

Indian journalists Siddharth Saxena and Rahul Sivasankar told that their country's lowly sports budget is currently being spent on arms



THE AFTERMATH OF A SCANDAL

»Sport is not in good shape in India,« says Siddharth Saxena of the Hindustan Times. »It receives only a very small part of the national budget, and currently, even this money is now being spent on arms. But still, there are two sports that are extremely popular in India - cricket and football.«

»But many people - both children and adults - have given up playing cricket because it is becoming so difficult to arrange a game,« adds Saxena's fellow Play the Game attendee, Rahul Sivasankar of the Times of India. »Many sponsors have withdrawn from the sport.«

Last year, India witnessed one of the biggest ever scandals in the long history of its national sport. Cases of players "providing information to bookmakers" - in other words, attempting to throw matches or individual innings' for cash - led to four top players being banned for life. Accusations have also been levelled at the self-appointed national cricket authorities, who have allegedly entered into an "under the table" deal with TV companies.

The two journalists express fears for the future of local sport if Indian TV becomes dominated by global media giants. »We need new laws,« continues Sivasankar. »I'm afraid that the international TV stations are on their way into India - and they only rate a few sports worthy of coverage. Therefore, the local, more Indian sports will become more and more marginalised.«

In India, he adds, very few sports facilities exist, and the concept of "sport for all" is often nothing more than a lofty ideal. »Nothing is well-organised here,« he says. »But you must remember, we are talking about a country of one billion inhabitants.« He points to the fact that women are taking more of an interest in sport and that more of the big athletics stars are female, as positive developments. »This may sound a little crazy, but in India, the beauty-ideal for many women is to be as light-skinned as possible,« he says. »Many women believe that the darker you are, the more difficult it is to find a husband. Therefore they stay indoors and avoid the sun. Many families simply do not allow their girls to enjoy sport out in the sunshine. This is proving to be an obstacle to the progress we are making. On the other hand, luckily, there are many women who have an independent profession. Attitudes are changing.«

Virtual riches on

By Karen Balling Radmer

Large sums of money are waiting to be made from Internet sport. Sports clubs and associations are aware of this - but they have not yet discovered how to effectively tap into the riches on offer. Until they do, the British Broadcasting Company is developing a public service Internet site devoted to sport, with the stated objective of delivering clear, objective information to its visitors.

Called BBC Sport Online, the commercial-free site was launched in July last year and achieved almost immediate success, logging up to three million visitors each day. The site is notable for offering a wealth of information and news on a large number of sporting topics. If, for example, the user wishes to view news of the latest golf tournament, BBC Sport Online will provide the background and statistics, breakdowns of each hole, information on the best method of approaching the course, features and video clips - all available free of charge.

Although a countless number of commercial sports websites already exist, BBC Sport Online is attempting to take the concept a stage further. The British media giant already has access to thousands of video clips, a worldwide network of journalists and vast archives. Its ambitious plan is to pool all these resources to become a new independent online medium offering an enormous amount of information on sport across the world.

Up to now, thanks to its wealth of independent material, BBC Sport Online has avoided entering negotiations with the world's various sports governing bodies over broadcast rights.

Loss of Independence

Speaking to the Play the Game conference, BBC Sport Online Director Pete Clifton said he was aware that sports clubs have not yet discovered how to make best use of the Internet - but they know that they could be looking at a



the Internet

Pete Clifton, BBC: »The Internet is set to provide a fresh source of income for sports clubs. However, the loser could be journalism itself. Well-written, objective sports articles could become very hard to find«

goldmine. Even the International Olympic Committee is now beginning to use the Internet as a serious commercial tool, and is monitoring its rivals closely.

During last summer's Sydney Olympics, he said, BBC Sport Online naturally wanted to provide the best coverage possible. However, the rights to stage the games had been bought exclusively by TV companies, which meant that journalists representing Internet-based media were not even allowed access to the stadium area. Despite the fact that BBC TV was one of the accredited TV stations and a major sponsor of the games, its online arm was restricted to showing pictures from outside the official stadium area. The IOC went to a lot of trouble to ensure that their conditions were strictly enforced.

»The IOC had a group of lawyers in England who, while the Olympic Games were taking place, sat and surfed the Internet,« explains Pete Clifton. »At one point I received a call in the middle of the night, where I was asked to provide evidence that one of the clips we showed was not filmed inside the stadium area. At the same time, enormous pressure was put on the BBC outside broadcast team in Sydney. They were told that we would be denied future accreditation if they stepped out of line.«

He is sure that in the future, the sports world will be able to find a viable solution that will allow information to be displayed online. At the same time, however, he cannot guarantee that BBC Sport Online will remain free of advertising. The fact that it is such a popular site means that it will find it more and more difficult to resist commercial overtures. If this occurs, he said, it could mean the end of the BBC's independent online sports coverage. ♦

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Sponsor with a heart

Like most of its competitors, beer producer Carlsberg is happy to sponsor selected sports clubs, organisations and events. However, the company is concerned about recent developments in sport. Are those clamouring for sponsorship only interested in money? Are the general interests of sport losing out?

For moral reasons, Carlsberg stays well away from associating itself with a number of activities such as children's sport. Carlsberg's Director of Sponsorship Keld Strudahl told assembled delegates at Play the Game that the company would not like to give the impression that it is trying to sell its product to anyone under age.

»But the sports organisations do not seem to share these concerns,« he said. »I get telephone calls almost every day enquiring if Carlsberg would be interested in sponsoring young people's events.«

Companies like Carlsberg choose to sponsor sporting events because they see sport as entertainment, a lifestyle, and - not least - a method of transcending cultural boundaries, he continued. However, according to Strudahl, the task of finding the right clubs or events to sponsor is becoming harder. This is because sports clubs and bodies are increasingly focusing on sponsors' money

as a major source of commercial income, while at the same time are neglecting the sporting ideals with which the sponsors would like to associate their product.

As a representative of a major sponsor, Strudahl was asked if he and his colleagues are putting too much pressure on the organisations they sponsor by demanding more and more events to increase their public exposure.

»It is not us that wants this,« he answered. »It is the sports associations that are putting the pressure on.« He added that he hopes to get clubs and associations to understand that they should focus less on money and more on the sport itself - values that he claims his company identifies with. Otherwise, the commercial possibilities presented by sport will become much less attractive to his company at least.

Finally, Keld Strudahl issued a stark warning about the attitude of sponsors in the future. He referred to a court case in France in which a number of sponsors got together to sue the Tour de France's teams and individual riders. The sponsors are demanding compensation for the fact that their names are now, they claim, inextricably linked with the doping scandals that recently affected the world's biggest cycling event. ♦

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