



GETTING BACK TO BASICS

Out of the rubble of the shambolic 2010 Commonwealth Games, the Cricket World Cup has given India an immediate opportunity to mitigate the damage to its international event-hosting aspirations. Does cricket's showcase have the ability to right the wrongs of Delhi?

OUTSPOKEN CRITICS have unsurprisingly outnumbered supporters of India's sports administration since the curtain came down on the Commonwealth Games on October 14.

Asian Football Confederation president Mohamed Bin Hammam was the most damning, saying that "lots of things need to be done" before India can even think of bidding to host the FIFA World Cup. And there were few who witnessed the construction delays, commercial controversies and financial mismanagement of the Delhi Games who backed up the optimistic claims of organising committee chairman Suresh Kalmadi that India could host the 2020 Olympics.

The fact that Kalmadi has since been removed from his role - after a national anti-corruption watchdog received complaints alleging up to \$1.8 billion of Games money was

misappropriated - illustrates the state of flux in the Indian sports industry.

However, just four months on from the Delhi Games, which did little to convince outsiders of the nation's credentials as a home for major events, India is the centre-piece of the quadrennial Cricket World Cup alongside South Asian neighbours Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Cricket is India's greatest sporting passion and although administrative disputes have left a familiar dark cloud over the three-year-old commercial behemoth of the Indian Premier League (IPL), there are hopes that a trouble-free Cricket World Cup could show India's event hosting industry in a better light.

"I think the Commonwealth Games have done some damage," Octagon managing director Glenn Lovett told *SportBusiness International*. "We decided to steer clear of the event and we didn't get involved, largely because of a lack of confidence in the market.

"Sport, like politics, is run in a very bureaucratic way in India, and I don't think that is going to change very quickly.

"There are different factions and there are elements of self-interest. However, there is a fresh commitment to clean up sports administration in India."

The nation's new Sports Minister, Ajay Maken, who has been given the task of sifting through the debris of the Delhi Games, has wasted little

time in shaking up the governance of sport in the country since being appointed in January.

Just days after dismissing Kalmadi and Commonwealth Games secretary general Lalit Bhanot "in the interest of impartial and unhindered investigations", Maken formed a committee to produce a report on ways to ensure Delhi 2010 competition venues do not become 'white elephants'.

"We will be mainly focusing on how to utilise the venues as training centres for young athletes, how to make the stadia available to top athletes training for the London 2012 Olympics, and the possibility of hosting national and international sporting events," Maken told reporters.

Renovations go down to the wire

The readiness of the Commonwealth Games facilities was a key concern late last year, and renovation work was still taking place at numerous venues in India in the days leading up to the start of the Cricket World Cup on February 19.

Delays in construction work caused Kolkata's Eden Gardens to lose the right to host the highly-anticipated India-England clash in late February, and the venue has been told it will not stage any World Cup cricket until March 15 at the earliest, when South Africa takes on Ireland.

At the end of January, the Wankhede Stadium



World Cup will "act as a step in the right direction" in India's future as a major sports event host - Getty Images Sport

in Mumbai was given two weeks to complete "minor finishing work" by the International Cricket Council while, at the start of February, a wall collapsed to leave two people injured at the MA Chidambaram stadium in Chennai, where hundreds of fans were queuing up for tickets.

"In Indian culture there is a tendency - with most of the companies we have dealt with - of leaving things to the very last minute," adds Lovett. "We are trying to find a way to tell them to move things forward sooner. If it all happens at the last minute, things won't run efficiently."

"It is an emerging economy, but a lot of the people there lack access to basic infrastructure. There have also been some errant structural issues that have restricted the growth opportunity, and the Commonwealth Games showed that."

However, the previous edition of the Cricket World Cup in the West Indies in 2007 was famously not without its issues. Sabina Park in Kingston, Jamaica suffered structural problems of its own, with faulty seats being removed due to safety concerns, and organisers were accused of setting ticket prices too high as the early fixtures struggled to attract spectators.

The logistics of staging a tournament spanning eight different islands was also cited as a reason for the problems endured by the event organisers. Similarly, the challenge

presented by the structure of the 2011 Cricket World Cup, held across multiple venues in three countries, means the chance to step onto the path to redemption for India's major event-hosting industry will not be straightforward.

However, despite poor attendances at several Commonwealth Games competition venues, organisers reported healthy ticket sales ahead of the arrival of the biggest tournament in India's national sport.

Lack of Interest In India

"One of the issues with the Commonwealth Games was a perceived lack of interest from the general population for some of the events," says Lovett. "Everyone could see the empty grounds on the TV, and there were ticket pricing issues. However, this time they need to make sure they give as many people access to the event as possible."

"In cricket, the good thing is that the Indian spectators will pack out the stadia in most cases. There will be a decent commercial return and the crowds there can play a really important role in restoring confidence."

In a cricket-obsessed country, other sports have fought a difficult battle to secure a slice of what is the second-most populous nation on the planet. "We talk about the size of the market and in terms of commercial return, cricket is the clear leader," Lovett adds.

"However, football is popular in India and the Commonwealth Games did in fact raise the profile of some other Olympic sports such as boxing, shooting and athletics."

"In terms of other sports breaking through to challenge cricket, though, there have been administrative issues."

Although it is widely thought that mismanagement of some events and sports has stifled the development of the broader Indian sports industry, Lovett remains bullish about the country's prospects beyond the Cricket World Cup, which it is hoped will act as a step in the right direction.

"As a global agency we need to be represented in India, but if you ask clients, India has underperformed up to now," he adds.

"In India there is a great opportunity and a massive market in terms of the number of people. The commercial growth of cricket and the IPL is an example of the opportunity, and it is about capitalising on that."

"Indian corporations need to work with the government to ensure everything is aligned in the private and public sector."

"India's reputation has been tarnished by the Commonwealth Games, and it could be for some time, but it is an ambitious nation."

"There is nothing wrong with taking on an event that is global and has a high profile, but they need to truly believe they can deliver."