

Kabaddi has emerged as an alternative for cricket in India

SPORTS TALK

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ing two different formats, i.e. Sanjeevani and Gemini. These rules were applied for the first time in an all-India tournament in 1923. Though the game originated in India, it happens to be the national game of Bangladesh. The popularity of the game here has come up the ladder, step by step, starting from regional games to the World Cup.

The turning point for the game occurred in 1936 at the Berlin Olympics, where the game was demonstrated by India, its first international exposure. Since then the game has been part of Asian Games, SAF Games, and the sport itself has come a long way. Today, it is making waves in the sporting world, especially so in India, which by all means is the largest market for sports consumption globally. The recent kabaddi world Cup 2016 has proved to be an eye-opener for 'sports pundits' in India. The tournament had teams coming from 12 countries,



including the USA; Australia; England; South Korea; Japan and so on. The popularity and the professionalism in game has turned it into a serious business. And India's win was the icing on the cake.

According to BARC data, the viewership of the event was 80 million in the first 18 matches of the World Cup

2016. The viewers of the event watched it on high-definition channels, which authenticates the arrival of this game across the social segment. The game was viewed all over the world, as the match of Poland and Kenya had a viewership of 6.1 million. According to official reports, the non-India games had a viewership of 34% as

compared to the T-20 World Cup which had a data of 26% (cricket organisers must be worried!). The viewership figures, according to the official data, was three times more for the World Cup as compared to the Kabaddi League.

The event was organised in Ahmadabad, which has recently got a new facility -

the Arena - to host kabaddi games, with all the required amenities. The tickets of the events were sold online, with a price tag of even Rs 2,000 per match. The craze about the starts was a treat to watch as we only see such scenarios in the cricketing context. Fans crying out to touch a player, to get a selfi or an autograph clearly shows that kabaddi has emerged as star sport in India.

The organisers were as excited as all the stakeholders. Such a response in a tier-2 city was indeed special, considering that kabaddi is not a very popular sport in Gujarat. I am very hopeful that this game is drawing attention of sports lovers in this country, who have been waiting to move beyond cricket. This craze in public and the support of the media will certainly encourage more organisers to put together such events, allowing Indian sports fans more choices than they currently have.

The recognition of the game has also enabled the players to make enough money through endorsement and awards. The winning team of World Cup - India - was richer by \$3 million, and the second best - Iran - got richer by \$1.5 million. Who would have thought that an indigenous, street sport will become a career option for many, offering fame as well as money.

The organisers of the kabaddi games are now thrilled with its popularity, since the fans have watched two sessions of the league recently. All those fears that an overdose would reduce the viewership figures have proven to be unfounded. Kabaddi in India has arrived, like NFL in the USA. The only difference between the two is the kind of money involved. And it's only a matter of time before kabaddi gets there.

The columnist is a sports guru

In 2005, as part of a sports delegation in Coventry, UK, we were facilitated by a Sikh group. During my interaction with them, they told me that kabaddi is a very popular and well-paid sport among them. Today that holds true for our country too. The game is truly

traditional in nature, with its unique techniques. The origin theory of the game has few a versions, but the most authentic one tells us that it originated in Tamil Nadu in 1918. The earliest known framework for rules of the game was prepared in Maharashtra in 1921, combin-