

American Armchair Cricketer

Friday, March 2, 2012

The Kids are All Right, or, Promoting the Game

No matter who I talk to about the state of cricket in the United States, the conversation always seems to boil down to agreement that the sport's governing body here—the United States of America Cricket Association—has grassed it. In-fighting, incompetence, possible corruption, power struggles—you name it, we have it.

But look around the game. As rosy-spectacled as I am about cricket, even I can see that every country and board has problems. Whether you're talking about Giles Clark and the ECB, the decline and fall of West Indies, the ham-handed and power-mad BCCI, spot-fixing scandals or the fact that nobody will even go to Pakistan to play cricket, it's easy to see that there are more than enough problems out there to go around. The problems here in the United States do feel worse to me because they have hindered the development of the game. In all the above-mentioned situations, the fans are cricket-mad and the sporting press actually realizes that cricket exists.

When the International Cricket Council unfavorably compares our country's cricket program to China's, it says a lot about just how bad things are ... at least it does to Americans.

But talking about it and arguing all day accomplish nothing. The game's the thing, with apologies to that fine bowler of off-breaking verse and middle-order playwright Will Shakespeare. We need to just move on and make it so the incompetent officials don't matter. And how do we do that? Again, when you bring this up, almost everybody says the same thing: "You've got to get the kids playing, and at a young age."

Jatin Patel of Indianapolis, Indiana, is one of those people saying that kids playing cricket is at least part of the answer to growing the sport in the United States. And he's not just

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 [USA_Cricketer](#)

Born and bred in Indiana, USA, I came to cricket as a result of my love for nearly everything British.

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talking—he's doing something about it. In 2010, Patel and Jamie Harrison of Maryland formed the United States Youth Cricket Association. Concurrently, Patel founded Indiana Cricket, which is a member of the USYCA. These not-for-profit organizations have one main goal.

“Indiana cricket and USYCA want to take cricket into the schools, and bring more American-born kids to the game,” according to Patel. “Cricket has mostly been played by immigrants, and we do not expect American kids to come out and watch them to learn game. But by taking it to the teachers in schools, kids can see the game, and start learning and playing cricket.”

Indiana Cricket and the USYCA do this by providing free cricket equipment and coaching. So far, nine Indiana schools have received kit and coaching, and started their cricket programs, with about 14 more at some stage of the process.

“There is no age limit,” according to Patel, “but our primary focus is on young kids so we can develop them better for the future of USA cricket.”

“Training teachers is also a perfect idea, because teachers will train kids for many years to come.”

Before moving to the United States, Patel played at all higher levels including Inter-College and University and Regional teams. He also had a 1st Coaching certification in India. He also possesses a National (US) D soccer coaching license, is a certified High school soccer and volleyball official, and coached high school soccer for six years. So teaching cricket to youngsters is nothing new for him.

“I start my sessions with the sports they know and skills they possess,” he says of his style of introducing teachers and kids to a game that can become very complicated very quickly. “Within 45 minutes to an hour I guide them to start playing cricket – on their own. No talks, no explanations. My idea is to let them play, as experience is the best teacher.”

Patel then fine tunes basic skills as they practice, and also makes sure that the players are enjoying the game and having fun. And, Patel says, they do have fun once they are introduced to cricket.



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“When you show them the flat, wide cricket bats they have more confidence in their hitting ability than they do in baseball,” according to Patel, who also says the kids really seem to enjoy the running back and forth between the wickets to score. “I’ve noticed they like to have the bat in their hand and extend it to make it their home for runs scored.”

Even though we adults typically talk about how complicated cricket is—and perhaps reveal our own fears about why the game won’t succeed in the US—Patel says kids he works with actually say cricket is an easy game. They like being able to hit the ball anywhere, and being able to keep batting and scoring as many runs as they can.

Efforts like this are excellent proof that there are people out there who care about growing the sport in the United States. The experience of those who lead such programs also shows that, when they are exposed to cricket, American kids like it and want to play and see more of it.

And that is precisely what we need.

For more information, go to www.indianacricket.org or e-mail inyouthcricket@gmail.com; nationally, go to www.usyca.org.

Posted by [USA_Cricketer](#) at [2:02 PM](#)



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[Jamie Harrison](#) [March 2, 2012 6:44 PM](#)

Terry,

Jatin has been doing a great job for youth cricket in Indiana; thanks for putting the spotlight on his hard work.

In addition to Jatin, there are folks from all over the country also laboring in the trenches of cricket development with USYCA - you can read all about them at usyca.org.

Of course, we are always interested in partnering with folks who want to volunteer to make a difference for youth cricket in their community.

Sound like you? Email USYCA at info@usyca.org for more information.

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