

AN OPEN LETTER

to the Indian Blind Cricket Team

From an erstwhile non-believer to a current

SUPER FAN!

Three months back, with enormous data on my phone, I decided to spend it on 'TED Talks' on YouTube where I came across a video by Disha Oberoi in which she talks about the 'Dying Art of Listening'. The session was enthralling, where she spoke about the importance of listening and not hearing. In a simple game of guessing the source of a sound (played on speakers), the audience failed completely. Why? Simply because we don't listen, we hear. Our generation is based on the fundamental belief that you hear to respond and not to listen and understand.

A LIVE example of a person who is completely the opposite of this fundamental and instead has made his life through listening is the Captain of the Indian Blind Cricket Team, Ajay Reddy.

Blind Cricket? You mean blind sportsmen playing the sport of cricket? Much to my ignorance, they were, and they were doing so with sheer brilliance, having won the T20 World Cup twice. As soon as I got to know about the sport and how it is played, I was a fan, undoubtedly.

It was fascinating to understand their game. The rules were different from normal cricket but the spirit was undeniably the same. The rattling sound of the ball helps the player to sense the direction of the play, but unfortunately, the sound failed to echo when the T20 World Cup, which was scheduled to be held in November, became an uncertain event. Due to lack of sponsorship and no support from the BCCI, the T20 World Cup was further delayed and the question of whether the sport will be played at all or not became a question to which no one had an answer to.

Media, unlike most of the times, played an important role in bringing forward the plight of the Indian Blind Cricket team. The news spread, finally Blind Cricket was getting its share of the limelight but not the kind that was expected. Now as a sports enthusiast, I do understand the dearth in sponsorship for such sporting events, the reason being the magnitude of the event which isn't too big, sponsors see a lack of potential in these events due to the absence of TV coverage and media presence. However, what they don't see is that the sport redefines social inclusion in a country like India where deformity is looked down upon. It gives a sense of belonging to these athletes who come from diverse backgrounds.

IndusInd Bank came on board and supported the feat of these athletes, more so to bring a positive change in the community and alternate perspective towards disability. Likewise, many corporates and banking sectors came forward to show their support and rest, as we say, is history. The T20 World Cup happened and how. A two-week phenomenon which

saw players participate from all over the globe, including our favourite cricketing rivals- Pakistan. Over 20,000 people turned up for the finals between India and Pakistan at the Chinnaswamy Stadium on 12th February '17, me being one of them. The crowd hooted and cheered, but it wasn't because Kohli had seamlessly scored a century. It was because Prakasha Jayaramaiah had scored an unbeaten 99 to lead India to a nine wicket win. Jayaramaiah

is your Shikar Dhawan but the only difference here is he is partially sighted, something like this had never happened in the history of Blind Cricket.

The Indian team had an incredible feat in the T20 World Cup, they had won all the matches, except for one, which they lost against Pakistan in the group round. However, they took sweet revenge in the finals and decimated them to lift the T20 World Cup for the second time.

The joy of victory on their faces was contagious; they had done it, once again.

I, not for once, could sympathize with them. They are heroes of their field, knocking sixes and fours of the rattling ball. You don't sympathize with heroes, you respect them.

Indian Blind Cricket Team, you command respect! Not many use their disability as their strength, but you have.

