

their drinking, and reminded that they ought not to be drinking and driving. All Indians need to know that excessive consumption of sweets and confectionery can lead to diabetes; all Indians need to

tion for both the sweet and the diabetes clinic, for the cigarette and the heart check-up, for the alcohol and the Alka-Seltzer.

In this business, conflict as a definition is when an

similar positioning farfetched?

Or is it opportunity knocking on the door?

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A cola on one sleeve, a vodka on the other one?

"I never play cricket. It requires one to assume such indecent postures."
— Oscar Wilde.

So true, Mr Wilde, indecent posturing is what many of the not-so-lucky suitors of the IPL would have said, when they saw their bids being trashed by the BCCI and the big fish swallow team after team for even bigger bucks.

Imagine a simple cricket league grabbing mega column centimeters of front page space in *The Times Of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, and chunks of TV prime time when Mr Modi announced the Club of Eight. The august company of Dr Mallya, Mukesh Ambani, Shah Rukh Khan, Nes Wadia, Mohit Burman, Priety Zinta, were joined by the GMR group, Decan Chronicle, India Cements and Emergent Media.



All forking out a whopping US\$ 723 million. Now why would sane, full grown men (and women) play this risky game?

"Risky? No, not at all. It makes great business sense, Navroze," said Mohit Burman, on his way to the airport to be in Mumbai for the IPL two day briefing course.

Can you imagine? A 2-day professionally managed briefing for franchise owners?

"This is big. And it's now up to the franchise owners to make it even bigger" said Mohit, who is one of the partners of the group that picked up the Punjab (Mohali) franchise.

The English Premier League must have been the trigger and the inspiration for the BCCI to get the IPL off the ground, though the real catalyst was the ICL, which threatened to run away with the "monies" in cricket. Kapil Dev and Subhash Chandra had stunned the world with the announcement of the ICL, and players suddenly realized there was another boss out there with a bigger cheque book. Almost all the big names, current and just retired, stood up to be counted. But then came the "play and be batted" diktat that threw many off the ICL players list.

Brands will line up now, and make the most of the 6-week gala.

Investors in the teams will add sizzle and glitz beyond player names and reputations, but finally the auction of the players (like prized artworks up there with even bigger price tags) will make crowds through the matches, and the turnstiles clang over.

From an advertising standpoint, here are eight teams, bristling with top Indian names and international players. Teams with Sachin, Dravid, Dhoni, Sreesanth, Ponting, Lee, Warne, Gayle, Akhtar, Yuvraj or Ganguly, would have the associates all ready with their cheque-books in their hands.

Brands from energy drinks, to soft drinks, to clothing and retail brands to engine oils and cooking oils, would not like to miss out. Team and city T-shirts sold in Reebok and Adidas outlets? Mugs, cups, posters, caps, and merchandise lining Archies stores? The launch of wild and whacko advertising campaigns to launch and promote the teams on show? Macho Mohali to Brandy Bangalore, the media will be boiling over, with agencies rubbing their hands in glee and the creative whiz kids, scratching their goatees.

April 18 will see fireworks at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bangalore, and in many more corporate head-quarters when India's most ambitious cricket dream takes off. Dreaming big will be the pioneers, who see

stock market listing in the next few years, and hectic layer trading from the second year onwards. Stalkers are already in the park hunting for prey and waiting with infinite patience. Press reports have already been abuzz with the ADAG on the look out, looking for the weak hearted to sell, or the week-kneed to fall.

No great coincidence that IPL's campaign will be designed by Piyush Pandey, former Ranji cricketer and now executive chairman of O&M. During the next eight weeks, the IPL will blitz the housewife and the husband, while full-time team CEOs, managers and coaches chalk out strategies to win the US\$ 3 million prize and brands vie to get eyeballs and relationships of their consumers with the world's best cricketers on display on television and on ground.

Who will pay how much? Which team will hold it's own? Will the left sleeve go to a cola and the right to a vodka? Will the mother of all cash cows start getting milked?

Well, the BCCI has laughed all the way to the bank. Is anyone else out there laughing?

Let's wait and watch. April 18th ain't too far away.

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