

The Best For Sri Lanka Cricket



Shammi Silva, President, Sri Lanka Cricket

Cricket has always been the unifying force of the country; it knows no boundaries and brings everyone together. Shammi Silva, President of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) speaks about the progress of the game and the activities of the governing body of cricket in Sri Lanka. He believes with the new initiatives taken the game will continue to grow in all formats. He affirms that the people will always select those who are competent to fit the role and, that he will always do the best for SLC.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe. Assisted by Tatiyana Welikala | Photography Menaka Aravinda.

As the President of Sri Lanka Cricket, can you speak about the performance of the institution and the game in general?

Compared to our performances three or four years ago, today the standard of cricket has greatly improved. The new coaching staff and our revamped system have helped us to do really well. We will see the results of these changes next year.

The new Committee and I were elected on February 21, 2019. Since then we have been working together on building a fresh, cohesive and progressive agenda to implement a new strategic vision for Sri Lanka Cricket. This is my first tenure as President. Previously I served as the Treasurer of SLC and was an EXCO member as well.

At the moment we have revamped our High Performance Center, which is the heart of Sri Lanka Cricket. We have appointed Jerome Jayaratne as the Chief Cricket Operations Officer of the SLC High Performance Center, and Mickey Arthur as Head Coach. We have brought in many other coaches to provide their expertise to Sri Lankan Cricket such as Grant Flower (national batting coach), Shane McDermott (fielding coach) and David Saker (fast bowling coach). The players and the coaches are bonding well and they are very happy with the level of professionalism. I feel that because of these initiatives we will be able to achieve results very soon.

We are doing well in test cricket and in the 50 overs cricket but we are not doing too well in the T20 format. I was speaking to my peers on this and they said it is because we do not have a T20 tournament in Sri Lanka. Our players do not have the experience in playing competitive T20 with international exposure. We are starting the Lanka Premier League (LPL) in August this year. We have received permission from our EXCO to go forward with this initiative. I believe this will help our cricket as well as the country by bringing in foreign currency and players from various countries.

As for the game, you have to allow the professionals to perform their specific roles and duties. Then we need to consistently evaluate and identify our weaknesses. This will provide us with opportunities to improve our current position which would in turn, benefit us with positive results.

What are your plans for SLC?

Many districts do not have grounds or clubhouses. I have personally visited each district to identify their needs. We are planning to build cricket grounds in all 25 districts. Currently, 15 districts have grounds but the other ten districts do not have grounds. This is an area we will focus on.

Recently I visited the North and they have a very good school cricket structure but for example in Jaffna, the main sport that they play is football. We must develop cricket facilities in these areas as well to encourage them to play the game. We plan to provide turf wickets to five schools in the North.

Every school district will play their own T20 tournament and from there they can be selected to the provincial level. These initiatives will provide the opportunity for players in the rural areas to display their talent.

It is in domestic cricket that new players are nurtured. What are your thoughts?

We are doing really well in domestic cricket. and we are continuously improving the standards of domestic cricket. We have provided grants as part of an initiative to provide infrastructure opportunities to eight Non-Premier Playing Controlling Clubs, 12 Non-Premier Playing Affiliated Clubs, Governor's Trophy participating Clubs, District and Provincial Cricket Associations and Tier 'A' and 'B' Clubs.

The Tournament Committee was entrusted with the task of rearranging the tournament structure. This was to reflect the Executive Committee's thinking to reduce the number of Clubs playing in Major Club Tier 'A' and Tier 'B' to ten each so that the first class tournament of the country will become more competitive. Currently Tier 'A' has 14 teams and Tier 'B' has ten teams. We are looking at reducing Tier 'A' to ten teams, similar to Tier 'B'. Therefore, when you play ten teams they play each other and have about 150 players. These top 150 players, will rotate in these teams. Subsequently my idea is to reduced to eight teams in each Tier which will be an achievement.

SLC also plans to take over the Under-15 All Island Schools Cricket Tournament in the future so that young cricketers are nurtured from their school days.

Many programs were held to develop the Umpires in the country. The Senior

Manager ICC Umpires and Referees visited Sri Lanka to observe the SLC ICC Panel Umpires. SLC was able to convince him to consider all SLC International Panel Umpires for ICC tournaments. For 2019, Kumar Dharmasena was chosen as the Umpire of the Year. Focus was given to the development of coaches and coach developers at all levels of the game so that they could provide the required expertise and training to the budding cricketers.

SLC has many departments, and much work is done to develop the sport at all levels. Can you elaborate on this?

We have many departments; Administration, Marketing, IT, Media, Anti-Corruption, Security, Human Resources and the National Development Center. Each Department has performed individually to contribute as a whole to Sri Lanka Cricket.

SLC has been investing in developing and promoting women's cricket and as such the Women's Cricket Development Program has seen financial and operational support that will launch positive momentum for the Sri Lankan Women's Team to perform well.

Infrastructural improvements are also a key priority for SLC and we have worked closely with the Districts and Provinces to distribute cricket material and ground maintenance equipment to the entities that are in urgent need of these supplies. The National Development Center of SLC has also completed the construction of 200 side concrete wickets. The stadium development initiative saw the renovation of playing fields island-wide to maintain the required standards.

Our Brain Center captures the data from videos and provides analyzed information, which is given to our coaches. This is not only for international cricket but also for domestic cricket. This is a totally new area of expertise. Technology is now a major part of cricket.

The Cricket Museum was opened in February 2019 in Colombo. The Museum has dedicated sections focusing on Sri Lanka's Test Cricket, ODIs, T20 and also the pre-test era. With the establishment of the Museum Sri Lanka Cricket, is able to display the 1996 World Cup to the public on a regular basis, along with the 2014 T20 World Cup and the ICC World Champions Trophy 2002, which was jointly won by Sri Lanka and India.

The National Team, 'A' Team, Emerging Team, Under-19 and the Women's Team participated in outbound tours and various tournaments where they performed well. This included the National Team's participation in the ICC World Cup.

How is the rapport between the Sri Lankan players and the Board?

There is a very good rapport between the players and the cricket officials. We look after their needs and support them fully. I am very strict with discipline therefore we expect the players to deliver their best performance. We have very good communication and coordination with our players.

Many of the national players do not play for clubs or they tend to miss the matches. Can you elaborate on the discipline instilled in the team?

The national players do not have much time to play for the clubs because they are always on tour. We are starting domestic cricket from the first week of August and all of them are free at this time, therefore everyone will play in those matches.

Can you tell us the relationship between SLC, ICC and other cricket boards?

As I am the ICC director for Sri Lanka Cricket we are maintaining an excellent relationship with all other countries, especially India.

What made you organize the Sri Lanka Premier League at this time?

Thanks to our Government's efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the country, we find this a good opportunity to deviate the attention away from other T20 tournaments in the world and to focus on our own T20 games. Presently, we are the only team in the world that will play the T20. India is starting the IPL but there will be a lot of issues in the UAE due to COVID-19. The ICC has great respect for our country. We are optimistic about the success of this initiative. The 'new normal' has had an immense impact on the game. Prior to the pandemic we were not able to get a good deal for the television rights for the matches. However, today we have received much better offers. Countries such as West Indies, Pakistan and Ireland have not been able to secure television rights. We have been very fortunate.

Cricket is always in the limelight with many ups and downs. What are the

lessons learnt through these endeavors?

Any sport is a challenge. If you are a top sportsman and if you lose you need to have the courage to rise up. SLC will take on any challenge and be successful.

We need finances for the game. The team's sponsorship, media and ground rights have expired for which we are in the process of securing funds. For the next three years if we maintain our finances to a similar capacity, our finances will amount to 30 million dollars from which we can run all the operations as well as domestic cricket smoothly. We can also further develop the game.

You have been a sports administrator; can you elaborate on your experiences?

In club cricket, I am the second most experienced administrator in terms of my years spent in the field compared to Michael de Zoysa. Apart from Ranjith Fernando I have been in the club for almost 35 years. I continue to be the president of the Gymkhana Club for almost ten years. My club plays cricket, rugby, hockey, squash and tennis. It is a challenge to handle a multi-sports club but I believe that Gymkhana is doing really well. The experience I have garnered at the club is enough to run any sports association.

Can you tell us about yourself? You have been a cricketer yourself and also a national squash player.

I started my career playing badminton and I was champion in the under 12 category, for the Colombo district. Then my school wanted me to take part in athletics. I started with putt-shot, discus and javelin throw events. From the under 14 -19 category I held most of the national records and public school records. In the under 17 category I won Sri Lankan national level for javelin, putt-shot and discus on the same day.

I started playing cricket when I was 17. I captained cricket at Nalanda College, Colombo in 1980. I captained test players such as Sanath Kaluperuma and Keerthi Ranasinghe. Then I joined the Colombo Cricket Club. I captained CCC in 1983 to 1984. When I was 25 I started playing squash. Within two years, I became Sri Lanka's number one and two. From there on I became a national player and went on to win a bronze medal at the SAF games. Later I became the national coach for squash. I was appointed as manager and coach of Sri Lanka squash for

the Commonwealth Games. However, through all these sporting feats, I was still involved in the Gymkana Club (CCC) for cricket and that is what led to my position at SLC.



You are the first person to modernize a club. Can you elaborate on that?

Gymkana has grown on many levels. When I was Vice President, funding from our main sponsors became limited. I thought it would be a difficult time and so we sought other ways to increase our finances. I constructed the building without any debt to any bank. We spent about 25 million for rugby as well as cricket. The rental income of the building aids in financing all the sporting operations and it has paid off very well. We will further improve our standards and prominence of the club.

Way forward?

We have taken many initiatives for Sri Lankan Cricket that the public is not

aware of, as we have not marketed or given publicity to these endeavors as well. In the cricketing fraternity, we are doing an immense amount of work to assist our stakeholders and improve the infrastructure.

In the past, there were factions within the community but I do not think this will continue in the future. We have become a more united front. People will elect individuals based on whom they see competent to fit the role. In my position as SLC President I will always support what is best for Sri Lanka Cricket.