

Book Review: De-Mystifying Indian Cricket's Myths

By Harpal Singh Bedi
Special to News India Times

MYTH-BUSTING: Indian Cricket Behind the Headlines
Author: Gulu Ezekiel, Price: Rs. 295, Rupa Publications

There is a myth that cricket in India gained popularity after it won the 1983 World Cup as the victory was directly beamed to the drawing rooms of millions of people back home and they felt elated and proud watching Kapil Dev and his men lording at Lords, venue of many humiliating defeats of their predecessors.

This is not correct. Cricket has been an immensely popular sport in the Sub-continent since the 1930s mostly patronized by the Rajas and Nawabs and to some extent by the Britishers.

After Independence Hockey was declared the National game and it did bring laurels to the country winning three Olympic Golds (1948, 1952, 1956) but surprisingly Cricket held its own among the masses despite the team's dismal and often pathetic showing.

It was indeed ironic to see more books and write ups on Indian cricket players and the team after every disastrous performance while very few if any books at that time came out glorifying Hockey or Football. We have books on and about the former cricketers who wrote about their exploits on the domestic circuit and talked emotionally about the defeats they suffered at the international level.

Intriguingly every defeat against West Indies, England, Australia, and even Pakistan brought more crowds to the stadiums. Instead of thinning the support base, the craze for cricket kept expanding.

Every defeat was laced with some myths and few and far victories in that era became a sort of folklore.

"Cricket around the World is built on myths and Indian cricket is no different. These myths have been repeated ad nauseam over the years till they have come to be accepted as fact," opines Gulu Ezekiel.

To demolish these myths and de-glamourize some of the cricketing folklore, Gulu Ezekiel set out on a tough, unpopular and arduous journey. And the result is a 232- page book- MYTH-BUSTING Indian Cricket Behind The Headlines.

Gulu is a veteran sports journalist but he LIVES cricket. This is his 14th book and

the second that this writer is reviewing.

Reviewing a book written by a friend is a very tough job and on top of that, if it is specifically related to cricket. Because 90 percent, the chances are that the writer and reviewer know each other.

I know Gulu for over two decades and having lavishly praised his previous co-authored book – Speed Merchant, I was apprehensive about this one. But a foreword written by Anil Kumble made the job easier.

Kumble sums up the book nicely.

"Gulu's attempt to demystify some of these myths of Indian cricket is unique and commendable. His desire to sift fact from fiction and the painstaking research that has clearly gone into the process is evident. Underneath the facts, stories, and anecdotes, lies the desire to get rid of some of these existing myths and rumours, in order to purify this beautiful game," Kumble says.

Myth Busting has several startling facts which so far have been camouflaged and one of them is about Ranji

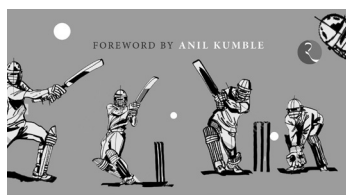
Ranji Trophy is now a part of Indian cricket's folklore. The hallowed tournament named after Shri Sir Ranjitsinhji Vibhaji, Maharaja Jamsahab of Nawanagar aka Ranji has showcased domestic talent which took the sport in the country to its pinnacle.

In the chapter "Ranji. the legend and the myth" the author quotes the first Secretary of Board of Cricket Control India, BCCI, Anthony de Mello who said, "Ranji did absolutely nothing for Indian Sports and Sportsmen."

According to de Mello, "We approached Ranji with a request that Duleep (Sinhji) be encouraged to bring his cricket talents to the aid of India. To all our requests for aid, encouragement and advice, Ranji, gave but one answer: Duleep and I are English cricketers."

To this Gulu writes 'India's embracing of the legend and the man, even though he played his major cricket in England and had a hardened disdain for all things connected to Indian cricket, is not unique'

There are several myths that have been



Book jacket of 'MYTH-BUSTING: Indian Cricket Behind The Headlines, by author Gulu Ezekiel.

accepted because they are harmless and amusing. One of them being an imaginary quote attributed to Australian captain "mate you have just dropped the world cup" after his rival dropped a catch in that tournament.

In India Salim Durani, the handsome all-rounder was nicknamed the Sixer Man who hit a Six whenever the crowd demanded or asked for it. This myth has been punctured by Gulu pointing out that though the tall Pathan was a rare talent, he hit only 15 Sixes in 50 innings.

Most of the cricket fans lament that because of a strike on BBC they could not watch Kapil Dev's historic 175 against Zimbabwe in the 1983 World Cup.

Gulu effectively demolishes this myth proving that two other matches on that day involving England/Pakistan and Australia/West Indies had live telecast. If there was a strike how come these two matches were shown is the question.

The author has an answer because India/Zimbabwe match was not a priority event for the BBC and both the teams were considered rank outsiders. After India's stunning performance this canard of the strike was spread which became a myth and was later accepted as a fact.

There is a detailed chapter on the 'Tied' test titled "Chepauk's Many Myths."

It is about the test match between India and Australia in 1986 played in then Madras.

The author details the test proceedings with quotes from the players, media persons, and umpires which are contradictory. He comes to the conclusion the tied test was after all, not that tied. But as it has been officially recognized as tied test number two he ends it with a quote from opener K. Srikkanth– "Hay guys, forget the win, we have become part of history."

Gulu also challenges another myth, viz., that Bishan Singh Bedi virtually surrendered the Test against West Indies by declaring when the team lost five wickets for 97 at Sabina Park Jamaica. He shows that there was nothing the skipper could

do as the other five players were injured and unfit to bat and the story that the Indian captain declared in protest is false.

The book is full of reality checks. It also contradicts Farokh Engineer's assertion that he scored the fastest test century from just 47 balls. The dashing wicket-keeper batsman has also claimed that he hit three boundaries off the first three balls he faced on his debut but that claim has also been proven wrong.

"Engineer is not the first and certainly not the last among many Famous sportspersons to embellish his own deeds with colorful stories which have entered cricket folklore and are accepted as gospel truth" (Page 198), Gulu notes.

The book also covers Engineer's sullen reaction after Abid Ali hit the winning run in that historic Oval test in 1971. The Wicketkeeper was on the other end on 28. He had scored 59 in the first innings. Engineer said at that time, 'Abid rushed out, got a top edge, and voila, we were home and Abid was a hero, never mind how he got the run.'

Except that it was not a top edge, it was a square cut to the boundary and the video footage is freely available (page 206).

There are several other intriguing myths perpetuated for decades like "Mankading" which have been de-mystified by Gulu. The book also vividly recalls Indian cricket's Grand Slam moments from June 1983 to March 1985. It details Kapil Dev's era Before and After. The younger generation's aggressiveness epitomized by Virat Kohli etc.

As Anil Kumble writes "The true hero of this book is Gulu," and he is absolutely correct.

Myth -Busting is not any other cricket book. It is a well-documented thesis which is very absorbing, funny, sometimes hilarious, and as its jacket proclaims it is a cricket connoisseur's delight.

To sum it up MYTH-BUSTING is simply unputdownable.



(PHOTO: FACEBOOK @HARPAL.S.BEDI)

Harpal Singh Bedi is a veteran sports journalist and former Sports Editor at United News of India. He has covered 8 Olympics, 9 Asian Games and several other national and international sports events.

Cricket-India Recall Ashwin For T20 World Cup, Dhoni Named Mentor

By AMLAN CHAKRABORTY

-NEW DELHI

India picked off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin in their 15-man squad for this year's Twenty20 World Cup and named Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who led them to the 2007 title, as the team mentor on Wednesday.

Ashwin last played a Twenty20 International four years ago but was one of three specialist slow bowlers selected, along with leg-spinner Rahul Chahar and mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthi.

The tournament, which begins next month, was scheduled to be held in India but the COVID-19 situation in the country forced organisers to shift it to the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

"The wickets in the UAE are usually low and slow and you need an off-spinner in your side," chief selector Chetan Sharma told a virtual news conference.

"Ashwin has been doing consistently well in the Indian Premier League over the years. Washington Sundar could have been another option but he remains injured."

Wrist-spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and Kuldeep Yadav were omitted and opener Shikhar Dhawan was also left out.

Rohit Sharma and KL Rahul are likely to open for India while Ishan Kishan, who can also keep wicket, was picked as a third option.

"Ishan Kishan can open the innings and he can fit in the middle order as well," Chetan Sharma said. "He gives us lot of options."

Captain Virat Kohli has been toying with the idea of

opening the innings and Sharma said the team management would take a final call on this.

India named three all-rounders in the squad — Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel.

Suryakumar Yadav was picked ahead of fellow Mumbai player Shreyas Iyer, who is returning from a shoulder injury and has been named as one of three reserves.

Inaugural champions India begin their bid for a second title in a Super 12 match in Dubai against arch-rivals Pakistan on Oct. 24.

Squad: Virat Kohli (captain), Rohit Sharma, KL Rahul, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant (wicketkeeper), Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Rahul Chahar, Ravichandran Ashwin, Axar Patel, Varun Chakravarthi, Jasprit Bumrah, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammed Shami.

-REUTERS