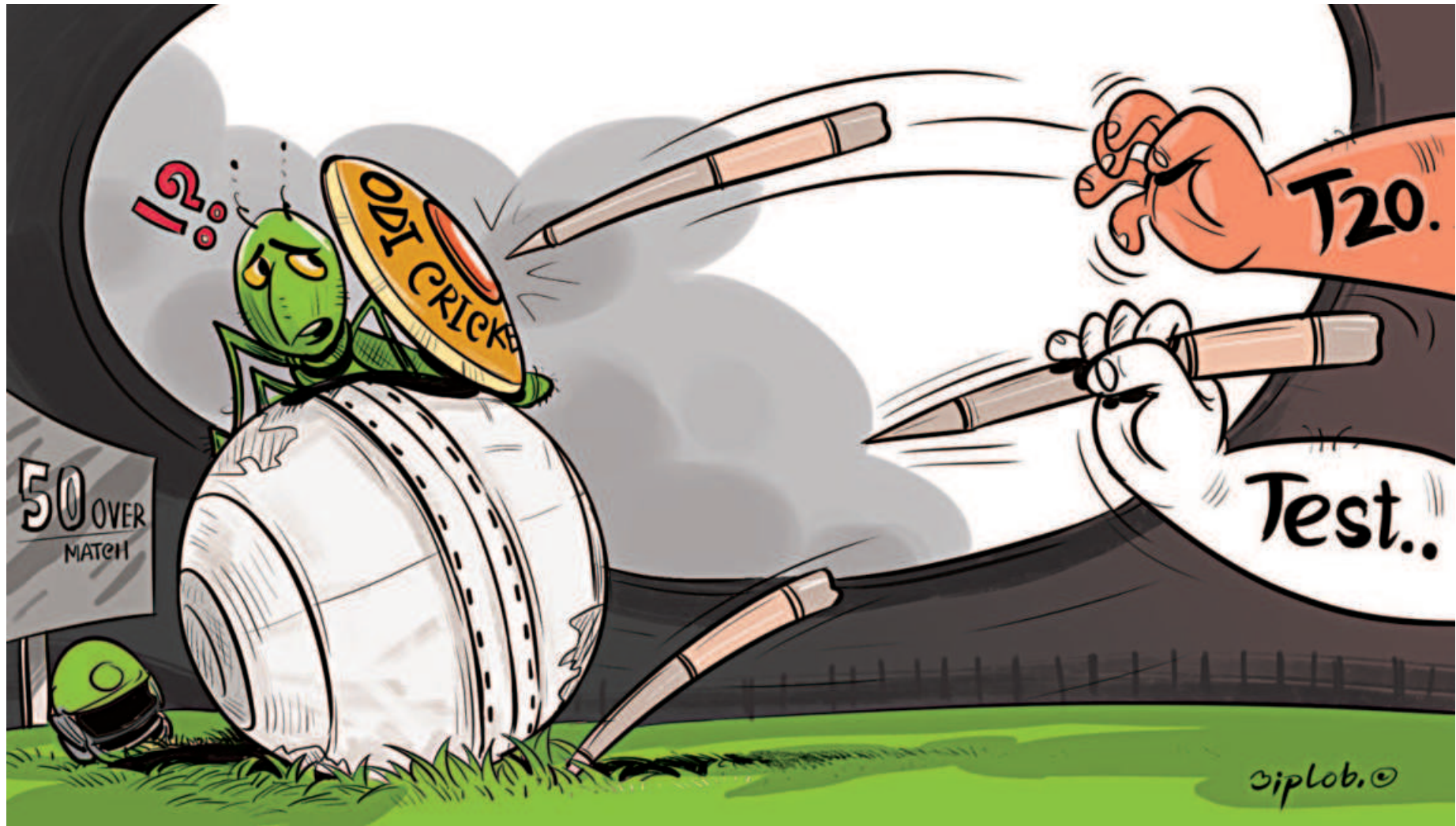


Players are doing it [playing ODIs] just for the sake of doing it. After the first 10 overs, it's just 'OK, just go a run-a-ball, get a boundary, four fielders in and you get to 200, 220 in 40 overs' and then have a go in last 10 overs. Another 100. It's kind of run-of-the-mill

Pakistan pace bowling legend Wasim Akram regarding the ODI format.



ODI format faces the ultimate challenge

In fact, the first-ever ODI game actually started off as a Test match between Australia and England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in January 1971. With rain withholding play for three days, the two sides came in agreement to play a 40-overs-a-side game, with eight balls an over, thus commencing the journey of ODIs. From there on, the ODI format went through further changes over the years, the most radical of all facilitated by Australian media tycoon Kerry Packer as the concept of coloured clothes, white balls, floodlights, and dark sight screens were incorporated into the format only after being inspired by Packer's World Series of Cricket, a tournament that only ran for 17 months but ended up revolutionising the game forever.

NABID YEASIN

If anything is constant in this modern era, it is the need for continuous adjustments to fit the ever-changing landscape of the sport. Of late, a discernible urge for change in the cricketing world could be sensed with the 50-over format of the game set to take the brunt of the transformation.

When England's Ben Stokes, one of the finest all-rounders of the game, shockingly announced his retirement from ODIs last month, citing that it is 'unsustainable' to play all three formats and manage the workload through an already crammed up cricketing calendar, a serious debate over the existence of ODI cricket came to the forefront.

Legendary pacer Wasim Akram was the first to react, and his opinion regarding the matter has been the most blatant of all. Coming from the second-highest leading wicket-taker of all time in ODIs that the format has become a 'run-of-the-mill' and needs to be 'scrapped permanently', the possibility of the 50-over format heading towards an existential crisis had gathered serious momentum.

But, of the three recognised formats of the game -- Tests, T20Is and ODIs -- why is ODI being targeted to make room for the two other formats? The answer could be found when the commercial benefits for players, the prime stakeholders of the game, are taken into consideration.

While the undeniable role of Test cricket in recognising the potential of a cricketer had experts hold the format in high regard for decades, the commercial benefit for players and every other stakeholder involved is mostly being catered by T20Is, more specifically, the franchise-based T20 leagues around the globe. And in that regard, it is indisputable that T20Is have been the most lucrative of

four wins from 13 games in the ODI Super League table, the decision heavily risked their team's qualification for the upcoming 2023 ODI World Cup in India. However, CSA's decision only implies the charm of ODI cricket is not where it once used to be.

Given the short span of time in which the athletes are able to yield maximum earnings in their career, it is understandable that financial gains will be the driving force in their decision-making process. In this case, the latest example is that of David Warner's. Warner, in fact, finds himself in a position of power with Cricket Australia (CA) reportedly lining up a lucrative contract worth over \$500,000 to persuade him to play the Big Bash League (BBL) after the star opener opted for IPL-backed UAE league instead of BBL.

Looking back in time, ODI cricket, as we know it today, actually came into being as the sport's governing body realised the need for a revolution in the game in order to reach a wider array of fans.

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Hence, from playing the first Men's ODI



all formats, given the endorsements, media involvement and money involved.

The power of commercial benefits to make significant alterations in the game's blueprint in time could be gauged from Cricket South Africa's (CSA) decision to drop out from the three-match bilateral ODI series in Australia, scheduled for next January, in order to ensure full participation of their key cricketers for their inaugural T20 franchise league, also scheduled to kick-off at the start of 2023.

With South Africa lingering at 11 with just

World Cup in 1975, in plain whites and with games constituting 60-overs-a-side, to playing 50-over formats in bilateral series and World Cups in the modern era -- even the ODI format went through significant changes to become one of the most played formats since its inception but it seems to have become the victim of its own success.

Even though the International Cricket Council (ICC) has played down the threat to ODIs despite the increasing pressure from all quarters, there is no denying that the

THEIR TAKES ON ODI CRICKET

This [ODI] is one format that everybody loves watching. If you look at the biggest events [in sports], T20 World Cup is not one of the biggest events; it's the ODI World Cup which is one of the biggest events.

Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal said

As for the ODIs, it is still exciting as long as they are scoring runs. Interesting to see the future of ODIs] and see where it goes. They have got to keep making it [ODIs] exciting. They have got a few challenges

Australian fast bowling great Glenn McGrath said in 2022.

As I had suggested, the format needs a tweak of two innings of 25 overs per side with a 15-minute break between each innings [a total of four innings between two teams]. The number of innovations that can be brought in are huge

India's legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar suggested back in 2019.

‘Franchise-based leagues are hurting the ODI format’

MAZHAR UDDIN

The sustainability of ODI cricket has been questioned after a number of legends of the game termed the format obsolete in the modern era. Considering the excessive workload that comes with having to play all three formats and with the growing demand for franchise T20 leagues across the world, many international stars have started to quit ODI cricket to give more emphasis on the two other formats. The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin caught up with the Tigers' former captain Mohammad Ashraful to discuss the pros and cons of the 50-over format and how it can affect Bangladesh cricket during an exclusive interview. The excerpts of the interview are given below:

The Daily Star (DS): How important do you think ODI cricket is in modern-day cricket?

Mohammad Ashraful (MA): Nowadays, I feel that the introduction of T20 cricket has made the ODI format lose its charm. People do not enjoy it as much as they used to in the past. As there are a number of franchise-based T20 leagues, and now we have T10 leagues as well, it's becoming really difficult for the ODI format.

Meanwhile, even the Test format also seems to be providing a lot of entertainment to the fans after the way Australia, England, India, New Zealand and other teams have been playing in the format lately. England and Australia have always given top priority to Test cricket. But I feel that since the introduction of T20 cricket, people have lost their patience to sit through an entire 50-over game as they get bored at one point.

DS: Do you think, in order to survive and maintain its popularity, ODI cricket needs a revamp?

MA: I think, in order to survive, it will be important to reduce the franchise-based leagues across the world. Fans' interest in international cricket has decreased mainly due to the matches in the franchise-based T20 leagues which do not take much time to finish. But I feel that the big tournaments, like the 50-over World Cup, will always be popular. But when it comes to bilateral series, things have changed. Unlike in the past, people do not wait eagerly for such series anymore as an overwhelming number of matches take place throughout the year.

DS: Pakistan's legendary pacer Wasim Akram stated that the ODI format has become a drag. England's Ben Stokes also retired from the format in order to manage the workload. What's your take on this?

MA: If we notice, recently England sent a separate ODI team to Ireland while their other team was playing a Test series against New Zealand. Yes, they can afford to have two different teams much like India or Australia. Considering the tight schedule, not every player is able to play all the formats. And I agree with what Wasim Akram said. I think nowadays, a cricketer thinks about quitting international cricket and playing franchise leagues as a player's career is short and there is a need to secure the future. Take the case of Kumar Sangakkara, who retired from international cricket in 2015 and went on to play franchise leagues for another two-three years. However, many felt that he could have easily continued international cricket for another couple of years. So, I really don't know how it can be changed but I feel that the franchise leagues are hampering international cricket.

DS: With a threat looming over ODI cricket's existence, do you think it's high time Bangladesh restructured their domestic circuit in order to have better T20I and Test outfits?

MA: We [Bangladesh] are yet to play consistent cricket in Tests, despite being handed Test status 22 years ago, and in T20Is. We play well in ODIs because we have a strong domestic Dhaka Premier League 50-over competition, which is very competitive and even foreign players find it hard to perform in this league. But we don't get to play enough T20 matches. In the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), the domestic T20 tournament that we have, a number of local players don't even get a chance to play. Also, not many quality foreign players have come to play the BPL in the last two editions. After the first few seasons, in which a number of top-rated foreign players came to play in the BPL, we were unable to maintain the standard of the tournament.

If I talk about the longest format, I have been playing four-day cricket for the last four to five years and things started to improve. But maybe our cricket calendar still needs a revamp. If we can make a calendar with dates earmarked for different tournaments, it would help us prepare and adjust accordingly. We also tend to rely on the national players when it comes to their participation in the domestic leagues as we don't know which league is going to start when. The reason why our standard of cricket is not improving is that we tend to think only about the national team and not the clubs and domestic structure as nobody is interested in the players outside the national team. At times, I feel very lucky to be able to play cricket in Bangladesh despite all the limitations.