

# The match of your dreams

Fancy yourself a sharp team manager? A whole hoard of websites now allow Indian cricket lovers to indulge in their favorite sport — deciding who should have been captain and who should have opened the game



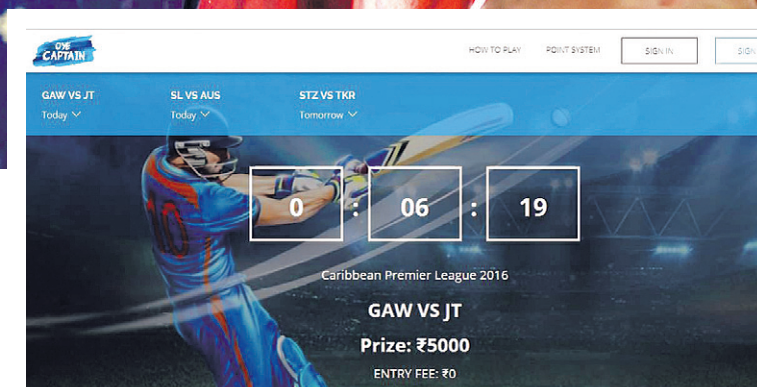
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LAST week, when Guyana Amazon Warriors played Jamaica Tallawahs in the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) final held at the Warner Park Stadium, Basseterre in St Kitts, it wasn't just Jamaica Tallawahs who won. In Chembur, 13,600 km away, 23-year-old Monil Shah also rejoiced as Sohail Tanvir (42 off 37 balls and 0-17 off four overs) and Imad Wasim (3-21), the players he had put on his fantasy team league for the match performed well. It won Shah a cash prize of ₹3,000.

Welcome to the world of fantasy cricket, where those who want to do more than just watch and fume at matches can create their own teams and score big (or small) depending on how the selected players perform in real time. While the first such dedicated Indian site kicked off in 2009, the industry has boomed in the last two years with over two million players, or team managers if you will, with over 10 websites.

## Live out your fantasy

Ever felt that the Board of Control for



Chembur resident Monil Shah's picks of Sohail Tanvir and Imad Wasim, won him the third spot in the Caribbean Premier League held last week. PIC/SAMEER MARKANDE

Cricket in India (BCCI) could have done a better job of selecting its team for a particular tournament? That, say an R Ashwin would have made a better captain than a Virat Kohli for the current campaign against the West Indies or Wriddhiman Saha should have been the opener instead of Shikhar Dhawan? A fantasy game allows you to choose your permutation, by selecting your playing XI from among the 22 selected for the real-time match. How much you score depends on how your selected players perform on ground. The more points your chosen player earns, the closer you are to winning your league and therefore, the cash allotted.

Take for instance, the ongoing Test series between India and West Indies in

the Caribbean. A gamer decided to omit India skipper Virat Kohli from his playing XI of the third Test and decided to choose West Indies debutant bowler Alzarri Joseph. When Kohli got dismissed for just three runs while Joseph claimed three wickets in the first innings, the gamer would have scored over a player who had chosen Kohli on his team.

Gamers can choose how many others they play against. Sites such as Oye Captain (which was launched earlier this year and has over 30,000 registered players), allow gamers to compete in a league of two, three or even five players. So, if you are competing against just one other person, your chances of winning are higher even if the cash prize is lesser.

The deadline to lock in your team varies as well. While you can start selecting your team the second the match schedule is available on the website, at Cricketinc the lock-in period ends an hour before the match starts while on Oye Captain and Fandromeda it ends just a few seconds before the start. "I feel that users can make more informed choices when they know the playing XI," says Ramesh Srivats, MD and CEO of the Bengaluru-based TenTenTen Digital Products which created Fandromeda in March this year.

In 2003, Cricketinc, founded by John Rajkumar, started a unique concept where even your best five-six players can make you finish at top of the chart. A gamer has to select the best 14 players from the live match — a playing XI and three substitutes. Your players in the XI have to play a maximum of 120 balls in T20s and 300 in ODIs, while the bowler has to take 10 wickets or bowl economically. For eg, if your batsman scores 160 runs in 20 overs while the bowler concedes 130 in the same, you will win 30 runs. The winner is decided on the basis of the runs

margin. Two substitutes can be used to replace a poor performer.

But, a real-time match may not always reflect well on a scoring card, since a few good saves may not affect the scoreboard. Srivats explains, "It's difficult to give points for fielding (except for catches and runouts). However, the points system at Fandromeda tries to be fair to batting and bowling. So, there are points for economy rates, dot balls, etc.



**Our biggest winners are consistent because they select their teams on the basis of historic performance statistics, player health and pitch conditions**

— Aditya Oberoi, CEO of Oye Captain





For instance, with a 0/18 in four overs in a T20, a bowler would get 36 points for economy which is nearly equivalent to two wickets. Our points-system has been created after analysing thousands of matches.”

Aditya Oberoi, founder and CEO of Oye Captain, says that’s not always easy, “We have to be able to quantify the way we distribute points. There will be exceptional performances that blow you away. For example, Sri Lanka bowled almost 26 maiden overs against Australia in the first Test at Pallekele last month. That deserves a lot of extra points, but we can’t account for every exceptional possibility on the field.”

### Where data equals cash

The one lure of a fantasy game is that it makes you money without making a bookie out of you (see box: The law of fantasy). But, not every one is open to jumping it.

While fantasy sports have been popular in the west for over two decades, with even reports and scares of insider trading in the multi-billion dollar American Baseball League, in India the games are still in a nascent stage. Investments can range from ₹10 to ₹5,000 per match and wins can bring in anything between ₹1 lakh when you are battling in a 1,000-plus player league. The money is transferred to the gamer’s bank account within 48 hours of withdrawal. He/she has to provide PAN card details and a bank account statement at the time of registration.

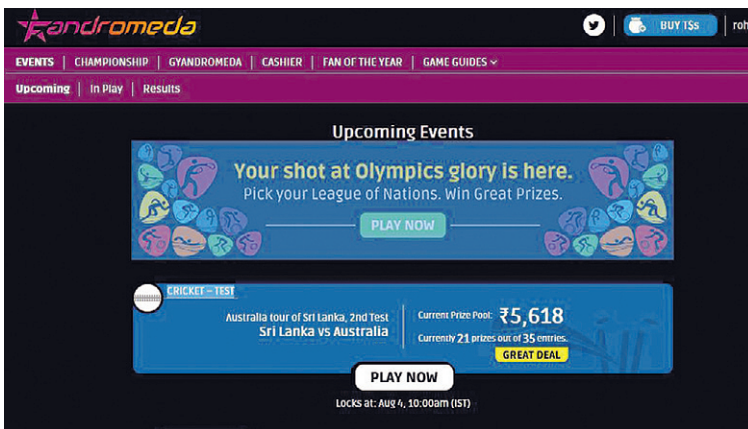
To bring in more gamers, sites like Oye Captain also provide cash rewards in free leagues. “This helps new gamers get used to the software, understanding the scoring system so they can experience it prior to depositing money. We want to be able to showcase our product and make sure customers know what they’re paying for before charging them,” says Oberoi.

What also helps, says Shah fresh from his win, is being a good study.

The 23-year-old, who works as a software developer for a big-ticket Indian firm, says he has been following cricket for 12 years now and has also represented his club and college at leather ball matches. “You have to read a lot of previews. Get the conditions right and accordingly choose the playing XI. Just because a player scores big in the first two matches doesn’t mean you should repeat him in a third. Sometimes a tail-ender comes and scores 30 off 10 balls, that changes the outcome of the match and your standing in the league,” he says. “Fantasy winners are only those who make proper use of their knowledge in the sport. Sometimes you need to give yourself sufficient amount of time to prepare a team. Remember, this is a game of skill and needs planning.”

“Our biggest winners are consistent because they select their teams on the basis of historic performance statistics, current player health levels and conditions, possibilities of player fatigue, pitch conditions, weather conditions, match duration and format, and a number of other quantifiable factors,” says Oberoi. Luck does play a role, however. “I would say luck plays as much a role as it does in real cricket. After all sometimes the toss can determine the result of a real cricket match,” says Rajkumar. The need for skill means that the game attracts those who genuinely love the sport.

Patna-based Shahid Akhter says a



Ramesh Srivats, MD and CEO of the Bengaluru-based TenTenTen Digital Products, which created Fandromeda. The site, which has an over 1.25 lakh registration, has also included the ongoing Olympics on its site. **PIC/AJEESH RAWTHER**

die-hard cricket fan, he had been looking for something that would challenge his knowledge of the sport. A chance advertisement a few years ago introduced the 42-year-old to fantasy cricket and has now given him a reason to follow the sport all around the globe.”

### More than cricket

With the sports industry in India exploding with not just various cricket leagues, but also in sports such as kabaddi and football, Fandromeda — with an over 1.25 lakh registration since its March launch — is including more

sports in its bouquet including those featuring in the ongoing Olympics.

“While cricket is everyone’s passion, a true sports lover likes watching all sports. And we hope that our game will add a new dimension of excitement to the events one watches,” he adds. “Kabaddi has seen similar levels of engagement as has non-India cricket. Football, even more. Oberoi too plans to add international football to the Oye Captain mix within the next six months.

To turn a phrase, may the best sport win.

## it started with football

In Oakland, in 1962, Winkenbach formed the first reported fantasy football league, called the Greater Oakland Professional Pigskin Prognosticators League with eight teams

## THE LAW OF FANTASY

The Supreme Court of India has termed fantasy sport as a game based on skill and not chance, making a distinction between fantasy sport and gambling. It is completely legal to play cash-league fantasy sport in India (except for in Assam and Odisha). An All India Gaming Federation (AIGF), a not-for-profit organisation was launched last week to manage the gaming industry in the country.

AIGF is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. AIGF CEO

Roland Landers explains: “The objectives of AIGF include diffusion of useful knowledge and promotion of sporting and gaming activities as well as urging the state and central governments to regulate gaming/gambling activities and suggesting measures to prevent gambling addiction. He says, “Fantasy games do not increase gambling but actually help in honing various analytical and statistical skills.

“Regardless of whether there is any participation fee or prize involved in a game of skill, it is exempt from the ambit of anti-gambling laws and is a legitimate activity. In 1996, the Supreme Court held that betting on horse racing was a game of skill since a lot of research and analysis has to be conducted regarding the pedigree and breed of horses, age, category, etc.”

## PLAYERS SHARE THEIR TRICKS



“Play a league only if you have proper information about the match. I have only played the matches I follow. Fantasy cricket is played over many domestic leagues across the world, which people here hardly follow. Sometimes you tend to play such matches for cash and end up losing

— Shahid Akhter, Patna, 42

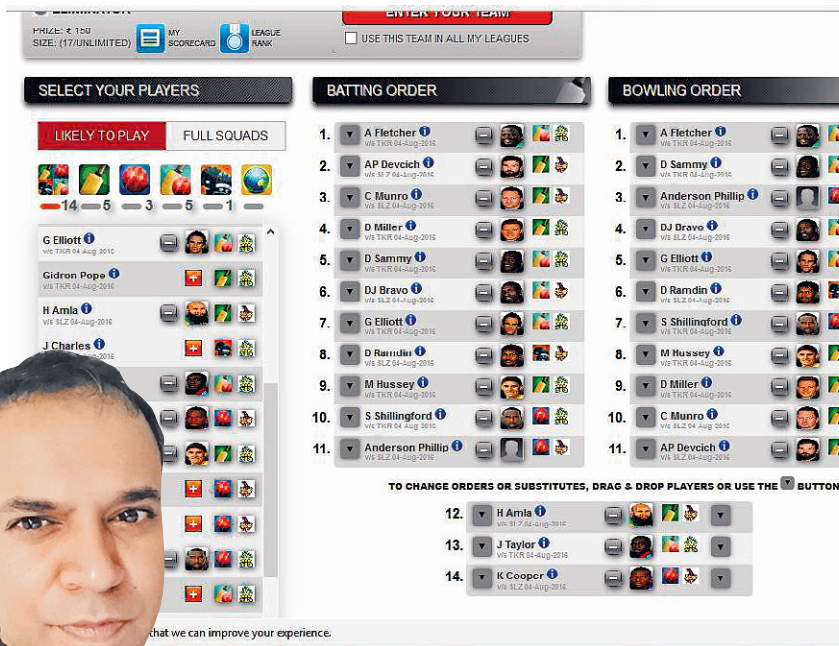


“Play with smaller amounts if you are unaware about the team. It’s best to play a match you find interest in. Don’t go behind big cash prizes

— Sachin Sharma, Himachal, 21

“In 2000, when I wanted to play a good fantasy cricket game, I realised there were only two or three choices — all copying the points system that American sports used

— John Rajkumar, founder of Cricketinc



At Cricketinc the lock-in period ends an hour before the match