



Cricket is steadily gaining popularity in USA. The ICC is eager to tap into this potential market. Golam Nowsher Prince, Suhrawardi Shuvo, and Aftab Ahmed, three former Bangladeshi cricketers who are now engaged in USA cricket in various roles, shared their experiences with Ramin Talukdar of The Daily Star.

Road to realising ICC's AMERICAN DREAM

STAR SPORTS DESK

It is no surprise that the West Indies will co-host the T20 World Cup 2024, given the Islanders' rich legacy in the sport. But what really adds spice to this ninth edition of the event is that the United States of America (USA) has emerged as the tournament's co-hosts. It is the first time the USA, an associate member in cricket, will organise a major cricket tournament.

When the USA was selected as one of the hosts, there had been sceptics who questioned the International Cricket Council's (ICC) decision, while most viewed it as a masterstroke from the game's governing body in its attempt to tap into the world's wealthiest sports market.

USA has prepared to stage 16 matches, including the highly anticipated India-Pakistan encounter on June 9 at the brand-new 34,000-seat Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in Long Island, New York.

ICC, for its part, is investing big in the sport's future in the USA, particularly the New York region, home to several hundred thousand people with links to cricket-playing countries, notably India and Pakistan.

It's no wonder that the India-Pakistan showdown is already sold out, with each ticket now topping USD 1,000 online.

But once the stadium is dismantled in July, local cricket will likely return to its struggling state. Despite having around 10,000 players, the sport has

Yankees slugger Aaron Judge pick up a bat than Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, or Jos Buttler.

"This is the start of a journey," International Cricket Council (ICC) CEO Geoff Allardice told Reuters. "The awareness that we're bringing in more elite cricket to the USA is

the T20 format for the first time. And therefore, a well-organised 20-team jamboree might help cricket acquire traction in a sporting scene dominated by baseball, basketball, ice hockey, and American football.

The centuries-old English game has a devoted



no dedicated stadium in New York, which will stage World Cup matches alongside Dallas and Florida.

Cricket boasts billions of fans worldwide, but few in the lucrative North American market, where fans are more likely to see New York

something that's been a strategic priority for us."

There had been a lot of buzz surrounding the launch of Major League Cricket in the United States last year, and the fact that 2028 Los Angeles Olympics will feature

following all around the world, but the USA, which has long preferred American football, basketball, and baseball as its national pastime, has been a stubborn holdout. But the scenario may transform when the USA has its moment in the cricketing

"Cricket is no longer an unknown game in America. It's gaining popularity, with many boys and girls playing, especially on weekends. There are major and minor leagues here, totalling around 400. Yes, in a country dominated by baseball and basketball, cricket is finding its footing. Immigrants, mostly Indians, are the main architect behind this success. Apart from India, there are players from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal." Former Bangladesh pace bowler **Golam Nowsher Prince**

"America has started a school cricket tournament similar to our popular Nirman School Cricket Tournament. I believe this will greatly enhance the game's popularity. I expect full galleries during the matches." Former Bangladesh left-arm spinner **Sohrawardi Shuvo**

"Just let the game be included in the Olympics, and you'll see a huge impact. When

explaining cricket to authorities, their first question is if it's an Olympic sport. Inclusion would change the game's dynamics here." Former Bangladesh batter **Aftab Ahmed**

From fringes to big dance

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

It took 28 years, but Frank Nsubaga has finally made it to the big stage.

Nsubaga, an all-rounder of Uganda's T20 World Cup team, has been around for a while. He first ventured into international cricket in 1997 for a team called East and Central Africa, a side that represented Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

His first tournament in international cricket was the 1997 ICC Trophy in Kuala Lumpur, the tournament that launched Bangladesh's ascendancy to full membership.

Nsubaga, who was just 16 at the time, played two of the four group-stage matches, all of which ended in defeat for the African side.

That was his first heartbreak in international cricket, the first of many failures in pursuit of a chance to compete in the World Cup.

That team has long disappeared from the face of cricket, but Nsubaga is still here. He resumed his international career for Uganda in 2004 and has been a part of the side for two decades now.

Nsubaga was seemingly destined to join the rank of cricketers who toiled away at the backwaters of cricket for decades, gave their life to the game but never got their moment in the sun.

But then a miracle happened. Well, calling it a miracle may be a

stretch, but it certainly was an upset.

Uganda stunned Zimbabwe in the Africa qualifiers, a result no one saw coming, and claimed a spot in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024.

Nsubaga and the spirited Uganda side will compete in their first major ICC event in the forthcoming T20 World Cup, a tournament where for the first time nine associate nations will be on display.

ICC's decision to make the T20 World Cup a 20-team affair opened up more slots for teams like Uganda and players like Nsubaga to experience the high of competing in a World Cup.

Papua New Guinea captain Assad Vala is another such example. A top-order batter, who has been around since 2005, had led his team to their maiden T20 World Cup in 2021.

But in that edition, they were slotted in the first round, an unofficial qualifying phase where associates competed against lower-ranked full members and only the top two teams of each group made it to the second round, where the big boys had automatically qualified.

The ICC has done away with that tournament structure, as in this edition the associates and full members will begin their campaigns from the first round, meaning Vala and his team will finally get to compete in the actual World Cup.

The stories of Nsubaga and Vala are of homegrown players who have worked for decades for

an opportunity to represent their country in a World Cup.

But in the world of associate cricket, almost all teams have players from other countries and in many teams, they even outnumber the homegrown cricketers.

Alpesh Ramjani, Nsubaga's teammate, is one such player. Born in Mumbai, Ramjani played for age-



level teams in Mumbai but had given up on his cricket dream, taken up a job, and was playing corporate cricket on the side.

But after losing his job during the Covid-19 pandemic, he moved to Uganda for employment and tried out for the national team, hoping to restart his cricketing journey in a different country.

