

Reception at the High Commission of India, Canberra
For the
Indian and Australian Women's Cricket Teams
6 November 2008

Players of the Indian & Australian Cricket Teams,
Distinguished MPs,
Gentlemen, Ladies,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all here to the HCI, where we are gathered to celebrate the great and noble game of cricket.

It gives me special pleasure, as a woman, to welcome the 2 women's cricket teams.

When I was planning this reception, someone, who shall remain un-named, said "Oh nobody will come, its only the women teams." Well I'm glad we've proved him wrong on that one.

I'm especially glad to see all the women here today.

Besides all the things that India and Australia have in common, there's something else, something relatively recent. Both our countries have women Heads of State; we have President Pratibha Patil; you have Governor General Quentin Bryce.

This reception is as much for all the women here today, as it is for the cricket.

For the Old Girl's Networks now jostling the Old Boy's Networks for equal space.

Here, I would like to acknowledge two of my fellow Old Girls on the diplomatic circuit – H.E. the Ambassador of Bosnia and H.E. the H.C. of Mauritius.

I would also like to acknowledge here Mark Vergano, Chief Executive of Cricket ACT and all the others from Cricket ACT.

In addition, all the speakers and participants.

On January 12 this year, we had held another reception, for the Old Boys, for the Indian men's cricket team. It was a great occasion, just a week after the Sydney Test Match and even the rain did not want to miss the proceedings.

We had the entire team here, Captain Anil Kumble, The Fab Four – Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Saurav Ganguly, VVS Laxman; Dhoni, Bhaji, Sehwag.

We had Senator John Faulkner, who cancelled a previous engagement to attend, and told us that he had attended every single test match between India and Australia at the SCG since 1967.

I remember, mentioning on that occasion, Jhulan Goswami being named Woman Cricketer of the Year and Kumble and our entire Cricket team leading the applause.

And today, we have Jhulan with us.

Jhulan, you do us proud, along with your entire team.

Since the Indian tour of Australia last summer, so much has happened.

Just a few days back, Anil Kumble announced his retirement from Test Cricket. It was a poignant moment, especially for those of us who had witnessed the quiet dignity and steadiness with which this great cricketer conducted himself and captained the India team during its tour of Australia last summer.

Then there was the moment when the Little Master, Sachin Tendulkar passed the 12,000 mark in getting the highest number of runs in Test cricket.

Please join me in applauding these two great icons of a great game.

Coming back to the Old Girls, I asked a friend to do some research into women's cricket and this is what he found:

- Women played cricket at village and county level in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
- The first recorded match in womens cricket was played on 26th July 1745 when "eleven maids from Hambleton won against the eleven maids from Bramley" at the Gosden Common near Guildford.
- Women's cricket had been played since the turn of the 20th century in Australia
- The women held their First World Cup in 1973, whereas the Prudential Cup for men was played in 1975.
- India was the first south Asian country to participate in international cricket. Women's cricket in India was formalized in 1973.

- It is in south Asian countries that women's cricket attracts the most crowds – the 1997 World Cup Final between Australia and England at Eden Gardens in Calcutta drew a crowd of 80,000 spectators.
- The only two south Asian nations participating in 7th Women's World Cup held in New Zealand were India and Sri Lanka – India making it to the semi-finals.
- In Indian Women's Cricket, the 1st Women's Test match that we took part in was in 1976/77;
- Shantha Rangaswamy became the first Indian woman to make a century in 1977 at Dunedin, New Zealand.
- In 1995 India won the triangular One Day series in New Zealand beating both Australia and New Zealand.
- South Asian women are generally introduced to the game through their brothers or fathers – they start invariably as the 'twelfth man', generally in a family picnic game using a soft ball or a friendly neighbourhood match running short of a player or two. Very few schools for girls, if at all, have cricket on their curriculum. The closest one comes to a cricket bat in school is perhaps in a game of rounders, which again, is played in a few schools.
- With a start such as this, it is no mean feat that women from south Asian countries have made their mark on the cricket fields of the world. They have played, and still do, under constraints not faced by their male counterparts. The players have had to face cultural constraints as well, in certain countries.
- However, our women are now playing the game in greater numbers. By playing more often, their game has improved and they have matured as players. Indian women's cricket too has its legends – Shantha Rangaswamy, Diana Edulji, Shubhangi Kulkarni and Sandhya Agarwal have all made major contributions in influencing the game.
- Records have also been set. Neetu David's 8 wickets for 53 runs against England in 1995-96 was the record bowling effort in a Test match innings.
- Sandhya Aggarwal made a world record by scoring 190 runs in an innings in a Test match in England in 1986.

- Mithali Raj has been on the international circuit for nearly a decade. In August 2006 she led the side to their first – ever Test and series victory in England and wrapped up the year winning the Asia Cup – the second time in 12 months – without dropping a single game.
- India, under her captaincy, also reached the one-day World Cup finals in 2005, held in South Africa. Then, India lost to Australia.
- The 2009 world Cup will be in Australia. Lets see what happens then.

Perhaps it would be fair to say that India and Australia have the two best cricket teams in the world, both in men’s and in women’s cricket.

In short, here we are, the two best cricket teams in the world.

Gentlemen, Ladies, please join me in celebrating this great and noble game and the presence of our two women’s teams here today.

Thank You.

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