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Indian Premier League

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The initiation of the Indian Premier League has been the biggest revolution that cricket has seen in many years, some in fact are stating that it's the biggest thing seen in cricket circles since Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket hit the cricket scene in the 1970's. To be involved with such an historic event in cricket history was over whelming, fulfilling, but at the same time challenging.

Upon arriving in Hyderabad to take up a nine week contract with the Deccan Chargers there were some challenges that needed to be encountered that was mostly revolving around coming to terms and adapting to the local way of life. It became evident early on that the culture treated cricket like it was religion. In India the game of cricket is almost lived and breathed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Early in my tenure in Hyderabad plenty of time was spent becoming customized with the food and local way of life, along with the environment and what some of the challenges that these factors provided.

In regards to the climate, much time was spent understanding it, including the temperatures, getting a feel for the evapotranspiration potential, understanding the likeliness of rain, and how these factors influence pitch preparation and the drying of the outfield after irrigation and rainfall. It was particularly testing as it was at the end of the cricket season, which meant the summer months were upon us, resulting in the climate being extreme.

A conservative amount of time was also spent understanding the local society and how they like to operate, this was obviously important in ensuring our objects could be met throughout the tournament. Having already dealt with another Asian culture in Hong Kong was seen as an advantage, however, the two cultures are very different. The advantage with dealing with the Indian culture within a cricket facility was they all understand the game making it easy to work with as all our objectives were similar. Good planning was required when allocating work to staff due to the work hours being restricted - as there was no work carried out at on the ground between the hours of 12 noon and 4pm due to the extreme temperatures! Finally in an attempt to learn as much as possible in a short time frame, a general understanding was undertaken of what the competition required, and what the team itself demand by the ground staff.

The competition itself consisted of each teams (Franchises) playing 14 matches, where 7 matches would be at home (Rajiv Gandhi Stadium) while the other 7 matches were at away venues. After the home and away matches, the top four teams would progress into a play off series. Each team had a squad of around 20 players, including eight international players. During the inaugural 2008 tournament there was substantial money

involved with the tournament. The most expensive franchise fee was 111 million US dollars (Mumbai Indians) and the most expensive player MS Dhoni (Chennai Super Kings) was paid 1.5 million US dollars. Below is a summary of the highest paid players during the first season;

- MS Dhoni (Chennai Super Kings) US\$1.5 Million
- Andrew Symons (Deccan Chargers) US\$1.35 Million
- Sachin Tendulkar (Mumbai Indians) US\$1,121,250
- Sourav Ganguly (Kolkata Knight Riders) US\$1,092,500
- Yuvraj Singh (Kings XI Punjab) US\$1,063,750.00
- Virender Sehwag (Delhi Daredevils) US\$833,750.00
- Rahul Dravid (Royal Challengers) - US\$1,035,00

Conditions on Arrival

On arrival the conditions of the centre wicket, practice wickets and outfield were well below par which required plenty of work to be done before the first match which was scheduled 23 days after arrival. Generally speaking the centre wicket lacked grass cover, presented uneven in Couch grass species, and was unhealthy in general. In India generally the cricket squares are quite small this combined with heavy cricket schedules generally leads to poor grass covering of wickets. These problems are magnified as players and coaches refuse to play on the edge wickets resulting in the center wickets being excessively worn. Due to the restriction of the sight screens at the ground, it meant only the three centre wickets could be used for the seven IPL matches, which required a lot stolonising of grasses to be carried out on the centre wickets to have them ready in time for play.

The outfield was generally in poor condition where it basically had low maintenance inputs, it was uneven in appearance, the surface was undulated, and drainage was poor. Although it was only a short period between the time of arrival and the first match an aggressive maintenance program was applied. Mowing, Fertilizing, Irrigation, and Aeration programs were all put in place to improve the surface of the outfield. As the maintenance inputs were low previously, combined with the good growing conditions, the response to the program was good where the appearance of the outfield changed dramatically. To aid appearance further, two days before each match the outfield was sprayed with iron.



Ground Cutting



Outfield

On arrival one of the main performance barriers was the irrigation system. The system was of an antique nature, ineffective designed and operated. A reconfiguration was required to make it work suitably.



Irrigation

There were two basic practice facilities at the Stadium – a purpose built facility out the back of the stadium, and a practice square on the outfield of the main ground. The purpose built practice wickets at the venue were of a similar nature to the centre wickets, where they were completely bare due to the over use during the domestic season. The practice wickets on the outfield were used for the team to train on pre-tournament, while the purpose built practice wickets at the back of the stadium were renovated and re-grassed to allow them to be used during the tournament itself.

Preparing practice facilities for the teams proved to be one of the most difficult challenges throughout the tournament. Due to the demanding schedule, it meant the teams would come and go on a regular basis making it difficult to schedule and prepare practice facilities. On most occasions it meant that we would only be given short notice when teams would arrive for practice, this accompanied with high expectations from players and administrators, generally provided plenty of difficulties in preparing practice facilities.

Wicket Preparation

The preparation of wickets for the tournament was a much talked about and most divisive topic of the nine week contract. The majority of the people involved all had opinions on how this complex task should be approached.

Due to the nature of the tournament being a 20/20 format, we set out with the sole aim of producing high run scoring pitches for matches. This basically meant we were looking to produce fully grassed, even, consistent pitches where there would be basically no sideways movement of the ball. We were always looking to produce wickets that had a good grass coverage not only to ensure the prepared wickets presented well, but to ensure that ball came onto the bat nicely and to make sure the pitches had good ball carry.

Due to the short version of the game being played, it basically worked in our favor in terms of pitch preparation, along with wicket allocation and scheduling. The maximum duration of any match could only be 40 overs, which allowed us to re-prepare pitches for secondary, and in one case three matches, it also allowed us to dry the surface of pitches to their maximum as we always knew the lasting qualities of pitches would not be tested, as a result in many ways the preparation of the IPL tournament matches was easier than what preparation of pitches would be for the more traditional format of the game and in the end this resulted in less pressure involved in producing pitches for the tournament.

As one would expect the climate was very dry in Hyderabad, most days temperatures hovered in/around 40 degree mark resulting in the evaporation rates being high, leading to high evapotranspiration rates of the Couch grasses that were in use. The soils in use were of typical black Montmorillonite clay with high shrinking and swelling properties creating an interesting battle with managing moisture contents within the pitch profile.

All pitches began preparation typically with 100% grass cover, and watered up to just under field capacity (around 90%) Preparations were generally carried out using two weight rollers, with the addition of a hand roller for cross rolling where appropriate.



Hand Rolling

Generally speaking the preparation of all pitches were with a top down preparation in that we commenced rolling with the light roller and work the roller up in weight until we reached our maximum densities. The management of hand watering throughout the preparation, in particularly early on in preparation was crucial in ensuring that pitches were maintained at optimum moisture contents for rolling. Due to extreme temperatures and ideal drying conditions the drying process of the prepared pitches was relatively short, and the same time was very predictable.

Two days before match day some additional work was done on the surface of the wicket to complete the process in that the excessive grass was brushed and cut from the surface, the surface of the wickets was re-watered to seal any visible cracks together and to create a pliable surface to apply dry grass clippings and rolling to seal the surface of the wicket more so, this eliminated any sideways movement of the ball and to ensured the presentation of the wicket was even and aesthetically pleasing.



Pitch Brushing



Final Preparation

The final day and a half of pitch preparation was spent mainly monitoring pitch conditions, ensuring there was no over rolling committed, ensuring the surface was dry, however at the same time ensuring excessive drying of the surface was not an issue. Excessive drying was controlled by covering the pitch during the heat of the day with two thick duty mats. In order to predict the likely playability of the prepared pitches an assessment was made through soil sampling, bounce testing, and general observations taking into account with the preparation history.

We were pleased with the way the pitches played throughout the tournament where good pace and bounce was present and minimal sideways movement was observed. Each pitch produced high scoring matches, where an average of nine runs per over was score for the seven matches. Although the Deccan Chargers failed to win a game at home, the Franchise was happy as our objectives were met. The local ground staff was also very pleased as there was an incentive system in place where the match referee rated each ground and the highest rating pitches & outfielders received a cash bonus for their efforts. A basic overview of the Deccan Chargers home matches below;

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Opposition</i> | <i>Start Time</i> | <i>Wicket No.</i> | <i>Winner</i> | <i>Scores</i> | <i>Avg Runs/ Over</i> | <i>Avg Runs/ Wicket</i> |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|--|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 22 nd April | Delhi Daredevils | 8pm | 4 | Delhi Daredevils | D/Chargers 8/142(20) D/Daredevils 1/143(12) | 9.1 | 31.6 |
| 24 th April | Rajasthan Royals | 8pm | 4 | Rajasthan Royals | D/Chargers 5/214(20) R/Royals 7/217(19.5) | 10.8 | 36.9 |
| 1 st May | Kings Punjab | 8pm | 4 | Kings Punjab | D/Chargers 8/164(20) K/Punjab 3/167(18.5) | 8.5 | 30.1 |

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----|---|-----------------------|---|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 11 th May | Kolkata Knight Riders | 4pm | 3 | Kolkata Knight Riders | K/Riders 4/204 (20) D/Chargers 7/181(20) | 9.6 | 35 |
| 18 th May | Mumbai Indians | 8pm | 3 | Mumbai Indians | M/Indians 7/187(20) D/Chargers 7/163(20) | 8.5 | 24.2 |
| 25 th May | Royal Challengers | 4pm | 2 | Royal Challengers | D/Chargers 169(20) R/Challengers 5/171(19) | 8.6 | 22.4 |
| 27 th May | Chennai Super Kings | 8pm | 2 | Chennai Super Kings | D/Chargers 8/147(20) C/Super Kings 3/148(19.2) | 7.5 | 26.8 |
| Total Average | | | | | | 9.1 runs/ over | 24.9 runs/ wicket |

Throughout the nine week tenure there were however some challenges that were not so easy to overcome. There were consistent challenges in place regarding ongoing maintenance and the continual improvement of the facility. The general lack of resources and products available also created difficulties in meeting objectives, these challenges were particularly difficult to overcome given the constraints of a short term contract.

The Indian Premier League experience was challenging, but at the same time was valuable and rewarding. The tournament and match days in general were overwhelming and thrilling. The emphasis placed on the pitch and outfield on match days was demanding, however at the same time this bought excitement to the role. On match days the stadiums were full of life from start to finish weather it be pre-match security inspections form the Bomb squad, player warm ups, pitch reports, T.V interviews or generally inquisitive fans it all added up to a enjoyable experience.



Bomb squad inspection.