

Two Sri Lankan records were established at the 'Mecca' of cricket this year by two Sri Lanka players, i. e. the ex-captain and the current captain. One was Kumar Sangakkara who was given the rare honor of delivering the Collin Cowdrey oration. To be invited to the Lords ground in London itself would thrill any cricketer. The other is current captain Tilakaratne Dilshan who made the highest score on that ground by a Sri Lankan player overtaking 190 runs made years ago by Sidath Wettamuni. However it is the performance of Sangakkara that became the talk of the town.

Apparently the first to take note of it was the Minister of Sports in the island. He had called for a report on the speech for some reason or other. There is nothing strange about a minister calling for a report on something that took place under his area of operation. What makes this request or order interesting is the fact that he had been worried about the contents of Sangakkara's speech.

To put the situation in simple words, Sangakkara called the spade a spade. No other cricketer would have easily made such a decision to come out with the truth about sports in the country as he did. Everyone is aware of the true position of cricket and all other sports in Sri Lanka. It

is the unholy intrusion of politics into practically every aspect of life in the county whether it has any relevance or not. What is worrying is that no one thinks of correcting the position as a result of which all sports suffer frustrating both the sports persons and sport administrators. Arjuna Ranatuna, the cricket captain who led the Sri Lanka team to victory at the World Cup finals at Lahore in 1996 had

highlight a constant irritation to sports activities, then one ought to thank him for drawing attention to the issue at a time a minister is agitated because of Sangakkara's comments.

Those living in Australia have seen how politicians operate within bounds, making an occasional comment when they find something not welcome in their view. Even on such occasions they have to accept the deci-

intended to find fault with individuals, but his remarks did hit the nail for all to take note of. What he said about his sport is sadly true of all sports activities in the country.

There have been politicians functioning as cricket administrators however, and doing a fantastic job in bringing the game into a respectable position. Two names in particular come to mind, that of two politicians from opposing camps. The first such politician to take over the Presidency of the Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka was the veteran leftist Dr. N. M. Perera, who understood his role well and did not play politics while carrying out his duties in that capacity. In fact, I remember the cricketer to succeed him in the job, Major General Russell Heine remarking about his relations with the then President of Sri Lanka J. R. Jayewardene. According to Russell, J. R. had telephoned N. M. and assured him of all necessary support in



## CRICKETING LESSONS



improving the game of cricket. Russell Heine later succeeded N. M. as the next President and did a wonderful job. Although he was the former Army Commander, his credentials as a cricketer were beyond question, having represented the country at international competitions. N. M. Perera on the other hand, was one of the school boy cricketers who led their

said that Sri Lanka lost the last World Cup due to the interference of Mahinda Rajapakse. Whether this was said just to spite the President who is his political rival or with sincere intentions we cannot be certain and I am not aware of such interference last time around. If he wanted to

highlight a constant irritation to sports activities, then one ought to thank him for drawing attention to the issue at a time a minister is agitated because of Sangakkara's comments.

This separation of duties and responsibilities is best illustrated when a team for a tour is selected. There would be quite a few ex-cricketers expressing their disappointment or even anger on the process or the final outcome, but politicians keep their opinion to themselves. They know their limits. We saw the spectacle of former Prime Minister of Australia John Howard, who was even endorsed by his political opponents, being frustrated in his bid to become the next ICC head. No politician was able to influence the decision of cricket authorities.

Arjuna Ranatunga's grievances started with his failure to get appointed as Minister of Sports under Rajapakse government as he expected. Whether he could have delivered the goods if he was given the opportunity is anyone's guess. I do not think a minister should be an expert on the subject he is going to handle, but he or she must invariably have the capacity and dedication to fully grasp what has to be done. Sri Lanka has suffered for the lack of that quality in many of its ministers who get the job for various other reasons. One shining example of an exception to this usual pattern was perhaps the M. P. appointed as minister of plantation industries buy Mrs. Bandaranaike, Colvin R. de Silva. Getting into a completely foreign area this legal luminary lost no time in mastering the subject. In fact it has been said that he was even able to advise his experts serving under him.

One cannot hope for that type of brilliance from all novices coming into office. However it is reasonable to expect a minister to be able to do justice to the persons involved in the various activities coming under his purview. With no intention to cast doubts on the capacity of current holder of the job of sports, it must be said that the performance of Minister of Sports has not been at all impressive. Sangakkara would not have

school teams in the game. He was captain of Ananda College team in his day.

Perhaps the best example of politician turned cricket administrator was the senior UNP man Gamini Dissanayake, who really did bring up Sri Lankan cricket to world standards, a fact recognized by even his political opponents. The above two politicians at least, proved that politicians are able to do justice to cricket or any other sport. Only ingredient required is the understanding of the role he or she has to play and absolute integrity in carrying out one's duties in that role. What is required is to draw the dividing line between sports and politics which everyone concerned must strictly observe without trying to throw one's political weight around. What was seen in reaction to Sangakkara's remarks made at his Lord's oration is tantamount to the behavior of an agitated politician who cannot stand criticism and not that of a sober and experienced sports administrator. Sadly though that is exactly the opposite of what even a minister administering cricket or any other sport ought to display. In the case of a politician this quality should stand out as an example for others to follow.

In this respect Sri Lanka has to go a long way in order to keep up with the rest of the world. What one cannot ignore is the fact and the need for any country taking part in world sports has invariably to observe rules and standards acceptable to the international organizations and sports - lovers. When the rest of the world is seriously leaving the administration and control of all sports in the hand of those who are competent and experienced in the respective areas, one solitary country cannot take a different approach to it and then hope for recognition and acceptance in the field of international tournaments or competitions. We remember how the international community wanted to punish South Africa during the Apartheid era by banning all its teams from taking part in any of the sports coming under the purview of international bodies. We also cannot forget how one of Sri Lanka's most respected cricketers, Bandula Warnapura lost his opportunity and place in

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