sun in co-hosting the World Cup.

ICC chief executive Geoff Allardice

said: "The USA is a strategically

important market and these venues

give us an excellent opportunity

to make a statement in the world's

Jamaican track hero Usain Bolt as an

ambassador, is a dream come true for

the USA immigrants, who comprise

much of the sport's USA fan base

and are more used to watching the

action on television than in their own

World Cup when football was much

less popular than baseball, American

football, and basketball. And yet, 3.5

million fans watched the matches

USA Cricket had expressed interest

in hosting the T20 World Cup during

the ICC cycle beginning in 2023,

citing the presence of a sizable

South Asian diaspora, which could

ensure crowded stadiums around the

how the marquee event affects USA,

an impact that could go on to stretch

the landscape of the sport to an even

Everyone is now waiting to see

In 1994, the USA hosted the FIFA

The tournament, which counts

biggest sport market."

from the stands.

wider panorama.



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

ARICAN 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 34,000seat Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in Long Island, New

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

out, with each ticket now topping or Jos Buttler. USD 1,000 online.

in July, local cricket will likely return CEO Geoff Allardice told Reuters. to its struggling state. Despite having around 10,000 players, the sport has in more elite cricket to the USA is

STATEN ISLAND CRICKET CLUB

HOME OF CRICKET IN STATEN ISLAND

It's no wonder that the India- Yankees slugger Aaron Judge pick up Pakistan showdown is already sold a bat than Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli,

"This is the start of a journey," But once the stadium is dismantled International Cricket Council (ICC) "The awareness that we're bringing

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

The centuries-old English game devoted



no dedicated stadium in New York, something that's been a strategic which will stage World Cup matches priority for us." alongside Dallas and Florida.

There had been a lot of buzz Cricket boasts billions of fans surrounding the launch of Major worldwide, but few in the lucrative League Cricket in the United States North American market, where last year, and the fact that 2028 countries, notably India and Pakistan. fans are more likely to see New York 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

many boys and girls playing, éspecially 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,

"Cricket is no longer

an unknown game in

America. It's gaining

popularity, with

Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal." Former Bangladesh pace bowler **Golam Nowsher**

"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 Sohrawordi 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.

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

Nsubaga, who was just 16 at the time, played two of the four groupstage 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.

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 toporder 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 lowerranked 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 Well, calling it a miracle may be a who have worked for decades for

stretch, but it certainly was an upset. 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.

In less than three years, from just another player in the Mumbai circuit, Ramjani has now become a star all-rounder at the associate level, even making it to ICC's T20 Team of the Year for 2023.

Then there are players like ex-New Zealand international Corey Anderson and former South Africa cricketer David Wiese, who now play for USA and Namibia respectively.

Both Anderson and Wiese are past their prime but with a move to the associate level they have extended their international careers and have an opportunity to make a difference in sides that are in pursuit of joining the league of the full members.

From a neutral fan's perspective, the inclusion of nine associates in a World Cup may seem like an overkill, as it increases the odds of seeing dead rubbers.

The associates can spring up surprises in the tournament, as they have done in past editions, but that doesn't change the fact that they are here more to make up the numbers than to compete for the trophy.

But before writing these teams off as unnecessary inclusions, spare a thought for the individuals making up the sides, some of whom have spent decades for this opportunity while others have moved to a different country for a second chance, and applaud from the sidelines as they fulfil their World Cup dreams.