

OMEGA

PROLOGUE

THURSDAY, 7TH APRIL, 2016

AND IT'S A SIX

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“And it’s a SIX”, screamed Harsha Bhogle.

“Chennai Superkings have done it again. It is that magic man Mahendra Singh Dhoni who hit the last ball from Shane Watson into the stands for a thundering six. It was the helicopter shot again. Steve Smith cannot believe what has happened. The last over has yielded 23 runs. Dhoni hit the last two balls for sixes to take Chennai to their third IPL title. What a match!! Rajasthan Royals thought they had this match in the bag; till the best finisher in the history of limited overs international cricket single-handedly took the match away from them. The stadium erupts as the man they adore played his last IPL match and won it for the Chennai Superkings. The Royals scored a stupendous 206 runs in twenty overs and it was always difficult for the Superkings to win it. At 77 for 7, with 130 runs required in the last 8 overs, nobody gave Chennai a chance. However, the captain cool, the indomitable Mahendra Singh Dhoni stood the challenge. He was ably supported by Pawan Negi. The match went down to the wire. Chennai finally finished with their noses ahead.”

I smirked at Harsh and Shaurya. Their heads were down and I laughed. Chennai had done it again. I was always a fan of the yellow tigers. While Harsh was a diehard fan of Rajasthan Royals, Shaurya was the most ardent fan of Kolkatta Knightriders. Chennai had disposed off Mumbai in the eliminator and defeated Kolkatta in the qualifier. Shaurya sought revenge and therefore supported Rajasthan Royals just to make sure that I did not make fun of both of them throughout the year. Throughout the match, they were on top, but the last over did them in.

The Indian Premier League gave more to our family than just a three hour entertainment bonanza every evening for the two months of summer. It was a family uniter. My bonding with both the boys grew manifold because of the IPL as it is popularly called. We had endless discussions about the teams and their players. We fought over the results; we celebrated the victories and felt ashamed when our team lost. We debated over the best player and the best team. As in all families, we were passionate about our teams. We defended them to the end; we hoped for them to win and we prayed for them. I realized that ultimately cricket was the winner. The Indian Premier League had brought more to the Indian fan than any other form of cricket had. It was a symbol of hope, a hope that every cricket fan had. The hope to play at the international level. It was a dream of every youngster that one day, and sooner than later, he would rub shoulders with the greats of the cricketing world. The A B De villiers and the Sunil Narines, the Kieron Pollards and the Glen Maxwells of the cricketing world would be there with them. Their heroes of the cricketing world, all flew down to the stadia of India and participated in the most entertaining cricketing event of the year. Even though the marketing and the merchandize had overshadowed the game, it was the real cricket in the stadia that brought excitement. The true fan always hoped to be a part of the IPL team. As was quoted by a very famous journalist, the IPL had brought the fans back to the stadiums. This was the first time in international history that a domestic cricket event had garnered such a huge following both within the country and across the globe.

At that moment, Harsha Bhogle interrupted my reverie. He was back with the post-match presentations. Harsha was

arguably, the best commentator in the world. He mixed a very technical analysis (I am sure he cannot take the IIM-Ahmedabad out of him ever) with the enthusiasm of a die-hard fan of cricket with such élan that he reminded me of Peter Roebuck, the deceased English cricketer turned columnist, unarguably the most eloquent writer that cricket had ever seen. Harsha's ever smiling face and his infectious laughter was as much a draw to be glued to the television as much as the cricket itself.

Harsha - "MS (as Mahendra Singh Dhoni was popularly addressed), this was your last match of the IPL, It was only fair that your team which had dominated the IPL for 9 seasons put the final stamp on the trophy. How did you feel today holding the trophy and also single-handedly taking the team to the title?"

MS - "I felt a mix of emotions. Of course, I was very happy with the way things finished here today. Rajasthan were always a tough side to beat, and once they got that huge total, it was a difficult task. However, Twenty20 is such a game that a couple of good overs and you are back in the game. When we needed 23 runs in the last over, I knew that we had a chance. You see, Harsha, if you looked at the some of the last ball finishes in world cricket, you would notice that the advantage lay with the batting side. Right from the time that Javed Miandad hit Chetan Sharma for that last ball six in Sharjah (Indian cricket was never the same after that match. For a good 25 years till India beat Pakistan in the 2011 world cup semi-final at Chandigarh, Indian cricket always felt bullied by Pakistan), or even depicted in our movies (Lagaan being the most famous) or in our advertisements (Amul Coffee), the last ball would be hit for the required six. All of

us anticipate such a scenario. We want the batting side to win; to see that ball soaring in the stands is just the perfect fantasy that all of us have. If you have ever dreamt of playing a match, you want these “last ball six” finishes. We are so much attuned to this fantasy of ours; we have replayed that so much in our heads, that it is easy to get the emotional strength behind us as a tailwind when we bat. When I hit Shane Watson for that six on the last ball, I was on automation; I was simply executing what I dreamt all along. That is my advice to all the batsmen who face this situation. Get that fantasy of yours into play. You have to execute what you have been so familiar with, all the time.

At the same time, I also felt sad. For me, the IPL was over. There was a satisfaction that I played to my fullest. However, cricket is my life. I am sad that I would not wear the yellow jersey again. I am hanging up my gloves, so to say. I love my team and all my fans. However, the past year was very trying. All the betting scandals and the spot fixing scandals that implicated Chennai and Rajasthan took a toll on me emotionally. I wish to take a break and then come back in a different role. I have a message to all my cricket buddies and fans. You can take Dhoni out of cricket but not the cricket out of Dhoni. I will be back. Till then, I urge all of you to carry on this sport in whatever way you can. Start the leagues in your apartments, schools, localities and cities. That is the best tribute you can pay to me and to cricket.”

Harsha Bhogle – “We end the presentation ceremony. A fitting end to the career of the best cricket captain of India. Mahendra Singh Dhoni has brought a swagger to Indian cricket. He charged the Indian cricket, whether international or domestic. He brought a certain pride to Indian cricket. He

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symbolized cricket with exciting finishes. I hope we can take his message to execution and inspire more cricket to flow from the grass roots.”

I was touched at the sight of this exciting career come to a glorious end. I had been a fan of MSD right from the time that he led India to that glorious victory in 2007 – the inaugural T20 International world cup in South Africa. Earlier in February that year, India had been unceremoniously dumped out of the ICC one day international World Cup in the West Indies. The uproar back home was huge. The Indian victory, especially over Pakistan in the 2007 T20 final was just the injection of life that Indian cricket needed. India never looked back after that. Under the stewardship of MS Dhoni, India reached the pinnacle of international cricket. India became a cricket superpower displacing Australia, England and South Africa.

Then I had this bright idea. I needed to inspire at least one cricket match as a tribute to Mahendra Singh Dhoni. What could be more exciting than to bring about a confluence of the ideals I had around me? I should inspire a Twenty20 match at Riverside school between the two grades which my children studied in. A match between Grade IV and Grade V would be an ideal situation for me. This would also give my children a chance to exhibit competitiveness between them in the public forum.

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PART ONE

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THE RIVERSIDE SCHOOL

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I wished I was born 30 years later than I was. It would have given me a chance to study in the Riverside school. Situated on the banks of the river Sabarmati, this amazing school has been a home to many a creative pursuit. Led by the charismatic Kiran Sethi, Riverside was a symbol of change for many a student and many a parent. I was associated with Riverside even before the birth of my children. Till date, I enjoy the ease of working with the teachers, the students and the parents alike. The “change culture” exemplified by Riverside took education system by storm. One thing that sets aside every Riverside student is attitude. Every student talks to you while looking up. It was not an unhealthy, narcissistic swagger. They wear their pride on their sleeves. They demanded acceptance for what they were. They excel in every field - education, sports (football to be more precise), drama, social service and creativity. There could not be a more ideal environment for a cricket T20 match than Riverside and more precisely between the two grades that my children studied in. I have two boys - Harshvardhan aged 10 in Grade V and Shauryavardhan aged 9 in Grade IV. Grades IV and V were close enough in age for a competitive match. I knew that it would be not 11 players on each side. It would be the entire grade that would rally behind their 11 buddies.

I decided to set up a competition in the school between my own children. As if the competitions in the buses while to and fro the school and in the classrooms were not enough. Most of the children in Riverside, as in other schools were occupied with playing cricket. Like every generation, they had their innovative ways to amuse themselves with the illusion of playing cricket. Our generation had the textbooks to play cricket. 2,4,6,8 on the units of the pages of the books were

the runs and 0 was the wicket. The pages were flipped and the unit number on the page was scored. This generation is however, clever with their hands. They have extremely fast twists of the fingers for runs and wickets. They played “ODD-EVE”. Using their fingers, they scored 12 runs off a ball and took wickets as well. I had an instant allergy to the words “odd, eve”. Every time I heard those words, a certain anger triggered in my head. To resolve a dispute, to pass time in the car, or in a restaurant, “odd eve” dominated my children’s lives. 24/7, my children’s hands twisted. While day dreaming, having a bath, eating food or studying, one hand would be twisting in gestures – bowling or batting. I tried to play it, with resounding failure. I scored 10 to 12 runs and when they batted, they would finish them in 2 balls. It was time to set this correct. They should have an experience which they would see as the ‘real cricket’.

I called up a few classmates from both the grades the next day – Friday 8th April, 2016. Harsh invited Garv (they are actually inseparable, Harsh would not do anything without Garv and likewise), Mayank, Sraj, Joey, Adi and Ashutosh. Shaurya invited Aarav, Aadit, Shlok, Dhruv, Arjun, Maanit, Aum and Krish. I suggested they play one grade versus another in football. They were thrilled. I assumed there would be a unity within the grade and a sense of competition against the other grade. However, surprisingly there was the lack of unity within the grade itself. Surely, a victory against the other grade was a good enough motivation for them to unite, even to make compromises. The infighting within the grades was quite disappointing. Their need to win was overcome by a narcissistic need to perform better and show off their singular effort. Their competition was not limited to the other grade,

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it was more within their own grade. They needed to outdo not only the opposite camp; they needed to do better than their own teammates. It was evident in the way that they took free kicks, throw-ins, penalty kicks, refused to pass the ball and celebrated a goal. This phenomenon was more in grade IV than in grade V. Maybe age had settled the fifth graders. But that could not be the only factor. The competitiveness within grade IV was appalling. They played solitary even though they were in a team. On the other hand, the kind of empathy displayed by grade V was quite a revelation. I decided to test this observation again in a game of cricket.

I had them play 2 matches. The first match was between grades IV and V. In the second match, I mixed the players from both the grades so that there was a balanced contest with both teams having players from each grade. The phenomenon which I had observed in the football game resurfaced again in the game of cricket as well. In the first match played between the grades, the competition within the team was very much apparent. They wanted to bat first and bowl first. Again this was exhibited more in grade IV children than in grade V children. The children of grade V exhibited more security as far as the bowling or batting order was concerned. They were concerned about the injury to a team member as well. However, an interesting phenomenon happened when the children were mixed for the second match. Both the teams had children from each grade. I expected that the affinity the fifth graders had towards their team members would be transferred to their new team members. However, surprisingly, while the fourth graders in each team started displaying more affinity for their new team members, i.e. looking up to the fifth graders in their teams for

support and guidance, the fifth graders still had affinity for their original team members, i.e. towards the other fifth graders in the opposite team rather than towards the fourth graders in their own teams. Their own sense of team cooperation was shaken up and they behaved more as individuals rather than team members in the second match.

Surely, there was something more than simple behavioural economics here. This seemed to be a very significant developmental phenomenon. Age, socio-economic status, intelligence, body size, emotional security, empathy, love of sport and various other factors could play a role in this phenomenon of team ownership. However, could a factor of “ground reality” also play a role in this? Did exposure to “reality” change the understanding of self and team spirit? I was reminded of the famous Shah Rukh Khan movie – Chak De India, and the way that Kabir Khan (played by a very restrained Shah Rukh Khan), the coach of the Indian women’s hockey team brings about a very emotional team cohesiveness by exposing them to “real situations”. If my hypothesis of the effect of “real cricket” was correct, team cohesiveness would be tested in a match between both the grades.

Armed with this experience, I approached Kiran on Saturday, 9th April 2016, to host a match between Grade IV and Grade V. She was amused when she heard my proposal. She said it was exciting and a great opportunity to bring about a bonding for the grades. She immediately agreed. However, she had a few requests. Firstly, she wanted the match to be organized in a proper stadium. Secondly, the teachers would not be involved in any preparations or decisions. All the teachers would support through their presence on the day of the

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match, but the Riverside staff would not get into the selection process of the teams or the organization of the match. While the match should be organized under the Riverside banner, the parents of both the grades should help in all the arrangements. Thirdly, the match could only be organized on 17th April, 2016. The school would close on 15th April for the summer break. And the match should be held on Sunday 17th April. Fourthly, she was very insistent that the entire grade, each child had to be involved rather than just the eleven players for this to be truly called a Riverside match. I agreed. I was left with only seven days to organize everything. It was a huge challenge, however, I did not want to let go of the opportunity.

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DAY 1, SUNDAY, 10TH APRIL, 2016

THE TWO TEAMS

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When I announced this news to Harsh and Shaurya, they were thrilled. They were excited to face each other in a cricket match. However, they realized that it was going to be a huge task to organize this match and make it a success. I called a meeting of all the parents and the students of Grade IV and Grade V at Riverside on Sunday morning. I sent a mail to everyone explaining the purpose of the meeting and requested mandatory presence. Surprisingly, all the children, with at least one parent, if not both the parents, came to Riverside. This was always the feature of Riverside. Whenever an event was organized, either by the school or any parent(s), all the other parents pitched in. They were there in full attendance, to learn, to participate, to help, to question, to contribute and to make up the numbers. On top of it, this was the first event in the history of parent meetings in Riverside, where the fathers outnumbered the mothers. In most of the parent meetings, generally the mothers outnumbered the fathers (the caveat here is that even though the mothers outnumber the fathers, on an absolute basis and even on a percentage basis, the number of fathers attending parent meetings far outnumbered the same comparison with other schools). However, today, there were 52 fathers in the meeting. All of them except one had responded to the mail. (Did I not mention earlier that, cricket will unite everyone in India? Anecdotally, it was said, that the captain of the Indian cricket team was the 3rd most powerful man in India, after the Prime Minister of India and the Editor of the Times of India newspaper.)

Darshan – “Dear parents and children of grade IV and grade V. I thank all of you for coming here today. I am very grateful to you for being here to support our children in this

endeavour. As I had outlined in my mail, we are here to host on behalf of Riverside, a T20 cricket match between Grade IV and Grade V. We have only a week to sort out all the issues so that we can host a very successful cricket match. I wish that all of us make the decisions together. The first task here would be to select the two teams. Now, team selection can be a very tricky affair.....”

Sudhir Ghodke – “Hey Darshan, Sorry to interrupt you here. I must thank you for this brilliant idea. All of us have to contribute. When we form the teams, there are eleven players are on the field and the entire grade is in the match. We should not look at this match as between 22 players alone. The game of cricket needs to be played in its true spirit. Individuals will always perform, but this is a team effort. All of us are here because we belong to either of grades IV or V. This sense of belonging is our strength. These eleven players are our choices to represent our grades. There should be no pride on who the captain is and who is selected or not. All of us contribute based on our abilities whether on the field or off it. I urge all the students and parents to select the best eleven players to represent the respective grade. There is no favouritism to anyone. The only basis for their selection is their cricketing ability. All of you suggest names and we discuss. After that, we distribute the rest of the organizing tasks as well.”

Paresh Mittal – “Well said, Sudhir, I suggest that you become the motivational guide for this match. These children need a lot of help to keep their motivations up. I suggest you talk to both the teams every day and keep their spirits up.”

Sudhir – “Ok, I love the job”.

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Ashish Nagpal – “Let us start with the team captain selection. I suggest Mayank Lalchandani for the captain of grade V and Aadit Desai for the captain of grade IV.”

Shilpa Patel – “Why do you say that, Doc?”

Ashish – “I saw both of them play at my house and at school. They are both, the most natural athletes. When Aadit is on the ground, he is completely engrossed in the game. He just loves playing outdoor games. Whether it is football or cricket, he moves from one part of the ground to the other with effortless ease. He throws off his footwear and becomes one with the ground. Whether it is the grass on the lawns, or the Kahaani football ground or the concrete surface at our home, he can go barefoot from one side to the other in no time. He naturally anticipates the opponents’ actions and his focus on his game speaks volumes about his natural talent. His ever present laughter on the field is a huge bonus. He really enjoys the sport. For Mayank, when he plays with Adi and his other friends, you can see him really light up. One day, when all of these children were playing cricket, he got hit twice on his leg. It was really painful, he had tears in his eyes, but, he went on and on. Give him a ball; whether a football or a cricket ball and see the genius in him come out. He can dribble around the most skilled players. With a cricket ball, his yorker deliveries are very deadly. He is probably the best bowler that grade V has right now. He too plays barefoot. So, both these boys should be the best players to lead their respective squads.”

I looked around and saw that everyone nodded their heads in agreement. Nehal Desai and Kiran Lalchandani beamed at the description of their children.

SHAURYAVARDHAN & HARSHVARDHAN

Sanjit Lavsi – “The captains are settled. Who is next? Wicketkeepers?”

Mayank – “For grade V, I want Joey.”

Aadit – “For grade IV, I want Shauryavardhan as the wicketkeeper.”

Everyone mumbled their approval.

Maulesh Patel – “I propose Aarav Gupta and Shlok Lavsi as two more players from grade IV. They are really hardworking players. They practice and take coaching. They are probably the most motivated players for all sports.”

Pravin Pathak – “The corresponding players in grade V are Garv Mittal and Aarsh Patel. Very dedicated and inspired to do well.”

The nominations continued. In this way, from grade IV the players selected were Aadit Desai, Shauryavardhan Shah, Aarav Gupta, Shlok Lavsi, Vishwas Kankaria, Kanishk Kankaria, Maanit Patel, Dhruv Harivallabhdas, and Krish Shodhan.

From grade V the players were Mayank Lalchandani, Joey Rao, Garv Mittal, Aarsh Patel, Sraj Patel, Priam Rao, Ashutosh Pathak, Aryan Shah, and Adi Nagpal.

So far nine players got selected for each team. The selections were unanimous. The nucleus of the team was formed. Two more spots were up for grabs for each team. Now, it was the turn of the fringe players. At this age, the good players were all-rounders. They bowled and batted. The fringe players were to complete the eleven. The cricketing abilities would

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not distinguish them apart. When the core ability was almost equally matched, the pride of being selected was an important boost to the ego. I was glad Shauryavardhan was selected. But there was a worry on Harshvardhan's face. His name was not nominated till now. So far, all the parents and children had followed an unsaid rule. They had not suggested any of their own sons, or their closest friends. Every selection was meritorious. I was also a bit tense. It would be a tough week ahead if Harsh did not get selected.

Pranay Desai – “The selection competition gets intense now. Much as I hate to admit, all of us want our child to be on the team. It is not a matter of pride, but one of relief. While Riverside has this great attitude of respecting every child equally, whether on the team or on the support staff, it is not wrong to feel left out if you are not on the team. This is the biggest event of the year. This is the first time that Riverside is hosting an intergrade cricket match. The prestige issue of representing your grade is high. These are your peers. Children you meet every day. Therefore your participation and performance counts.”

Pranay echoed thoughts and feelings on the minds of most parents. Much as I wanted to remain neutral, I felt exactly what he described. I struggled to neutralize that feeling. Sadly, there were only two more places on each team. There were more contenders. There was no way to have a team of more than eleven players. That would take all the fun out of the game.

Kunal Shah - “May I suggest that my son Arjun will not contend for the team.”

There was a hush around the ground. For the first time, a parent had actually talked about his son, but for taking him out of the equation. It was a start, and could be followed up by more sacrifices.

Amit Gupta - “I suggest we appoint Arjun as the umpire from grade IV. He is the most neutral boy in the grade. I trust him completely to use his judgement neutrally for both the grades.”

Teena Jain – “I know that this is a boys’ only match, but I wish that Sudena becomes the umpire from grade V. She is a cricket fanatic. She watches all the matches. She has attended all the IPL matches held in Ahmedabad. She is a Rajasthan Royals fan. She knows all the cricket rules. She is also very neutral in her judgement.”

The atmosphere had changed. Parents became more emphatic about their wards taking up positions. So far, whether it was in Coffee at Riverside or Artist in Residence programs at Riverside, the school teachers chose the participants. The school invited applications from all the students for various positions. Based on their interviews, their talents and their presentations, they chose the participants. However, this time it was different. The parents were involved. The parents of Riverside were no different from the children. They were expressive, independent-minded and proactive. It was a reverse rub-off. The children’s attitude reflected off their parents. However, they were also accommodating and fair. Their maturity enabled them to be realistic and practical. I was fascinated by what was happening. It was quite an interesting day.

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Aditi Mittal – “Way to go Teena, let there be a participation of girls too. I second that suggestion. Sudena should be the umpire from grade V.”

Maharashree Munshaw – “I don’t agree. Let this be a boys’ only match. Are we going to get girls on the team as well? It will destroy the tempo. The boys may want to get rough. They may feel awkward with girls on the field. It will take away the competitiveness. I am not being chauvinistic here. Just being practical. I have the fullest respect for Sudena and her moral and neutral behaviour, and an equal respect for her cricket knowledge and umpiring ability. However, I feel that letting this be a boys’ slugfest would be more exciting for them.”

Geetika Gupta– “I emphatically want the girls’ participation. The entire class needs to participate. We should be gender neutral. This sport is played by girls and boys at an international level. There are many girls here who are interested in cricket, follow cricket avidly, and also play equally well if not better than the boys.”

I felt my gut tighten. There were 15 boys in grade V. I had counted out Vansh. Aryan Ganotra had not come. That left 13 boys in the fray. Harshvardhan would be very very unlucky if he did not get chosen in the 11 out of 13 boys. However, Aditi, Teena and Geetika brought up an entirely new point. There were many athletic girls in both the grades. If the girls entered into the teams, it would be a very competitive situation for Harsh to get selected.

There was a buzz around the ground. Couples discussed animatedly about this point. If this went through, then we would have to recast the entire teams again. I looked at the

side. Kiran, Geet Sethi, Meera (Grade IV teacher), Jyoti (Grade V teacher), Nandini (Key stage 2 coordinator), Nikita, Jhanvi and a few teachers stood and observed. They were here to oversee. They had declined to play any decisive role in this match. They were very interested in the proceedings as this was the first intergrade event. I chanced to see Mayank and Aadit in a discussion. Mayank nodded his head in agreement to what Aadit said.

Aadit – “Dear parents, I have discussed this issue with Mayank. As captains of the two teams, we wish only boys in the playing eleven. Aditi aunty and Geetika aunty, with due respect to your suggestions, we accept that many girls would be eligible for being on the team; however we want only boys for the teams. In return, we are ready to have girls as the support staff and as umpires as well. If we are able to successfully execute this event, we promise to have the next event with a mixed team of boys and girls. Sudena can become the umpire. We do not have any objection to that. But we request you for an all-boys team for the playing eleven.”

Hmm. This was support coming from unexpected quarters. There was a discussion again. Aditi started to say something, but then saw Garv plead with her to agree with Aadit. The players who were already selected wanted a very competitive show off. Was it just that, or was there a sense of favouritism going on? Had the calculations which went through my mind also gone through Garv’s mind? Was he batting for Harshvardhan on the team? As soon as Aditi saw the pleading look on Garv’s face, she gave way. She did not say anything.

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Sudena – “Ok, I will be the umpire from grade V. We should agree to have a boys' only team.”

All the boys started clapping. There was a visible relief on the boys' faces. Those who were selected and those who were hoping to be selected.

Rutu Lavsi – “Let us get back to the teams then. I nominate Rohansh.”

Rohansh was Deepa Dattani's son. Deepa was a teacher for Riverside and had taught both the grades in grade II and grade III.

Deepa – “Rohansh is a very good player. However, he has just recovered from a bacterial infection. He will not be able to participate for 4 hours in a cricket match. I thank Rutu for nominating Rohansh. I recommend Adit Patel in place of Rohansh. I have seen him play. He is a good batsman and an excellent fielder. I think we should choose Adit.”

Aadit piped in – “I want Adit Patel in my team.”

Aarav said – “And I want Aum Adhyaru.”

Surabhi Mehta – “Ok. Then the team is settled.”

The grade IV team got done. They had their eleven. Now it was the turn of the grade V fringe players. The selection process had definitely gotten very hot.

Neelma Nagpal – “I vote for Harshvardhan.” He is not very adept at fielding, but his enthusiasm is a must for grade V. He is very cheerful and motivates everyone. He will bring a

calming effect if there are any conflicts on the field between the players.”

Harshvardhan’s face was tense. He had observed what had happened in the previous five minutes. He anticipated some objection. But fortunately, there was none. He had made the team. A wave of relief passed over my face. I felt the joy of someone who has gone through an excruciating wait to be crowned king and then got the reward. Both Harsh and Shaurya had made their respective teams. While I hoped that the best team would win and everyone would perform according to their best ability, the fact that both Harsh and Shaurya would be competing on the field and not split between the field and the audience gave me a great joy.

It was time for the final player to be chosen.

Mayank – “I want Raj on my team.”

The final player got chosen. Both teams were complete.

Mahavir Kankaria – “We have the playing eleven. We should have a few players additionally in both the teams. Even though we have only 20 overs for each team to play, we need to factor in injuries. We will need substitutes. I suggest we have a team of fourteen players each. If any change is needed from the teams selected here, the captains can make those changes.”

That would accommodate almost everyone. The boys who had not been selected had a chance to show their performance and earn a place in the final eleven if available.

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Shimul Harivallabhdas – “Let us give a chance to Prithvi Zaveri and Mohammed Kakiwala to be the 12th and 13th players of the Grade IV team.”

Dharmesh Harivallabhdas – “Kushan Mehta also. That will complete the fourteen player team for Grade IV.”

Pragnesh Patel – “For grade V, put Vivaan Chiripal on the substitute list. If Aryan Ganotra is available later in the week, he can be the other substitute. We can go with a team of thirteen players at the moment.”

Things were falling in place fast now. The boys were settled. Yet, the entire class had to be accommodated. This event needed the feminine touch as well.

Bhavesh Kabra – “Can we have a strategist cum coach for each team? For grade V, I suggest Suryaja Patel. She can plan very well. She enjoys the respect of the entire class.”

Anita Devnani – “We can have Preyaa Patel as the coach for grade IV. She is very smart.”

Both got accepted.

We still had to plan for the various other verticals.

It was two hours into the meeting. Cheerleaders, commentators, statisticians, audience management, food management, physiotherapists and so on were debated and allotted. At the end of it, we worked out the involvement for all the students of grade V and grade IV.

GRADE IV

1. Aadit Desai - captain
2. Shauryavardhan - wicketkeeper
3. Aarav Gupta – all rounder
4. Shlok Lavsi – all rounder
5. Kanishk Kankaria - bowler
6. Vishwas Kankaria - bowler
7. Maanit Patel - batsman
8. Dhruv Harivallabhdas - batsman
9. Adit Patel - batsman
10. Krish Shodhan - batsman
11. Aum Adhyaru - batsman
12. Prithvi Zaveri - substitute
13. Mohammed Kakiwala - substitute
14. Kushan Mehta - substitute
15. Umpire – Arjun Shah
16. Strategist cum coach– Preyaa Patel
17. Commentator – Shanaya Mehta
18. Commentator – Adya Sarin
19. Statistician/scorer – Tara Ghodke
20. Physiotherapist – Rene Shukla
21. Cheerleader – Tansi Devnani
22. Cheerleader – Kiera Gopalia
23. Food management – Dhrishti Agrawal
24. Audience Management – Rohansh Dattani
25. Media Management – Aahan Arya
26. Documentation – Dhvani Agrawal

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GRADE V

1. Mayank Lalchandani - captain
2. Harshvardhan - all-rounder
3. Garv Mittal - all-rounder
4. Sraj Patel – all-rounder
5. Joey Rao - wicketkeeper
6. Ashutosh Pathak - all-rounder
7. Aarsh Patel - all-rounder
8. Raj Thakkar - batsman
9. Priam Rao - batsman
10. Adi Nagpal - all-rounder
11. Aryan Shah - batsman
12. Vivaan Chiripal – substitute
13. Aryan Ganotra - substitute
14. Umpire – Sudena Chandnani
15. Strategist cum coach – Suryaja Patel
16. Statistician/scorer – Tanyaa Dalal
17. Commentator – Nargis Kachramathur
18. Commentator – Radha Mehra
19. Physiotherapist – Amira Munshaw
20. Cheerleader – Vansh Rajwani
21. Cheerleader – Dhwanit Jain
22. Food Management – Aashvi Kabra
23. Audience management – Prachi Bhansali
24. Media management – Mansi Sabnani
25. Documentation – Raima Munshi
26. Stadium Management – Rani Jain
27. Stadium Management – Saumya Gupta

SHAURYAVARDHAN & HARSHVARDHAN

We came to the end of the first major task. It was tiring to say the least. We had involved all the children of both the grades. I was not sure that everyone went home satisfied. Some parents felt that their children were not getting to be at the centre. However, this had been a process conducted in a manner as democratic as it ever could be. Personally, I felt very victorious. Both the boys were in the team. I remembered that when Shaurya was selected in the Art spark plug, and Harsh was not, it was difficult to keep him focussed on his work when Shaurya was not there on those Wednesdays and Fridays. Harsh is very sporting. He would have taken an avid interest in the match, even if he was not in the team. However, he would have suffered a lot internally. I was sure that many children felt left out, but they would continue to contribute.

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DAY 2, MONDAY, 11TH APRIL 2016

SARDAR PATEL STADIUM

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The children were very excited when they went to school. They had cricket on their minds 24/7. We parents had a big task ahead of us. We had to still arrange for the stadium. I made phone calls to some friends who could help to reach out to GCA – the Gujarat Cricket Association. However, everywhere, I got the same answers. I needed some influence with Amit Shah – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stalwart or Narhari Amin – who wielded a lot of influence with the GCA. Both politicians were with Narendra Modi – the Prime Minister of India, away to the USA on a trip to promote the state of Gujarat. They arrived back on the Monday after and we could not utilize them before that. I felt dejected. How could we arrange a stadium now? I sent a mail to all the parents and all my contacts. It was a tough task. Understandably so. The stadium was unavailable for such intergrade school matches. If the association started granting such a request, it would be difficult to maintain the stadium and the pitches. Then I got a call from Maulesh Patel. He wanted me to meet him regarding the stadium. In an hour, I was at his office. Seated with Maulesh was Parthiv Patel – the gutsy former Indian wicketkeeper. Parthiv Patel who hails from Ahmedabad was one of the biggest beneficiaries of the Indian Premier League. He made a bold move into the Indian Cricket Team in England at the age of nineteen years. However, indifferent form saw him in and out of the Indian team. With the elevation of Mahendra Singh Dhoni as the captain, his chances of a re-entry into the team became almost non-existent. Then the IPL happened. The domestic players got a great boost. Parthiv demonstrated that he could score quite briskly as an opener. His stint with the Chennai Superkings gave him a new lease of cricketing life. He was already doing very well as the skipper of the Gujarat Ranji

cricket team. The IPL had brought him back in contention for the national games.

Maulesh and Parthiv were childhood pals. He requested Parthiv for the stadium. Parthiv responded splendidly. He, as the captain of the Gujarat cricket team, requested the Gujarat Cricket Association to consider the proposal from Riverside school parents to hold this interclass match. And they agreed. However, instead of the Sardar Patel Motera stadium, they offered us the Sardar Patel Stadium next to The Sports Club of Gujarat on Ashram road. It suited our purpose perfectly. It was a god sent gift. All of Kiran's conditions were fulfilled.

I immediately sent a mail to all the parents to come to the stadium at 5 pm on Monday with their children. We had a huge task to do. The venue had to be sorted out. The camps had to be set up for the two teams. Food, audience and media had to be managed. The equipment had to be sorted out and we needed a sponsorship for the entire event. Otherwise, the cost would be huge. If the parents had to contribute to the event effort financially, that might introduce complex elements into the organization of the game.

My next stop was to meet Amit Gupta. Amit is the head of a real estate conglomerate. He could handle the co-ordination of the sponsorship. I met Amit at his office. He was very happy about the organization of the match. When he heard the news that we had secured the Sardar Patel Stadium, he was thrilled. Before, I could talk to him about the sponsorship; he offered to take care of the expenses of the stadium and the organization of the event decorators on that day. I was speechless. This was turning out to be a fantastic day. Not only did he do that, he called up Sanjit Lavsi and

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asked him to manage the cricket equipment for the two grades. Sanjit was ready immediately. Within half an hour, we had secured the stadium, the sponsorship for the event management and the equipment. The evening was going to be a lot of fun.

All of us were together at the Sardar Patel Stadium at 5 pm. This time, there were even more people than just the parents of the children. Some of the grandparents, some aunts and uncles and some older siblings had joined in. There was a carnival like atmosphere in the air. We formed a core committee for organizing the cricket aspect. Bhavesh Kabra, Navdeep Kachramathur, Kunal Shah, Shiral Patel and Bijal Mehta took the responsibility of everything related to the cricket part. Bhavesh took charge of organizing the pitch. Navdeep called players from both the teams. He stood at the bowler's end and threw balls to each player for them. After the players had hit the ball 6-7 times each, he concluded that a 40 metre boundary would be optimum. There was a buzz of excitement around the ground. Bijal took up the equipment part. There was a lot of discussion on whether to use the tennis cricket balls or the tennis tennis balls. Using the tennis cricket ball had the danger of causing physical damage. Using the tennis tennis ball would make it difficult to hit the ball beyond a point. It could take the fun out of the match. However, safety first. So it was decided to use the tennis tennis balls. The final list of equipment stood as follows

1. Two pairs of stumps with LED lighting
2. Four bats – BDM and SG
3. Four tennis tennis balls – 2 per innings
4. 5 helmets
5. 6 pairs of pads

SHAURYAVARDHAN & HARSHVARDHAN

6. 6 pairs of gloves
7. Abdomen guards
8. Pelvic guards
9. Red T shirts and shorts for grade V
10. Black T shirts and shorts for grade IV
11. Blue T shirts and shorts for umpires

Except for the apparel, it was decided to use the equipment commonly between the two teams. It soon became eight pm. It was time to leave. Everyone committed to meet at the stadium the next day at 5 pm. Tuesday was a day of full team practice and to churn out strategies.

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DAY 3, TUESDAY, 12TH APRIL, 2016

GRADE IV UNITES

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In the morning, I went to Suresh Lalchandani's showroom. He is a jeweller of prominence. I requested him to sponsor the following –

1. The winner trophy
2. Medals for the winning grade
3. Medals for the losing grade
4. Man of the match
5. Best batsmen
6. Best bowler
7. Best fielder
8. Moment of the match.

He was very happy to do so. He suggested that he could get the names imprinted on the trophy and the medals for whoever wanted later. He would deliver this material by Friday.

5 pm brought everyone to the stadium. Sudhir wanted to talk to the players of both the teams. He called everyone to the centre of the stadium.

Sudhir – “Listen guys, I know that you want to play this match very much. However, I must tell you to follow certain rules. Otherwise, it would become meaningless.

The first rule is that this match has to be played with true sportsman spirit. Everyone has to commit to that. Is everyone in for honest play?”

“Yes!!” screamed the grade IV and grade V children.

Sudhir – “The second rule is that all the decisions of the umpires will be respected and obeyed. It is possible to make some mistakes or take some wrong decisions. However, both

the umpires are neutral and respect the importance of making a correct decision no matter for which grade it is. At the end of the day, one team will win and the other team will lose.

What is more important is how you play the game. Outcome always matters, but it is equally important to be respectful. Is that Ok?”

“Yes!!” screamed the grade IV and grade V children.

Sudhir – “The third rule is that there will be no bad language on the ground. We have seen on television, several cricketers mouthing obscene profanities and sledging the players of the opponent teams. There are a lot of dirty gestures. None of it should be there on Sunday. Is that noted?”

“Yes!!” murmured the grade IV and grade V children.

This time the voices were quite low compared to the earlier ones. A few boys looked down and giggled. They knew exactly what Sudhir meant. I was reminded about a few times when I had seen raw expression of emotions from the cricketers on television. The image that stood out was of Yuvraj Singh slamming his fist in the air, after hitting a century in a one day match and shouting out profanities to the maximum. On a 50 inch LED screen, his words were very much readable and much more deplorable. Much as I enjoy his cricket, I am disappointed with the way that Yuvraj shouts obscenities during live telecasts. Virat Kohli had also started emulating him and was admonished by the Indian cricket team management. The raw expression of emotions had increased a lot in the last few years. The success of the Indian cricket team had this one major negative effect. A lot of players had taken it to be their inborn right to express whatever they felt without regard to the sensitivities of the

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audience. The one exception to this was MS Dhoni. Though he always met the opposition in the eye, he was never brash or arrogant in his expressions.

Sudhir – “All of you should play for your team. It is not about individual performances. The game of cricket is bigger than the cricketer. All of you wish to leave a mark on this game. We all hope to play on the bigger ground in our life. But believe me, respecting the game and respecting each other is more appreciated. There will be good performances and excellent ones. However, the team which will win will be the one that plays as a unit and not just as isolated players. This is your chance to make compromises and sacrifices for the team benefit.”

While he said this, he looked towards the grade IV players. Sudhir was sending out a message. My experience was also the same. They needed to gel well as a unit. Otherwise it would be a great fiasco.

Sudhir – “I am available to all the players and parents if they want to talk to me for any difficulty. Play the match in the most competitive manner. May the best team win.”

There was a round of applause from the students and the parents. The two teams then dispersed to practice.

I went to the grade IV camp to check what they were doing. Preyaa had the ear of everyone. She drew a pitch on the ground and instructed the fielding positions. She had a notebook full of observations regarding each of the players of both grades. I was impressed. She had really done her homework well. Grade IV did not start practice that day. Preyaa wanted each player to contribute to the strategy. She

took notes and compared them to her own observations. She wanted each student, irrespective of whether they were playing or not, to speak.

Aadit – “Although I am the captain, each player is valuable. I want everyone to contribute. We play as one team. There will be joint decisions. I regard Sudhir uncle very highly. What he has told us is very right. We have never played as a team, and I want to win this match as a team. I want all of us to go by what Preyaa suggests as a strategy.”

Shlok – “I promise to play as a team player. If I am going wrong anywhere, please let me know.”

Aarav – “We should bowl first. It is easier to chase a target than to set one. The pressure of scoring runs first would be on them. We should restrict them under 100 runs. If we can do that, then we can win easily.”

Preyaa – “The toss will decide that. I will prepare the scenarios for both batting first and bowling first.”

Shauryavardhan – “We need to devise strategies for each of their players. Mayank and Garv are their star players. When they are bat, we should use our best bowlers. They have a long tail. It was evident from the team selection. If we can get Mayank and Garv early, then we have a good chance. Let us make a strategy for their star players.”

Preyaa – “Noted. I already had a plan for that. However, let us not get overconfident. They have good players like Sraj, Joey and Aarsh too.”

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I was quite amazed with her knowledge. She matched the boys word for word. They were lucky to have her as a strategist.

Vishwas Kankaria – “I will open the bowling”

Kanishk Kankaria – “I will be the second bowler.”

Maanit – “Aarav, Aadit and Shlok are our other three bowlers. We need a couple of back up bowlers as well. Krish Shodhan and Adit Patel can be the reserve bowlers.”

Dhruv – “Let us get the batting order straight. Who is going to open?”

Everyone was silent. They knew that Mayank and Garv would open the bowling. They were terrific bowlers. No one wanted to sacrifice their wicket. This was going to be a real test of their team spirit.

Preyaa – “Maanit and Aum will open the innings. Both of them will play out the initial overs from Mayank and Garv. Without any panic.”

Aum – “I don’t mind. I can play good defensive shots.”

Preyaa – “Aum, I want you to practice defensive shots for the next three days. Don’t play big shots. For that we have other players. If you can last out four overs from both the opening bowlers, you have done your job.”

It was amazing the way she cut across egos and went for the team’s benefit.

Adit Patel – “We need a solid middle order. So 3, 4 and 5 should be Aarav, Aadit and Shlok.”

It was clear that grade IV were heavily dependent on Aarav, Shlok and Aadit.

Krish – “No. I don’t think we should put all the best players in the middle. I suggest we keep Aarav and Shlok at 3 and 4. At 5, we should keep Vishwas. He can play a few shots and increase our run rate.”

Preyaa – “I agree. Aadit will go at 6.”

Prithvi – “May I speak?”

Aadit – “Of course. Prithvi, you are equally a team member.”

Prithvi – “Shauryavardhan should be number 7, Kanishk at number 8.”

Mohammed – “Then Dhruv at number 9, Adit Patel at 10 and Krish at number 11.”

Preyaa – “So our batting order is set. For the bowling, let us start with 2 overs each from Vishwas and Kanishk.”

Kushan – “Then Aarav and Shlok bowl two overs each. Shlok should complete his quota of 4 overs while Aadit bowls two more.”

Shanaya – “Aarav and Kanishk should complete their quota and the last 4 overs are between Aadit and Vishwas.”

Tara – “The bowling order is done. Where are you placing the fielders? We need to get the best fielders in the close up positions and the fast runners on the boundaries.”

Preyaa – “I have already marked all of that. We are going to play with a 4-5 field. Aarav, Shlok, Vishwas and Kanishk will

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be on the boundaries. Maanit and Dhruv will be on the off side. Krish, Adit and Aum will be on the on side. This is when Aadit is the bowler. And then whoever is bowling, Aadit will take his position.”

Kiera – “Only Aarav, Vishwas and Aadit should play aerial shots. All others should play ground shots. We need to practice for that. Otherwise we will end up giving catches to them.”

Preyaa – “Well said Kiera. That is very right. We should get our egos out of the way. Not try to hit sixes. If we score from ground shots, we can make a good total.”

Rohansh – “Look guys, I know that we have formed our side of the strategy, but we need to have a look at the other grade as well. Have you factored in their players? What Shaurya had mentioned is also to be looked at.”

Tansi – “Rohansh, how can we plan for that? We don’t know what their strategy is. If we go about planning for them, we have a lot of complexity. Let us keep it simple. Let us focus on ourselves only.”

Rene – “Ok guys, we have got the cricket sorted out. I advise you to start a proper nutrition. All of you should eat a lot of protein. All of you should practice running. You know how to play cricket. In the next one week, your cricket skills are not going to improve. What is needed is a lot of running. Try to catch and field the balls. Practice increasing your muscle strength.”

I looked with renewed respect at the entire grade. Rene had absolutely no experience of being a help of this nature, yet

she was very accurate. What was commendable was that the entire grade was speaking as one unit. Grade IV was coming together.

I looked at the other side. Grade V was playing. They were enjoying themselves. Suryaja talked to each one of them one by one. But as a whole, they were making merry on the ground. Mayank bowled in tandem with Garv. Harshvardhan and Sraj played catch. Joey and Ashutosh batted. Aarsh and Raj ran around the ground. Priam and Adi threw balls at the stumps. Aryan and Vivaan helped Suryaja with her strategy. Tanyaa and Nargis organized the camp. The grade seemed pretty chilled out. They left the strategy to Suryaja and enjoyed the atmosphere. Their relaxation was quite a contradiction to the precise planning of grade IV had. Both sides were doing the opposite of each other, yet they were right in their approaches. Sport is strange.

The day ended. We looked forward to the next day. We decided to meet at 5 pm again for practice.

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DAY 4, WEDNESDAY 13TH APRIL, 2016

LUCKED OUT

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Things had gone pretty smooth till now. I rode an amazing wave of luck. But Mr. Murphy was right. My luck had to run out.

It is unusual for Ahmedabad to have rains in April. However, since the last couple of years, the weather had changed dramatically. 2015 was the hottest year ever. Before this 2014 was the hottest year. Temperatures were higher throughout the year by a couple of degrees or more. Unseasonal rains had become common since the last two years. There was humidity in the air from the last two days. I hoped it was just a passing cloud and it would not rain. At 2 pm in the afternoon, a downpour started. What started as a small drizzle turned to a raging storm. It kept raining. The ground became very wet. Not only was there no practice possible on that day, if it rained the next day also, the match was in serious jeopardy. It was not possible to get the ground ready in two days' time. We had kept Saturday off. Since the match was on Sunday morning, we did not want to tire out the kids. We had only Thursday and Friday to set everything up. If it rained on Thursday, the pitch and the outfield would not be in a condition for the match to be played. Since this was not an international event, there was no provision of a super sopper to soak up the water. Even the pitch was not covered. I waited and prayed that the rain gods would relent.

I went to the stadium at 5 pm. I was not alone there. There were quite a few parents there as well. Dhrishti, Rohansh, Rani, Mansi, Prachi and Dhani were there with their parents. They braved the rains, with their raincoats and umbrellas. More children and parents came in. Their optimism was not shaken. They refused to be cowed down by the rains. It was not a denial. They went about their tasks irrespective of the

rains. The most surprising element was the presence of Vansh Rajwani. He went around the perimeter of the ground on his wheel chair and assessed what he would do as a cheerleader. A huge effort from him.

The rains slowed down a bit. By 8 pm, the rains abated. There was moistness in the air, but it had stopped raining. If the sun showed up on the next 2 days, we had a game on hand.

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DAY 5, THURSDAY, 14TH APRIL, 2016

NO PRACTICE

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I went to Kiran to update her of the progress on the match. She had mixed reactions. She was very happy that the match was organized with her conditions.

Kiran – “Well done, Darshan. In such a short period of time, it is a fantastic effort. I talked to Geet yesterday. He was pleasantly surprised. This will be a first for Riverside. To hold an interclass match in a national stadium is indeed a pleasure. I want this to be a huge success. I am quite happy with the way the parents have responded to the challenge. Geet and I are going to be there on that day. We may have a surprise or two for you. I am not going to tell you what, but if things go according to the plan, then Geet will give you a huge surprise.

However, there are two concerns I have. The first concern is that all the students are so much in the match wave, that it has become difficult for them to focus on their studies. We have to go through their checkpoints, end of the year assessments and congloms. They cannot stop talking about cricket. It has become difficult for the teachers to control the students. The students constantly talk about field placing, catches, hitting sixes and bowling the opponents. There is a constant chatter as if there are 25 commentators in each of the grades. I have issued a warning to all the students to focus on the year end assessments for the next 2 days. They have time from Friday afternoon to focus on the match. I do want to ensure that the students get time to complete their studies. We lost time yesterday due to the rains. Today also, the stadium is not going to be ready for practice. I have asked all the children to stay home and complete their academic tasks. Please suspend all the activities regarding the match for today. Let the children and the parents focus on the studies and the presentations.

The second point is that I want proper media coverage of this match. I know you and all the parents have done a lot. However, since this match would be executed under the Riverside School, I want a proper reporting. You know, that I have never cared for media coverage. Riverside is a brand on its own. However, since the parents are so involved, I want to take this opportunity to show the strength of the parent body to the outside world. The parents of grades IV and V have come together in an amazing manner. What I saw in the interactions on Sunday was very informative. The fairness, the neutrality and the ease with which the parents accomplished this task; the manner in which they picked the teams, the way in which they made sacrifices and the way the mothers participated in this event has been a revelation for me and the teachers. I always trusted the parents to deliver. The way in which the preparations took place has shown a new resolve and togetherness. I have already instructed the children of all grades of Riverside to attend the match. They will come in their Riverside uniform. Their parents and friends and relatives are invited as well. I have sent invitations to our partner schools all over the country to send their students and teachers to attend this event. So, please expect to have a huge audience. I expect an audience of over 10,000 people at least. You should handle the media and the audience. I know that Rohansh from grade IV and Prachi from grade V are handling the audience management. I have already talked to their parents and apprised them of the situation. They are going to support their children whole heartedly. I have also assigned the grades VI, VII and VIII to come to help with the audience management and food. I have asked Parul to get in touch with the media management. She

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will talk with the newspaper and television reporters to adequately cover this event.”

I felt quite overwhelmed. What had started out as a four hour affair, a benign match between the grades of my two children, was now an event far beyond my imagination. There were more elements added every day. I felt quite dizzy and disoriented. To manage this kind of an event was no small thing. I had no experience of handling 10,000 people. I was pushed into the role of a leader. I was going to have a few sleepless nights ahead. As if this was not enough, I had to manage both Harsh and Shaurya as well. They had their own anxieties. Since I had spearheaded this project, the children of the respective grades had lot of expectations from Harsh and Shaurya. While Aadit and Mayank were the captains of grades IV and V respectively, the importance of Shaurya and Harsh in their respective grades was no less. Between the two of them, a competitiveness was brewing about which grade was going to win. Gauri and I had to manage this budding sibling rivalry as well.

I exited Riverside with a heavy burden on my shoulders. There was so much to do. I was glad that we had an off day from the practice at the stadium. My work was no less. I sat down at a café and made a list of my works. I could only accomplish all of this if I went about in an organized manner. I had to check the cricket equipment, the apparel, the medals and trophies, check the two team camps at the stadium, ensure adequate security at the stadium, and get the sound system in order and so on. While the sun had come out and the stadium was drying up, I still had to check the pitch condition so that we could have a good game on hand. I decided then that there was no choice left now. I had to do

my bit in the best possible manner. My luck had held out so far. I could not step back or even do a mediocre job. With a song in my heart, I set out to complete the tasks of the day.

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DAY 6, FRIDAY, 15TH APRIL, 2016

THE ACCIDENT

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The school ended at 1 pm. There was a roar from all the classrooms. This was the last day of the school. All the grades were quite excited. There was an excitement of the vacations and then the next grade. The students had worked very hard for the entire year. They were looking forward to the break. For grades IV and V, now going to grades V and VI, there was the added excitement of the match as well. They all rushed out with expectations. I picked up Harsh and Shaurya from the school itself. Normally, they would come home in the school bus. However, for today, I needed to pick them up and run a few errands before we went to the stadium. It was decided to have the practice session from 2 pm till 5 pm for today. Then we had to hand over the stadium for the management of food, water, and audience. Shaurya told me that the two captains had met in school and proposed a mini match today. A 10 overs per side match to test out each other before the big match. I immediately said no. There was no room for a structured match at this time. It would be very distracting. The outfield was getting dry, but there were still patches of wetness. I did want any injuries to take place. It would take away the charm of the match as well. I had to intervene and tell them, that though it would be nice to have such a match, it would deprive them of a much needed practice.

I again found myself gravitating to the grade IV camp. Here Aarav and Shlok were bowling with speed and accuracy. Aum and Maanit were batting. Both Aarav and Shlok were able to get through their defences and uproot their stumps. Preyaa was shouting at both the batsmen to use their defensive strokes. If they were not able to handle Aarav and Shlok, they would find it difficult to handle Garv and Mayank as well. I

went over to the grade V camp. I saw the continuation of the same ease I had seen earlier. Suryaja was talking very firmly with Mayank. They were in deep conversation about the team composition, batting and bowling orders. The rest of the team ambled around. Then an unfortunate accident took place. I heard a cry from the other side. Aum was on the ground crying out loud. I quickly rushed there. I saw that Aum was clutching his left foot. His left foot had started swelling. Aarav had bowled a fast yorker to him. In trying to dig the ball out, he had lost balance and twisted his ankle, Not only that, but his bat came down heavily on that foot and there was a fracture for sure. His parents quickly picked him up and rushed him to an orthopaedic surgeon. His further participation in the match was over. There was no way that he could play. Grade IV looked disturbed. For Preyaa, it meant a rethink of her strategy. She quickly had a conference with Aarav, Aadit and Shauryavardhan for the replacement. They were debating from the options of Kushan, Prithvi and Mohammed. Finally they decided that Kushan would be in the team in place of Aum. Dhruv would replace Aum at the top of the batting order and Kushan would take his place at the end of the batting order.

It soon turned out to be 5 pm. The children were looking exhausted. They had a very busy and exciting morning and then a lot of practice in those 3 hours in the afternoon. Everyone got to bat and bowl a lot. Suresh came in to show the apparel to everyone. What gear it was!! The black T shirts for grade IV were superb. And so were the red clothes for grade V. They looked bright and colourful. It was going to be a fun day on Sunday. Even the medals and the trophy had arrived. Suresh was the star of the day. All the children were

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stood surrounding his table. He displayed all the medals and the trophy. It was a shining trophy of a boy holding his hands in the air with a victory on his face. A cricket ball was in one hand and a cricket bat in the other hand. The grade that won the trophy would really cherish the prized possession. All the children held it in their hands. The feel of it was out of the world for them.

Saumya – “Wow, Uncle that is a very nice trophy. I wish grade V wins it for us.”

Dhwani – “Yes, I agree. I too hope that my team wins it for us.”

The trophy and the medals plus the cricket gear and clothes suddenly lent a very realistic note to the whole event. It brought about a change from the fun cricket to a real match. Suresh had upped the stakes now.

Friday came to an end. Saturday was going to be an off day. The outfield was drying up and with one day still, if the sun shone as fiercely as today, we would have a nice pitch and outfield. The boundary ropes were already placed. Amit had taken over the ground responsibility. He was overlooking the laying of the boards for grade IV and grade V, plus banners of Riverside school and his own company’s sponsorship banners.

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DAY 7, SATURDAY, 16TH APRIL, 2016

ACCIDENT FOR GRADE V

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It was heartening to see a nice and bright sunny day. I went to the ground early to check the progress on the preparations of the ground. Everything was on track. By afternoon, the tents were in place for the two teams. There were tents around the ground for food and drinks. The Riverside banner was flying high. Since the stadium was next to the Sports Club of Gujarat, the members were allowed free entry to watch the match. Amit had distributed 5 lac copies of a pamphlet that his company had printed inviting people to come and watch the match. Already several inquiries had been made. Since the Gujarat Cricket Association had given this stadium at a special request from Parthiv, we could not sell tickets. We wanted maximum spectators. I could see the sound system being set up. There was a commentary box, where all the commentators would sit. Maharashee had set up a recording unit. This would be used to record the entire match. We did not have the facility of the third umpire in this case as many more cameras and equipment were needed for that. The decision of the on field umpires was final. There was a VIP enclosure made for the principal Kiran Sethi, Geet and a few dignitaries. Parthiv Patel had promised to come for the entire match. He was the guest of honour and would give the trophy.

Everyone was advised to be on the ground by 8 am. The toss and the pre-match preliminaries would commence by 9.30. The match would start at 10 am. The first innings would be of 20 overs from 10 am till 11.30 am. There would be a four minute break at the end of the 7th and 14th overs in each innings. The second innings would start after a ten minute interval. We hoped to wind up the match by 1.10 and have the presentation till 2 pm. At that moment, I got a call from

grade V student Raj Thakkar's father - Lalit. He sounded very apologetic. In the background, I could hear Raj wail. I was concerned. Lalit explained that they were going to USA for a holiday. They had planned to leave on 17th April, Sunday. However, he had not realized that the ticket was for 2 am on Sunday. It meant that they would leave on Saturday night, early Sunday morning and therefore Raj was unavailable for the match. He had assumed it was Sunday night and therefore Raj could play the match and leave. However, the travel agent reminded them that they had to leave that night. He was extremely regretful, both at his son missing the match and the inconvenience it would cause the team. There was no way that anything could change. I had a knot in my stomach. Grade IV had the options of replacing a player if someone missed out. However, that luxury was denied to Grade V. Vivaan Chiripal was the 12th man and could be drafted in, however, if there was any mishap or problem through the match, if there was any need for a substitute, grade V would be hard pressed to bring someone in. I immediately called up Mayank and took Suryaja and Vivaan's father on conference call. I broke the news to them. While Suryaja was immediately apprehensive and Mayank a little sad, Vivaan was quite delighted. He had not expected to be in the match as a part of the playing eleven. This was a surprise for him.

I called up all the parents of each grade and talked to them. Everyone was upbeat and looked forward to the match. I left the ground in the able hands of Amit and went home. I had one surprise for Harsh and Shaurya. A surprise that promised to make this match a personal competition for them.

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PART TWO

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HARSHVARDHAN – THE TITAN

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Born on 31 Aug, 2005, Harshvardhan had the knack of adaptiveness and enthusiasm unmatched by his peers. Since his father was a psychiatrist, he suffered from being stuck with a diagnosis. Harshvardhan had a difficult time in his childhood in terms of his sleep and diet. He had lactogen allergy. Therefore from very early on, his nutrition suffered. The mixture of peculiar food habits, upset night sleep and allergy to lactogen made it difficult for him to focus adequately. It was a miracle that he did so well. When Gauri and I contemplated his education and school, we had only one name. Riverside. There was no way that he could cope up in any other school. So it was a great relief for us when he got accepted at Riverside.

Every year, when the teachers from Riverside came for the home visit, I would tell them about his difficulties and they would be surprised. Their experience was that he was among the top performers in the class. He was very popular in his class as well. His enthusiasm and his adaptability made him everyone's friend. We made a huge effort on his education. Two factors contributed to his current state. In order to help him medically, Gauri turned to Homeopathy. She toiled for a good seven years with his homeopathic medicines. It had a huge effect. Simultaneously, we entered into the concept of proactive parenting. We enacted a very structured regime for him. He had at least one class per day. He attempted mathematics, drawing, craft, skating, football, swimming, taekwondo, handwriting improvement, English spellings, grammar and chess. This was in addition to the education he received from the best school in town and the home education that Gauri imparted to him. While I am a great advocate of free time for children, I have seen a lot of

children suffer from the absence of a structured program. It worked. At least so far, it had. Till grade V, he had been able to perform near the top of the class. He was able to secure the 2nd positions in the Olympiads as well. This helped him to maintain his self-esteem with his peers.

In the recent past, the rejections for Harshvardhan were coming thick and fast. As the age increased, sports became an integral aspect of the self-esteem. Harsh found it increasingly difficult to be a part of the teams. Whether it was football or cricket, chess or tennis, he attempted everything. However, the net result was only a shadow of what others could achieve. However, with Shaurya on his heels and doing well, the absence of success in sports had become a double blow.

Garv Mittal is Harsh's best friend in school. They had been in Riverside right from the beginning. They have formed a very enviable friendship. Both are extremely close, spend night outs together and enjoy each other's successes. Garv is a multi-talented boy. He is very good in football and cricket. In studies he is quite at the top. Joey Rao is another of Harsh's close friend. He is a quiet boy with a solid psychological spine. He would stand by Harsh and Garv in every difficulty. Mayank is also one of Harsh's close friends along with Adi Nagpal. However, due to the distance between the residences, Garv and Joey are more accessible than Mayank and Adi – both of whom lived in Shahibaug.

Harshvardhan's strength is his pain bearing capacity and his enthusiasm. He can be a part of any interaction. He can submit himself to any person or group so that he can play. He is popular because he has tremendous empathy power.

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Even in movies, he feels the pain of the characters in the movie. His relationship with Shaurya is dominated by care from his side. He ensures that Shaurya is a part of his get togethers and always ensures that he does not feel left out. Riverside also gave Harshvardhan his nickname – HV.

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SHAURYAVARDHAN – THE DAZZLER

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Born on Nov 2, 2006, Shauryavardhan was a delightful baby. He was a very quiet child and hassle free. I never realized when he grew up to become five years old.

Shauryavardhan is an embodiment of change brought about by our efforts. As he became of age, we approached Kiran for his admission to Riverside. At that point of time, Riverside had decided to not grant admissions to siblings. It was in line with their goal to spread the Riverside education to as many people as possible. Every family wanted to admit their children in this school. By granting admission to siblings, Riverside felt restricted in spreading their message. So when we met Kiran on the day of the interview, we were apprehensive of getting the admission. For us, it was important that Shaurya got admission in Riverside. There were multiple advantages for us. Not only was it the best school, we had ourselves felt tremendously supported in our upbringing of Harshvardhan. The ease of having two children in the same school was unquestionable. For a brief period, the prospect of two children in two different schools was a trifle exciting. However, it was facile given the excellent education that Riverside gave. Kiran did tell us about this policy and her reservations in granting admissions to siblings. She emphasized the complimentary role of parents and the school in the child's experience. Thankfully, Kiran did grant admission for Shauryavardhan to Riverside. We realized that we were very lucky in this case. Many siblings had been denied admission to Riverside and they were feeling resentful on missing out on the Riverside experience.

In his first few years of Riverside, the teachers had a recurrent observation about Shauryavardhan. He knew everything. He was very fast. However, he was shy. He did not speak up. He

suffered from an inferiority complex. He did not look anyone in the eye and avoided the teachers and his fellow students. If he met his classmates outside of school in a mall or movie hall, he did not greet them. They were quite excited to see him and came to meet him, but he always avoided them. He went to birthday parties, sat in a corner alone and came back upset. His feeling of misery in social situations was palpable. In Pre-K, K1 and K2, he experienced isolation more times than not. He turned to materialistic gratifications as a comfort to his isolation. Manchester United, Football club of Barcelona, Nike, Adidas and Puma became his obsessions. Anything that had a logo of the above became his desire. Footballs, shoes, socks, lunchboxes, water bottles, cricket bats, stationary and everything else that had these logos were coveted. While we verbally discouraged him to show off these things, we did not resist this form of a comfort to him. It became easy for us to delude ourselves to buy those things as it brought a smile on his face.

Two of Riverside teachers had a remarkable influence on Shauryavardhan. The first one was Archana Todi. Her understanding of Shaurya and her ability to contain and support him was amazing. She absorbed his tantrums and motivated him to interact. She motivated us to get him to socialize on a one to one basis with his classmates. The other teacher who had a significant impact on Shaurya was Sabina Zamindar. Where Archana left off, Sabina took over. She planted in him, a respect for his opinions. She would ask him his opinion on daily events and get him to speak. That really inspired in him, a confidence to voice and be applauded for his ideas.

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Grade III was when the transformation for Shaurya picked momentum. Our efforts to socialize him bore fruit in grade III. We made a routine of inviting Harsh and Shaurya's friends over for play dates. As a consequence, their interactions with their peers increased. Shaurya became closer to Harsh's friends and they also showed a fondness for him. This took away his inhibitions and he began to express himself more. Shaurya had been suffering from asthma and had even been hospitalized once for it. When Gauri started the homeopathic medicines for Harsh for his allergies, she started the same for Shaurya as well. It paid rich dividends. Grade III saw him maintain a good health. Except for a patch of 3 months, when both Harsh and Shaurya tried to play football at Kahaani (the dust really precipitated their asthmatic allergies), both displayed excellent health. They practiced swimming in the summer and that helped them to increase immunity. In the summer, they followed the IPL more keenly. The stage was set for them to take up interest in cricket. We bought a lot of cricket equipment for them.

For Shaurya, grade III was a turnaround year. His academic life soared and the peaking point was when he scored medals in the Olympiads, including a state medal. Both Harsh and Shaurya were also scoring in the Aloha maths competitions. The Olympiads added a feather to their academic caps. This helped Shaurya a lot in his confidence and his social life became busier than ours as well. There was a stage where for one week; he was off for parties and get togethers every day. As parents, we had a hard time managing our schedules around him. He was the darling of the class, adored by both – boys and girls. He wanted to participate in everything and win everything.

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THE OMEGA

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The Omega is a premium brand in watches. With brand ambassadors like James Bond, George Clooney, John F Kennedy and Prince William this Swiss watchmaker has established Omega as a precision instrument. Omega has been the official timekeeper of the Olympic Games since 1932. I was lucky to be gifted one beautiful Omega watch by my family. The watch was gifted as a token of my success as a psychiatrist. The look and feel of an Omega watch on my wrist was a luxury. The watch was more than a timepiece for me. It was a symbol of success for me.

What is the relevance of an Omega watch here?

While no one was dearer to Harsh and Shaurya than each other, as they grew up, a rivalry became more apparent between them. In the early years, the competition was objectified by display of knowledge about dinosaurs. Both of them were crazy about information related to dinosaurs. They boasted about the various features of dinosaurs and tried to be one up on each other. As time passed, it got replaced with rivalry over beyblades. The beyblade is an addictive toy. Reminiscent of the spinning top of our days, the beyblade is a mechanical wonder. We had bought about two hundred of them over a span of 6 years. We bought each new beyblade that arrived in the market. Soon after it was bought, it was dismantled and the parts used to make a new beyblade. Rivalry over winning beyblade battles lasted a couple of years. The rivalry then turned to mobile games like subway surfer and temple run, then to scoring marks in mathematics and then onto football knowledge and winning in FIFA 14 mobile game. The rivalry had currently settled in cricket. IPL and its teams had generated enough competitiveness among them.

There was now a healthy rivalry on the field between them to score more runs, hit more sixes and take more wickets.

While I am not fond of rivalry, I have accepted it as a part of normal human living. From the time since Sigmund Freud articulated the theory of psychoanalysis and explained the mystery of the Oedipus complex, the psychology world has been abuzz with the concept of rivalry. Traditionally, it is a concept between two siblings, with the elder one feeling the rivalry towards the new arrival for the possession of the mother. I realized that a proper channelization of the rivalry resulted in a much healthier relationship. I was quite impressed with the movie “Shart” in which two friends had a buzzing rivalry and exchanged a 10 rupee note whenever one of them won the bet. One of the outcomes of rivalry was that it allowed them to increase their effort.

Both Harsh and Shaurya were keen to know what was happening at the stadium. I assured them that everything was on track. I took them to my room and opened the box containing the Omega watch. Shaurya coveted the watch and always wanted to wear it.

Darshan – “Listen Darlings, tomorrow is the big day for you and your grades. At the end of the match, one team will win and the other will lose. There are plenty of prizes to be won. However, I want to instate a special prize only for the two of you. Whoever’s grade wins the match, irrespective of the performance of either of you, the person belonging to that grade will get the Omega watch as a prize from me. I will give it to you at the stadium. Is that ok?”

Both Harsh and Shaurya were ecstatic. They now had a personal dimension to the match.

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PART THREE

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SUNDAY, 16TH APRIL, 2016

D-DAY

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The D-day arrived. The children woke me up. They were very excited. They were dressed in their gear. All ready to go. It was just 6 am. We needed to be at the ground. I wanted to make sure that we were amongst the first few people on the ground. At 7 am there were already a lot of people there. We parked the car and went inside. Today the ground looked magnificent. Lush green outfield. The two camps, the commentary box and the VIP Box looked colourful. The ground began to swell with spectators. Bijal Mehta had arranged for a band. They had set up camp and played motivational songs. Rohansh, Prachi, Rani and Saumya had made a wonderful effort. They were in their respective grade outfits marshalling the audience towards the designated places. Their parents supported them as did the other students of Riverside. I was pleased with the effort. People had responded to the mails sent out by Kiran. The schools and other organizations affiliated to Riverside had come to support the cause. The banners of Design For Change, Akshay Patra, Children of the Park, Aproach and other organizations decorated the boundary ropes.

I went to the Grade V camp. The board “GRADE V TITANS” shone above their camp. It was a very playful camp. The cricket gear was strewn around. Amira was making sure that every player stretched their muscles. She corrected them, motivated them, making sure that each one was properly awake and alive. Suryaja went through her strategy list. She was the only serious note in the Grade V camp. The players surrounded the table set up by Aashvi Kabra. She had set up a host of energy drinks. Glucon D in various flavours was quickly consumed by the players. She had a variety of chocolates, cakes, biscuits and sandwiches laid out for

consumption by the players. Her food preparation was very meticulous.

I sauntered over to the Grade IV camp. “GRADE IV DAZZLERS” was inscribed in bold black and gold letters over their camp. Preyaa held fort there. She was at the centre and all the players surrounded her in a circle. She made sure that each person knew their role properly. They looked a beautiful lot. Dressed in black, against the backdrop of a clear blue sky, they looked every part warriors dressed for battle. Rene had her bag of bandages, medicines and sprays. She looked ready for any medical accident. Dhrishti had her table of goodies laid out. There were coolers of iced drinks, cut fruits - fresh watermelon, pineapples and oranges. She had bags of quick food bites for each person for a pre-match snack. There was an air of meticulousness around the camp. There was a sense of purpose. I smelt the scent of ambition in this camp.

It was 8 am and the ground was filling up. My eyes fell on 4 people. Dhwanit Jain, Vansh Rajwani, Kiera Gopalia and Tansi Devnani were in a huddle. They had glaring bling bling apparel. They were the cheerleaders. Dhwanit had a bull horn in his hand. Vansh was in his wheelchair with a lot of placards across his lap. Kiera was cartwheeling. Tansi had a bunch of masks of the players of grade IV and she was putting them on one by one. They were going to move around the boundary and make the spectators participate through their efforts. It was their day now. Their enthusiasm was huge. In their own individual ways, these four cheerleaders were having a field day (pun intended). The perimeter of the ground was theirs. The effort they made to entertain the crowd and cheer their respective teams was

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fabulous. Tansi had photographed the entire team of grade IV and made masks out of them. She would wear the mask of each bowler or batsmen who was in action at that time and move around. Kiera was a flexible doll. She could convolute her body into any shape. She did multiple cartwheels around the ground. The spectators were as much thrilled with her antics as much as they were with the anticipation of the match. Dhwanit went around the ground with his bull horn shouting at the top of his voice about grade V players. He had a neat set of jokes about all his teammates and about the grade IV players as well. The crowd was in raptures listening to him. Very much like his namesake and the ever loved Radio Jockey Dhwanit of Radiomirchi, Ahmedabad. He mimicked the players and treaded a careful line between mocking them and making a light atmosphere. He succeeded at that too. The most enthusiastic and attention capturing was Vansh Rajwani. His caretaker pushed his wheel chair behind Dhwanit. Vansh held placards with motivational quotations and player photographs of grade V. Both Dhwanit and Vansh operated in sync. They made a perfect pair. On the opposite side, Kiera and Tansi also worked in tandem. This was a fabulous start to the day.

Having enjoyed the two grade camps and the cheerleaders, I headed over to the other important spot on the perimeter of the ground. The commentary box. Shanaya Mehta, Adya Sarin, Radha Mehra and Nargis Kachramathur tested the mike system. They were the commentators for the match. Alongside them were the scorers – Tanyaa Dalal and Tara Ghodke. They had the score sheets in front of them. They had a big blackboard on the side. They were going to display the scores there for the audience. There were a few empty

chairs there. Sudhir was going to man this counter. Bijal and he would help the scorers. They looked very well organized. Shanaya started her commentary about how this match was conceived. Nargis talked about the Riverside school. The two important centre pieces of the match sat there. Clad in their blue uniforms were Sudena Chandnani and Arjun Shah – the umpires. They both looked the epitome of responsibility. They had pledged to be neutral and play their part with the utmost responsibility. Sudena read a book on the rules of cricket. Arjun was watching on his Ipad, the various umpiring bloopers on YouTube. They looked calm and poised. I waved to them and asked if they were ready. Both said yes. Arjun even brought out the coin for the toss. It was a special coin made by Suresh for the match. It had Grade IV Dazzlers on one side and Grade V Titans on the other side. A unique coin to commemorate the event.

I went to the fourth and the last end. The VIP box. Parthiv Patel, Kiran and Geet Sethi, a few parents, a few teachers and principals whom Kiran had invited would be seated here. There was a mobile air conditioning unit, refreshments and comfort chairs placed around. All arrangements were in order.

I looked around. Every corner seemed to be in place. The pitch and the ground looked very inviting. The stumps were set, minus the bails which were with the two umpires. The markings were in bright white for the creases on both ends. The two camps, the commentary box and the VIP box adorned the perimeter of the ground. Beyond that, the cheerleaders and the spectators had taken over. The hoardings, the food and drinks stalls, the security arrangements were the effort of the parents, especially Amit

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Gupta. The crowd was interspersed with Riverside students who came with placards advertising the various grades of their school. Even the newspaper and television reporters were there. For them, it was a novel event. A school interclass match being played in an international ground and a replication of Twenty20 match was worth coverage. They interviewed a few parents and talked to the players. Riverside was getting good coverage.

It was close to 9 am now. I called up Kiran to ask how long it was before she arrived. She had to be there before we addressed the audience and tossed the coin. She cut my call and messaged me to start the proceedings. She would be there in a few minutes. Her explicit instructions were to start the proceedings and not wait for her. There was a surprise for all of us and it was central that the process be started.

I found it amusing. Nevertheless, I went to Sanjit Lavsi and asked him to address the audience. He was to co-ordinate the day's events. He was to maintain the clock and make the announcements for the audience.

Sanjit – “Good morning to all of you. I thank all of you for being here. I am very happy to see you here for this interclass match between the two grades of Riverside. It is very gratifying to see you here on a Sunday morning to support cricket at the grass roots level. It is very exciting to see these young kids in their magnificent attire to recreate a mini IPL match. I am sure that we are going to be thoroughly entertained.

On one side we have the challengers – The Grade IV Dazzlers. Their aim today is to upset their seniors and take this trophy home. On the other side are the defenders – the

Grade V Titans. Their aim is show to their juniors today that they are the bosses here. Our role as an audience is to motivate them in this battle. Are we ready?”

“Yes, we are. Bring them on” shouted the audience.

Sanjit - “Here we are. Let me introduce the two teams. The first team here is the challenger for today – The Grade IV Dazzlers. The team is led by the smiling assassin Aadit Patel. Following him as the wicketkeeper is Shauryavardhan Shah. He is the academic wizard and would be behind the wickets today. Then we have my son Shlok Lavsi. Shlok is a good all-rounder and his most outstanding ability is his fielding. Next is Aarav Gupta – again an all-rounder. Their bowling is spearheaded by the Kankaria brothers – Vishwas and Kanishk. Then we have the two opening batsmen – the verbose Maanit Patel and the silent waters run deep – Dhruv Harivallabhdas. The other players here are Adit Patel – a very good batsmen and the life of their class – Krish Shodhan. To complete the playing eleven is Kushan Mehta. Prithvi Zaveri and Mohammed Kakiwala make up the bench strength.”

The Dazzlers walked to the middle of the ground on one side of the pitch and stood in a line. The audience was clapping and shouting – “Dazzlers, Dazzlers”, “Aadit, Aadit”, “grade IV, grade IV”, “We are the best”. Some banners went up. Rutu held her son’s enlarged photograph on a placard and so did Geetika. The tempo was building up.

Sanjit - “Now we have the defenders – The Grade V Titans. They are led by the carefree Mayank Lalchandani. Following him is the Mr. reliable – Joey Rao – their wicketkeeper. Their star player is Garv Mittal – a very accurate bowler and a good batsman. They have the all-rounders Aarsh Patel and Adi

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Nagpal. Aryan Shah and Sraj Patel are their middle order. The life of their class is next – Ashutosh Pathak. Vivaan Chiripal and Priam Rao are their support players. Finally making up the eleven is the effervescent and enthusiastic Harshvardhan Shah.

The Titans walked up to the middle of the ground and stood on the opposite side of the pitch. The noisy crowd was applauding them. The most intense noise came from the clapping of the higher grades of Riverside. These grade V children were very popular with their seniors, who wanted them to win.

Sanjit went on – “Let me also bring to notice the other contributors to this match. Without them, we would be incomplete. Please welcome the four cheerleaders. From grade IV we have the bright Tansi Devnani and the bubbly Kiera Gopalia.”

Tansi wore a big mask of herself and Kiera started doing a couple of cartwheels.

Sanjit - “From grade V we have Vansh Rajwani and Dhwanit Jain.”

The band started playing loud drums to the bull-horn stimulation of Dhwanit and Vansh waved from his wheel chair.

Sanjit – “Here, in the commentary box, we have our statisticians and scorers for the day. Tara Ghodke from grade IV and Tanya Dalaal from grade V. They will be holding the key to the match. Also here are the commentators – Shanaya

Mehta and Adya Sarin from grade IV and Nargis Kachramathur and Radha Mehra from grade V.”

A big round of applause went on. I saw Sudhir talking to someone on the phone. He was all smiles. I wondered what had happened. He looked at me and his smile grew bigger. He was a gentle giant. To see him smile from over 7 feet was quite amusing.

Sanjit – “And last, but not the least we have the two most important people of the day. Our umpires and on-field judges – From grade IV we have the quiet Arjun Shah and from grade V we have our first female on field – Sudena Chandnani.”

The crowd again started clapping. There was a bit of impatience in the crowd. They wanted the match to start. I looked anxiously at my watch and wondered where Kiran Sethi was. Surely, we could not begin without her. At that very moment Kiran and Geet walked in with Parthiv Patel. Sudhir was in an animated conversation with Sanjit. A variety of feelings showed on his face. Disbelief, excitement, shock, laughter and amusement showed one after another. I felt anxious and left out. What the hell was going on?

Sanjit was now talking in a higher pitch – “Let us all welcome the two diamonds of our city. The principal of Riverside school Kiran Sethi. Thank you very much, madam, for your permission and help to organize this wonderful match between grade IV and grade V. And for supporting us parents in this way. You are a wonderful leader of this generation.” He handed the mike to Kiran Sethi. She waved to the crowd.

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Kiran – “Thank you Sanjit, and thank you all. Riverside has always been the pioneer for children’s empowerment. This match has been organized by the parents of Grade IV and Grade V. I am very pleased with the outcome. You can always count on our support.”

Then she turned to the players on the ground. – “I am proud of you, Dazzlers and Titans. I want you to be competitive and play a very good game of cricket. You don’t just represent your grade, you represent Riverside today. This is your first time in a stadium, but definitely not your last one. Make every run count, make every ball count. I wish luck to all of you.”

The players and the crowd clapped. Tansi wore a mask of Kiran and the crowd laughed again.

Sanjit – “Here today we have with us Geet Sethi. India’s jewel. Our billiards and snooker would be dull without Geet. What many people may not be aware of is that Geet is a brilliant motivator. He talks to our national cricket team to inspire them. He talked to them before the 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup. The beholder of multiple world titles for billiards and snooker also has a contribution to our cricket success.”

He handed the mike over to Geet.

Geet – “Thank you very much for the kind words, Sanjit.”
He turned to address the crowd.

Geet – “I have always been a fan of Indian cricket. But it is the crowd which motivates us to perform better. Cricket is a game for all of you. Without you, the excitement in playing would not be there. We Indians are very passionate about our cricket. I have seen audiences around the world in many

sports. However, Indian cricket and the relationship of the fans with the cricketers stands out at the top. We make our cricketers into celebrities. Today cricket is undergoing a huge transformation. India is right at the centre of this transformation. The Indian Premier League is the most followed cricket event around the world. We have provided recognition to many of the young cricketers, not only of India, but of the world. They got famous first in IPL and then got cult status in their own countries and in the other Twenty20 leagues around the world. Our administrators today head the world organization. Today, India is the superpower in cricket. We have revolutionized the interest of the crowds and brought them back to the stadium. There is a stupendous growth of cricket – both in terms of reach to the common public and in terms of the financial market size. We can see many men, women and children now take up a favourite team in the IPL. I hope that we can organize many more matches like this and give our children an experience to cherish. Thank you for having me here today.”

The crowd again applauded Geet. It was very easy to see why he was such a motivating force for the Indian cricket team. He used his words carefully; he talked in a gentle tone; yet he had a very powerful impact.

Sanjit – “We have here our Guest of Honour – the captain of the Gujarat Ranji cricket team. Our beloved former wicketkeeper of the Indian cricket team – Parthiv Patel.”

Another round of applause went up.

Sanjit continued – “A special thanks to Parthiv because he requested the Gujarat Cricket Association to grant us this stadium’s use for today. Not only is he an outstanding

cricketer, he loves to promote cricket and loves helping out in every capacity.”

Parthiv is a silent man. He refused the mike and just waved to the crowd. Now that the formalities were over, I was eager to get the toss done and begin with the match. When I looked towards Sanjit to announce that, I saw him conversing with Kiran and Geet. He looked at me, smiled again (that was irritating) and then took up the mike again.

Sanjit – “Dear audience, we have a surprise for you today. We all have been following cricket for many years. For the ardent fan of cricket, it is unmistakable to recognize the special guest who we have here today. The credit for this goes to our principal, Kiran. When Darshan had gone to Kiran and requested for this match, she had asked him the genesis for this idea. After he had narrated his reasons, she wanted to give him a surprise. Dear Audience, now entering the stadium is none other than the best commentator of cricket our country has produced – the ever enthusiastic Harsha Bhogle.”

I was stunned. I looked at the entrance and there was Harsha Bhogle striding in, laughing and waving to the crowd. I was too lost for words. Here was my favourite commentator, and for a match, whose motivation was to let my children have a stadium experience, this was an icing on the cake. I had never expected to meet Harsha in my lifetime, let alone, have him present alongside me watching my children play a match. I was frozen with excitement. Now I knew what Sudhir was laughing about. They knew this all along. I came out of my frozen state and looked up. Kiran, Sudhir, Geet were all looking at me. By this time, Harsha had reached the VIP box. He shook hands with me and grabbed the mike.

Harsha Bhogle – “A mini IPL we have here, is it not? I love Ahmedabad. The city is a hotbed of geniuses and innovations. I spent a considerable time of my young life in Ahmedabad – at the Indian Institute of Management. I have come to Ahmedabad many times to comment on cricket, but never in such an unique position. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity.”

Shanaya was ecstatic. She was going to have a very experienced companion in the commentary box.

Before I could think of anything else, Sanjit’s voice interrupted me – “Now for the last surprise of the morning, before the match begins.”

I jerked up my head. What was happening? Who had done all of this?

Sanjit – “As I said, Geet is our champion and he talks to the Indian cricket team as a motivator. When this match was announced, Geet wanted to contribute as well. Maulesh roped in Parthiv Patel and Kiran talked to Harsha Bhogle. Sudhir who is a parent here and also was educated at IIM-A played an important role in bringing Harsha here. And then Geet, Harsha Bhogle and Parthiv have given us all a gift that we shall forever cherish. Dear children of Riverside and other schools, all the people on the field and in the audience, I present to you, a man who needs no introduction.”

I looked at the entrance again. I swear I could have had a heart attack at the sight that met my eyes. Walking slowly and waving to the crowd, dressed in the Chennai Superkings jersey was none other than Mahendra Singh Dhoni. This was unbelievable. And this was not a dream. An unbelievable

reality. True ground reality. MAHENDRA SINGH DHONI was on the ground to be a spectator at a match whose part I was. My mind was swirling with thoughts and I was going through a flurry of emotions. Apprehension that this should turn out to be a show worthy of having MS Dhoni here. Excitement that the children were playing in front of him. I cannot even explain what I felt then.

The crowd was also shocked. The first off the block was Dhwanit with his bull horn. He started a slow chant – “Dhoni, Dhoni, Dhoni” The crowd too joined in. Everyone gave him a standing ovation. They clapped and chanted his name. The media was shocked as well. They had not known about this. All the smartphones on the ground flashed the cameras to click the magical man. I looked at the pitch where the two teams were standing. All of them were looking at Dhoni except for two. Harsh and Shaurya were both looking at me. They knew the impact of this on me more than anyone else. Dhoni had been the subject of many conversations between the three of us. Chennai Superkings was my chosen team of the IPL. Dhoni was my all-time favourite.

By this time Dhoni had reached the centre. He looked towards Parthiv, who pointed to me. Then Dhoni came to me and put an arm around me. My body went limp, the legs were watery and I was overcome with emotion. “Well done, Darshan. Well done.” he said gently. I was too stunned to say anything. By this time both Shaurya and Harsh had rushed up to me. The next few moments were gestures. Dhoni looked at the two of them and then gestured towards me as if asking whether they were my children. I nodded. He then shook hands with them and smiled at them. Harsh, in his characteristic style was sheepish. Shaurya confidently shook

Dhoni's hands. Dhoni looked at his wicket-keeping gloves and appreciated him. The laconic Dhoni smile was in operation.

Harsh and Shaurya led him to the centre of the pitch where the teams were standing. MS asked for the captains. Mayank came forward, identified himself and then introduced all the players of Grade V Titans including the support staff one by one. Dhoni shook hands with all of them. Aadit came forward and repeated the same for Grade IV Dazzlers. They were feeling ecstatic. Dhoni then walked up to the VIP box. He greeted Parthiv, Geet and Harsha with hugs. He congratulated Kiran on this effort. Sanjit handed him the mike and asked him to say a few words to the boisterous crowd.

MS – “Thank you very much for inviting me here. Ahmedabad is a lovely place.”

The crowd clapped in praise.

MS – “I believe that cricket is our game. No matter what is happening in our lives, a good game of cricket can always liven us up. There is nothing more exhilarating than when India wins a match. I enjoy every time I step on the ground to play. Whether it is for India, or for Chennai Superkings, whether it is for a test match, a one day international or a Twenty20 match, I enjoy every moment. Before I came into the team, I was also watching matches from the grounds. Today Ranchi has a cricket stadium, otherwise I travelled to Delhi to watch the matches. I loved cricket from when I was very young. Football and bikes came a close second but cricket has made me what I am today. I play the sport without pressure and that is what I advise everyone to do.”

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By this time as if on cue, another mike had appeared. Harsha Bhogle had it in his hands. The pair was back from where they had left off a week back.

Harsha – “MS, what advice would you give to our young players here?”

MS – “Focus on the cricket. Take it one ball at a time, one over at a time, one innings at a time. You will always come back into the match. Whether you are being hit for runs or wickets are falling around you, if you stay focussed on the game, you will make your mark on it. I have been in positions where it seemed difficult to win, yet, by staying focussed; I have turned the match around. You need to enjoy your cricket. Today, cricket has become a very statistics driven game. The South Africans started the trend and the Australians took it to another level. We Indians have also adopted a lot of statistics.

Harsha – “Sorry to interrupt MS, statistically, you are the best finisher in one day internationals.”

MS – “Yes, however, that statistic is of no use in an individual game. I have been successful because I have always enjoyed my game. Whether we are chasing a very high score of 350 in a 50 over game, or whether we are 7 wickets down for half the score, I have always enjoyed myself on the ground. The day I stop enjoying cricket, I will quit.”

Harsha – “That is true MS. We need to get on with today’s match. Let us not forget, we are here as spectators and not the players/commentators.”

MS – “Right mate.”

He turned to the crowd – “Enjoy the game”.

A loud roar went up.

MS (to the two teams) – “I hope one of you will take my position as the captain of the Indian cricket team and many of you will play either in the IPL or in the Indian cricket team. All the best. May the best team win.”

A loud cheer went up from the teams.

All of us walked to the VIP box. Greetings were again exchanged. Geet Sethi was congratulating MS on his speech. The media had taken over. People lined up to take autographs of MS and Parthiv. I was still coming out of my shock. Amit, Sudhir and Sanjit surrounded me. They had known about this. They laughed. It was a pleasant shock. I thanked these parents, Kiran, Parthiv and Geet for this gift. Dhoni came up to me and said – “You have a nice pair of boys. I am glad I am here for you and your children. This is a superb arrangement.”

I was ecstatic. It was 9.45. We had to get the match started. I quickly went up to Arjun and Sudena and asked them to go for the toss.

Sanjit again with the mike – “Now that the fireworks are over in the tents, let us start the fireworks on the field. Let the toss happen.”

Arjun and Sudena walked out to the middle of the pitch with Aadit and Mayank. The teams were still murmuring about Dhoni and Harsha Bhogle. As Mayank and Aadit went for the toss, they started saying “Odd-Eve”. Then both of them laughed. This was a match in the stadium, not in their

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backyard. Such has been the penetration of “Odd-Eve” in today’s children, that it is used to resolve most dilemmas. Arjun gave the coin to Mayank. As the defender, he had the right to toss the coin. Shanaya and Nargis as commentators were there as well. Mayank tossed the coin high up in the air. “Dazzlers” called out Aadit. The coin hit the ground, rolled a bit and then came to a stop. Arjun looked at the coin on the ground and said “Grade IV”

Aadit had won the toss. He promptly put Grade V Titans into bat. Mayank signalled to his team that they were batting first. Suryaja asked Aarsh and Joey to pad up.

Shanaya – “Aadit, you have won the toss and elected to field. Any reason for this?”

Aadit – “We hope to get them out for a low score. We are good chasers. Since they are the defenders, the pressure is on them to put a good score on the table. We have depth in the batting. We can chase any score.”

Nargis to Mayank – “Mayank, you lost the toss and are batting. What would you have done if you had won the toss?”

Mayank – “Does not matter. We would have batted first if I had won the toss. It is a hot day. By the time the second innings begins, the sun will be high in the sky. It will be difficult to run in the heat. We want to put on a good score while we are fresh.”

Adya – (To the audience) “Aadit of Grade IV Dazzlers has won the toss and put Grade V Titans into bat. We shall be back with the first ball of the Grade V Titans batting.”

Impressive. This was a good start. Everyone got into their respective positions. Shanaya, Nargis, Adya and Radha were back in the commentary box. Harsha sat between them with a mike. He was going to co-commentate and guide them. The two statisticians sat on either side of them with their score cards. MS Dhoni and Parthiv enjoyed a soft drink with Kiran and Geet. They laughed and joked about the IPL. The media had finished interviewing them all and now headed to cover the match. The two teams were in the camp. Grade IV Dazzlers were in a huddle and got the last minute instructions from Preyaa. They dispersed and took their positions on the ground. Vishwas had the ball in his hand to start the proceedings. Grade V Titans were in their camp. Aarsh and Joey were going to open. They padded up and were going to the middle of the pitch. Aarsh was to take strike. Arjun was the umpire at the bowling end and Sudena was at square leg of the batting end. They put the bails on the stumps and took up their respective positions. The crowd was already shouting. The cheerleaders had started their acts. Dhwanit talked about Aarsh and Joey and poked fun at them. Vansh held a placard with writing of “We want a six”. Tansi put on the mask of Vishwas. Kiera tossed up balls in the air and juggled them. Our task had come to a great fruit. We all hoped that the match would be exciting. The stage was set for the match to begin.

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THE FIRST INNINGS – GRADE V TITANS

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Radha Mehra – “We are beginning the match. This is the moment we have all waited for. Grade V Titans versus the Grade IV Dazzlers – two teams from Riverside school. Right in the heart of the city in this picturesque stadium of the Gujarat Cricket Association – the Sardar Patel Stadium. In the VIP box, we have the captain of the Indian cricket team – Mahendra Singh Dhoni, the captain of the Gujarat Ranji cricket team – Parthiv Patel, the billiards and snooker champion of India – Geet Sethi and the principal of the Riverside school – Kiran Sethi. With me here in the commentary box is Harsha Bhogle and alongside my co-commentators Nargis Kachramathur, Adya Sarin and Shanaya Mehta. Over to you Harsha.”

Harsha – “A warm welcome to all of you. It is a fantastic morning. This is going to be a very exciting match. A lot of unknown talent here.”

Nargis – “Sure is. Here is Vishwas with the first ball of the match. He runs in and bowls. Aarsh quickly puts it away to square leg for a single. The first runs are on the board. The Titans are 1 without loss.”

The match was on its way. I was feeling proud now. Gauri and I sat in the VIP box and watched the match.

Adya – “Here is Vishwas, with the last ball of over 1. SIX. It has been dispatched by Aarsh over the midwicket boundary. The first six of the match. What a hit.”

Harsha – “That was massive. The ball cleared the boundary so easily. Aarav on the boundary could see it soar over him. It has been a good start for the Titans. 12 for no loss after the first over. Aarsh is on 9 and Joey on 3.”

Shanaya – “Kanishk is starting the proceedings from the other hand. Joey is on strike. FOUR. The first ball has been dispatched to the third man boundary. The first boundary for Joey. The Dazzlers are giving away runs easily. Aadit is looking unhappy with the score. The Titans are scoring freely.”

Radha – “The next one from Kanishk is down the leg side and collected well by Shaurya. He dived to his left and stopped the ball. Joey looks at the umpire for a wide, but Sudena is unmoved. Titans are 16 for no loss after 1.2 overs.”

Harsha – “So what would be a good total for the Titans to shut the Dazzlers out of the match? The ball is coming on to the bat nicely, the boundaries look scalable. I wonder if a score of 200 is enough.”

Nargis – “The Dazzlers hoped to get the Titans under a hundred. However, given the start the Titans have, they might put on a huge total. While we speak, another boundary from Joey. He has hit Kanishk past the diving Shlok. The runs are piling. At the end of 2 overs, Titans are now 24 for no loss.”

Adya – “The last ball of the 4th over now. FOUR. Joey has hit this for another boundary. With this, the Titans reach their 50. 50 for no loss in 4 overs. Both Aarsh and Joey are batting beautifully. 24 balls for the first fifty. We are looking at a huge total now.”

Dhwanit was shouting with his bull horn. Vansh had a placard with 50 written on it. The Titans camp was ecstatic.

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The crowd was enjoying the match. The boundaries were flowing. Suryaja and Mayank looked pleased. They had a good start. They were enjoying the way the batting was going on. Preyaa looked worried. Aadit was feeling clueless now. His opening bowlers were hammered. Four overs and now the score read 50 for no loss. They had not leaked any runs in wides or no balls. However, both Joey and Aarsh were hitting them easily. Two sixes in the 3rd over by Vishwas were hit, one each by Joey and Aarsh. He had to do something.

Aadit tossed the ball to Aarav. He badly needed a breakthrough.

Shanaya – “Aarav is going to start now. The Titans are cruising. The first ball from Aarav and Aarsh has skied it in the air. Shaurya is running towards the point region and Aadit is running in from third man. O God, are they going to collide? GONE. Aarsh is gone. The Titans have lost their first wicket. What an amazing catch. Aadit saw Shaurya running and knew that he had a better chance. He stopped in his track. Shaurya stood patiently under the ball and pocketed it. Aarsh is gone for 25 in 9 balls. The Titans are 50 for 1 in 4.1 overs.

Radha – “Aarav runs towards Shaurya and hugs him. There are high fives going on in the Dazzlers camp. Aadit looks relieved. They have gotten their first wicket. Aarsh had begun to look dangerous.”

Harsha – “First wicket for Aarav, and boy, he looks excited. That was a nice innings from Aarsh. He played 8 balls and hit 2 sixes and 2 fours in those 8 balls. 25 off 9 balls is a good strike rate. The next in is Aryan Shah. An ace batsman for the Titans.”

Nargis – “The batsmen crossed over before the catch was taken. It is Joey on strike now. In runs Aarav. Joey goes for a pull. Is it a six? No. GONE. Joey is gone. Shlok has taken a stunner. He ran and dived and came up with a stunning two handed catch. He just came out of the blue. Two wickets back to back for Aarav and the Dazzlers. The Titans are 50 for 2 now.”

Harsha – “Aarav is on a hat-trick now. Boy, that catch was a stunner. Moreover, he had the sun in his eye. He dived and timed the catch to perfection. This is the catch of the match. 2 good catches back to back and the Dazzlers are back in the game. Both set batsmen are gone. We have two new batsmen at the pitch now.”

Adya – “The captain is in now. Mayank is facing the hat-trick ball. In comes Aarav running fast and FOUR. Mayank slams him past the diving Dhruv for a boundary. First ball for the captain and he hits it for a boundary. With confidence. He did not look scared to face it. Good shot. The ball was along the ground in a flash. 54 for 2 in 4.3 overs.”

Harsha – “Mayank’s swagger reminds me of Ricky Ponting. He looks so confident. The way he dispatched that ball is a very Australian manner of playing. It was a good shot.”

Two more balls were played where Mayank and Aryan took a single each. The last ball of Aarav’s first over was to be bowled. Shlok ran to Aarav and whispered something in his ear. Aarav changed the field to put two more players on the on side. Mayank expected a bouncer. In ran Aarav and a yorker came crashing to Mayank’s toes.

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Shanaya – “BOWLED him. The off stump is cartwheeling. The captain’s gone. Mayank has been comprehensively beaten and bowled. The Dazzlers are rejoicing. Shlok and Aarav are dancing. They plotted his dismissal. Aarav fooled Mayank into expecting a bouncer and then bowled a beauty on the off stump. Mayank had no clue about the ball.”

Radha – “That was fantastic bowling. The Titans are crumbling now. A superb over from Aarav. 3 wickets for him in that over. He has brought the Dazzlers right back onto the top of the game. Mayank was the star batsmen for the Titans. He is gone for 5 runs. The Titans are 56 for 3 now in 5 overs.”

Harsha – “That was a peach of a ball. This is the most amazing part of Twenty20. Just before this over, the Titans were cruising and one over later they are on the defensive. Plus the Titans don’t have a lot of depth in their batting as well. Garv now walks in to bat. There is not much batting left now for the Titans. This is their last recognized pair. Sraj, Adi and Ashutosh can throw their bat around a bit. However, if the Dazzlers pick up a wicket or two now, it will really demoralize the Titans.”

What he said was true. The Dazzlers had their tails up. They were an excited unit. Preyaa was smiling. They could really press for the Titans to score less. The ground was good enough for them to chase a score of 150. The cheerleaders were enjoying. If the first four overs were for the Titans, now it was time for the Dazzlers. Kiera was cartwheeling from end to end. Tansi had the mask of Aarav on her face. Amit and Geetika were feeling ecstatic. Aarav’s bowling had brought

them great joy. They had toiled hard for getting him coached. It was paying dividends.

The VIP box was relaxed. Everyone was enjoying the match and gave their opinions on the match.

Nargis – “There is another bowling change now. Aadit comes into the attack. He will bowl to Aryan. Garv is on the non-striker end. The first ball from him, Aryan places him to cover and tries to steal a single. Maanit is on the ball. He shoots the ball to the non-striker end. Garv is out of his crease. MISSED. The ball misses the stumps by a whisker. Surely, Garv was gone. The Dazzlers now have a renewed energy about them.”

Adya – “Yes, they do. All the players are on their toes. Next ball from Aadit and Aryan hoicks it over the long on rope for a SIX. The Titans are not giving up. They had a scare, but, they have come back with another shot.”

Shanaya – “It is getting interesting. Another ball from Aadit. It is a bad delivery. Aryan slams it straight down the ground. One bounce and over the ropes for FOUR.” The Titans are hitting every bad ball for runs. Aryan moves on to 11 from 3 balls and the Titans are 66 for 3 after 5.3 overs.

The game went on for another over. At the end of 7 overs, the Titans were 70 for 3. Garv was on 2 and Aryan was on 13 runs. Garv was playing very carefully. The drinks break came up.

All the players went to the ground. Even Dhoni and Parthiv were on the ground. Dhoni congratulated Shaurya and Shlok on their catches. Parthiv praised Aarav on his bowling,

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especially the ball that got Mayank. He had set up a camera and was showing Aarav the replay of that ball. After a four minute break, they were back for the resumption.

Harsha – “So what is the batting order for the Titans? Next are Sraj, then Adi, Ashutosh and Harshvardhan. Who is their hitter? If they need to get to 150, they need 80 off the last 13 overs.”

Radha – “They have to bank on Aryan. Garv is a steady player. Sraj too can hit the ball long. But no one else. One of these 3 has to play a long innings.”

3 more overs passed. The score moved on to 90 for 3 after 10 overs. Aryan was batting on 20 off 8 balls and Garv was on 15. However, he had consumed a lot of balls. 15 off 27 balls. The run rate was slowing down now. Aadit and Aarav had bowled a tight line. They had contained the batsmen.

Aarav started the 11th over. His 3rd over. He had already taken 3 wickets. Aarav was bowling to Garv. He hit the ball straight to Kushan. In and out. Kushan had dropped Garv. A simple catch and floored. Garv was relieved. That would have been a huge wicket for the Dazzlers.

Nargis – “The Dazzlers have really pulled things back. Garv is looking defensive. Twice he has been saved from being sent back. He has finally managed to take a single off the 4th ball of Aarav’s over. Aarav is bowling to Aryan. GONE. A faint nick and Shauryavardhan takes a simple catch behind the stumps. Aryan is gone. The Titans have lost their 4th wicket. Aarav has taken his fourth wicket too. Aryan was getting frustrated with the pace of the scoring. Now we can expect Titans not to go beyond 150. To get to 150 will be a

struggle now. They have the overs, but no one to hit the balls.”

Adya – “Sraj is now the next batsmen in. He takes guard. Aarav decides to go round the wicket. He runs in and the ball is on the leg stump. Sraj flicks it, and GONE. Gone first ball. Straight into the waiting hands of Krish Shodhan. He jumps in the air and topples backwards but holds on to the ball. Titans are 91 for 5. Sraj walks back a disappointed boy. Five wickets for Aarav Gupta. What a performance. Splendid. The Dazzlers owe it to this boy. Aarav is on a hat-trick again. The six balls have been bowled in this over. We have to wait to see if he can get a hat-trick in the next over. Who is in next? Are we even going to see 150?”

Harsha – “Do we have an upset on the cards? The Dazzlers are bowling superbly. Aarav is a gem of a bowler. Garv is feeling overwhelmed. Garv and Mayank are the star players for the Titans. The captain failed. And they really need someone to inject some momentum. Wait a minute. I thought that Adi was the next man in. But Suryaja has overruled Mayank and sent Harshvardhan in to bat. What is she thinking? Adi would have run between the wickets better. He would have supported Garv to score in these overs. We know that Harshvardhan is a poor runner. Suryaja has been talking to Harsh. She seems to have given him some instructions.”

Shanaya – “A bowling change by Aadit. Shlok is the bowler now. His first over. He had plotted the dismissal of Mayank with Aarav. He is a good bowler. He can be quick. First ball and Garv hits it past Dhruv in the covers. There are at least 2 runs here, but they only take a single. HV is not the quickest

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between the wickets.” Garv needs to keep the strike. Shlok will cherish bowling to HV. He is going to his bowling mark very enthusiastically.”

Radha – “First ball for HV. An off cutter, and HV swings wildly. SIX. The ball sails over Aarav on third man for a SIX. The ball connected to the lower end of the bat and with Shlok’s pace, the ball went over the boundary. A fluke shot at best.”

Nargis – “Shlok is furious now. He runs in and bowls a short one. SIX. Again a swing of the bat and the ball flies over the midwicket boundary for another SIX. The crowd is on their feet now. Two sixes in a row. HV has brought up the 100 for the Titans. He is just swinging the bat. Shlok cannot believe what is happening. The Titans are now 104 for 5. The 100 up in the 12th over.”

Harsha – “Here comes Shlok again and another swing of the bat. SIX MORE. The ball is over the midwicket ropes. Another six. 3 in 3 for HV. Shlok is looking helpless. Garv is rolling on the ground with laughter. He cannot believe what is happening. HV has his effervescent smile on his lips. 18 runs off 3 balls. Did anyone imagine that HV would be hitting 3 sixes and that too off Shlok? All of them were good balls, yet they got hit.”

Adya – “Shlok runs in, he bowls more quickly now, HV swings again, the ball hits the toe of the bat and runs past the stumps. FOUR. No one is there on the ropes and it is a four. Another fluke shot. He should have been bowled, but the toe of the bat saves him. It is now 22 off 4 for HV. What an over it is turning out to be. The run rate is now climbing up. Dhwanit is out with his bull horn. And Vansh has his placard

up for HV. They have been quiet for a while. Now they are rejoicing. The Titans camp is jumping up and down.”

I was shocked. Harsh was batting like a Lava Hound. He was plonking down his bat on the crease. He reminded me of Chris Gayle the West Indian barbarian. He was murdering Shlok on the field. Shlok seemed deflated. He ran in to bowl the last one of his over. Again a wild swing and the ball skied up in the air. It went towards the long on boundary. Aadit ran from midwicket and slid to prevent the ball from crossing the boundary. It was a good save. Harsh and Garv managed to run 3. Harsh was panting now. He was not used to this kind of excitement and running. Garv calmed him down. Amira ran in with some water. Harsh drank the water in sips. He was too excited. The Dazzlers grouped to plan the strategy. Shlok was looking like a ghost. His figures read 1,6,6,6,4,3. He had been hit for 26 runs in his first over. The run rate had climbed near to 10 per over once again. The Titans were 117 for 5 after 12.

Aadit flipped the ball to Aarav. He wanted to save him for the last over. However, the Titans were running away with the match. He turned to his most trusted bowler.

Aarav was on a hat-trick. He was bowling the 13th over and his last.

Shanaya – “Will this be the hat-trick. He missed the one the first time around. Will he get it this time? Garv is on the non-striker end and he is asking HV to be patient. Aarav runs in and bowls a fast one. SIX. One more over the ropes. HV swings again and this one connects right on the middle of the bat. It goes deep over the ropes and into the crowd over long off. No one is being spared. Garv’s eyes are popping. He was

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playing Aarav with respect. And HV has imperiously hit him for a six.”

Harsha – “Ha, Ha. This is pure entertainment. Till now it seemed a very adult-like match, and now HV is making this a boy’s game. Dhoni is applauding him. The run rate is climbing now. One more over of this mayhem and the Dazzlers will be demoralized.”

Radha – “Here is Aarav again, and FOUR. Again a wild swing and the ball connects in the middle. It goes one bounce over the long on boundary. The shoulders are drooping in the Dazzler camp. How do you bowl to this kind of swinging? Even a good ball is going for a boundary. 10 runs off the first 2 balls. HV is now on 35 off just 7 balls. Four sixes and two fours.”

Nargis – “Here is Aarav again, FOUR. What a shot. This one zings past Kanishk at cover and runs past the ropes. HV is using Aarav’s pace to his own advantage. Wham!! Bam! No one can stop this boy. And have a look at Suryaja. She has let her guard down and is laughing. Her strategy has worked out brilliantly. Even she would not have thought that it would work out this way.”

Adya – “Aarav goes round the wicket now. He bowls on HV’s legs. FOUR again. The ball has been flicked behind deep fine leg. There is no fielder there and it is an easy boundary. Aarav has lost his cool now. The Dazzlers are beginning to come apart. 6,4,4,4 so far in this over. And Harsh is on 43 from 9 balls. Will we see another one now? The fielders are beginning to scatter and protect the boundaries now.”

Shanaya – “This is fantastic stuff. Just wild hitting. And off the most feared bowler of the Dazzlers. Here comes Aarav again. Where are we going to see this one go? A wild swing and the ball goes towards the midwicket boundary. It won’t go for a four this time. Vishwas is after it and stops it. There were three there, but Garv stops after 2 runs. He wants HV to take the strike. He is playing second fiddle to HV at the moment.”

Radha – “Last ball of the over. HV swings and the ball goes straight to Adit. They steal a single. 21 runs off this over. Back to back run slogs for the Titans.”

Nargis – “A fantastic spell of bowling comes to an end from Aarav. Four overs for 31 runs and 5 wickets. 21 of them came off the last over. If not for that, he had amazing figures. He is surely in contention for the man of the match and the best bowler prizes.”

Harsha – “Yes. The one that got Mayank was a beauty. The last over got overshadowed by HV, but till then it was fantastic bowling. Now that his spell is over, Aadit has his hands full. At the beginning of the 12th over, the score was 91 for 5 for the dazzlers. Now it is 138 for 5 after 13 overs. The Dazzlers still have 7 overs to bowl and they have to search for someone who can bowl to HV. Aadit is putting his trust in Shlok again. “

Adya - It is Shlok to HV again. Will we see the fifty in this ball? He swings but misses. The ball is collected by Shaurya. First miss for HV. Garv comes up to him and talks to him. Here is Shlok again. HV swings. The ball is high in the air. Shlok deliberately slowed the pace of his ball. Harsh has hit the ball too soon. It is Dhruv under the ball. He catches it

perfectly. GONE. Shlok has got Harsh this time. Shlok gives him a send-off. He cannot control his expression of anger and relief.”

Shanaya – “HV misses out on a fifty. But what an innings. 46 off 13 balls. It has brought the Titans back in the match. A score of 170 and above now looks more probable. HV has injected life back into the match. HV trudges back to his camp. The crowd gives him a standing ovation. They are on their feet and clapping all the way as he steps in. Suryaja and Mayank give him a big hug. There are high fives all along. The audience is thrilled with this performance.”

I felt very proud at Harsh’s performance. He had decimated the Dazzler bowling. More than that, he had silenced his critics. There were doubts about his performance ability and he had proven them wrong. Whatever be the outcome of the match, his innings would be remembered for the way in which he rained boundaries on the opposition. For me, it was a moment of vindication. Gauri went over to the camp to settle Harsh down. This innings had been more than adequate excitement for him. He took one dose of his inhaler to catch his breath.

Harsha Bhogle – “That was a barbaric act. What is now interesting is that, HV through his hitting has taken the fear off his team mates. If he can come in and hit these bowlers, surely, they are going to feel more empowered to try and emulate him. I will not be surprised if Garv shifts gears now. If they are able to score briskly, the Titans may have a very big total on the board. This is an inflection point for the game.”

Ashutosh now had taken Harsh's place at the pitch. Since they had crossed over, Garv was now facing Shlok. He ran in to bowl and SMACK – Garv carted him over long off for a massive SIX. The flood gates had opened. Where Harsh had left off, Garv took over. This was a clean hit. No more slogging. Shlok could only hold his head as he saw the ball soar over the boundary.

Radha – “You were right Harsha. The HV innings seems to have put Garv in a confident mood. FOUR. Shlok again tries the slower ball. Garv waits for the ball and cuts it past point for another boundary. The Titans are unstoppable now. Garv is accelerating. Aadit comes down to Shlok and talks to him. They are appearing worried. If Garv goes on like this, it will be a treat to watch.”

Nargis – “Shlok is losing his rhythm now. Here he comes, FOUR More. Shlok bowls a full toss and the ball is pulled away for another boundary. Kanishk was on the boundary, but the ball rocketed past him for a four. He had no chance to even come near the ball. A six and two fours. THE 150 is up for the Titans. And in quick time too. Shlok has now conceded 40 runs in his two overs.”

Harsha – “This is clean hitting now. Proper cricketing shots. If the Dazzlers keep throwing loose balls, they will be punished.”

Arjun signalled for the drinks break. The Dazzlers surely needed a break. They needed to rethink their strategy. The Titans were 152 for 6 after 14 overs. Still 6 more overs were to be bowled. They could get to 200 if Garv played well. The Titans were rejoicing. Garv was talking to Suryaja and Mayank about the strategy. He wanted to bat till the end.

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The match restarted. Aadit gave the ball to Krish. He knew that he could not allow Shlok to bowl any more. He needed to get 2 more overs from somewhere. He turned to Krish – the only spinner in the game.

Adya – “Welcome back. Ashutosh is on strike. Ashutosh is a scurrer. He can run very fast between wickets. The first ball from Krish and SIX. Ashutosh puts it away for a six. Krish lobbed the ball to him and he hits it very cleanly. What a shot. The Titans are now eyeing the boundary rope every ball.”

Shanaya – “Here is Krish again with his spinner and SMACK – another SIX. This time over the extra cover region. 12 in 2 balls for Ashutosh. Garv is encouraging him a lot as well. The score is past 160 now and Preyaa is looking worried.”

4 more came off that over. The next over was by Kanishk and he too went for runs by Garv and Ashutosh. Ashutosh hit him for a boundary and Garv took some singles off him. 16 overs gone and the score was 174 for 6.

Harsha – “Aadit has gone back to Vishwas now. Vishwas was hit for runs in his first 2 overs. Ashutosh has reached 20 in no time. Here is Vishwas to Ashutosh. CAUGHT. He tries to hit the ball, but the bounce is awkward for him and he ends up hitting it in the air. Shaurya rushed forward and pouched an easy catch. The Titans are 174 for 7. Ashutosh has played a nice cameo.”

Radha – “This is quite exciting. I hope that the Dazzlers can match this. This is beginning to look one sided now. Adi Nagpal is in. First ball and Adi flicks it away. FOUR. Another boundary. They are coming one after the other. Vishwas is

shouting at Maanit to change his fielding position. However, it was a bad delivery.”

Nargis – “Here is Vishwas again. FOUR. Adi scoops him over the wicketkeeper for a four. Superb shot. He anticipated the slower one and timed it to perfection. 8 in 2 balls for Adi. They are all inspired now.”

Krish conceded 10 in his next over and Vishwas gave away 10 more in his next over. At the end of 19 overs, the Titans were 202 for 7. Aadit was going to bowl the last over. Garv was on 49 and Adi was on 19 off 5 balls.

Adya – “Garv is on 49 now. Will he get his 50? This is the last over. Here comes Aadit, and Garv hits him for a couple over the bowler’s head. HALF-CENTURY FOR GARV. What an innings. He started slowly and then picked up the pace. His last 25 runs came in 10 balls. He has managed to make the most of the dropped catch by Kushan. He held the innings together for the Titans. We have the first 50 of the match. The Titans are now 204 for 7 with 5 balls to go.”

Three more balls were played and four more runs were scored. Adi was on strike with 2 balls to go.

Shanaya – “Here is Aadit with the penultimate ball and Adi goes aerial. Shlok is underneath the ball. He catches it nicely. The ball was swirling and Shlok manages to hold it with both hands. Adi is gone for a well-made 20. Last ball to go and the Titans are 208 for 8 now. Garv is on strike on 54. Here comes Aadit and SIX. Garv hits him for a huge six over long on. What a shot to finish the innings. Massive massive hit.”

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Harsha – “Wow, this is a huge score. 214 for 8 off 20 overs. I think the Titans have won it here. Garv hit that huge six off the last ball. I have a faint statistical recollection that if a team hits a six to end an innings, then they always win the match in a limited over match.”

The crowd gave a standing ovation to the Titans. They had truly put up a huge score. The two outstanding innings from Garv and Harshvardhan stole the show for them. They had overcome a feisty bowling spell from young Aarav to take the team to a total of 214. It was not going to be easy for the Dazzlers. There was a lot of pressure on them to chase this score.

The innings break was uneventful. The Dazzlers looked tired and red faced. They needed someone to talk to them. I asked Geet to motivate them. He went up to the Dazzlers camp and called everyone there.

Geet – “Look guys, you have done very well as a team. You have bowled very well. No wides or no-balls in 20 overs. You got undone by one innings. There are eleven of you. It requires just one or two of you to play a bigger innings. Everything will fall in place. You went in with the expectation of bowling them out under 100 or 120. That did not happen. But it does not mean that the match is lost. You still have your 20 overs to bat. You go there and play your natural game. There is so much of talent here. Don't get disheartened. Learn to roll with the blows. Adjust to the new target. I am sure that you will do well. There will be setbacks as well. Even then, there will be opportunities to score well. Go ahead and play the match. Your family and friends are all here to support you. Whether you win or not, they want you

to play well and they will cheer you. Play as a team. All the best.”

They all nodded. Kiera came and started cartwheeling. Aadit began to smile now. A wave of relief passed through the Dazzler camp. Their bodies relaxed. They regrouped again. They knew that they had to play their best game. They knew the strength of the Titans bowling. It was not going to be easy to chase 215 against the likes of Mayank, Garv and Aarsh. They had to play carefully, yet score briskly to remove the pressure from themselves.

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SECOND INNINGS – GRADE IV DAZZLERS

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It was time to start. Arjun and Sudena were at the pitch. Grade V Titans were buoyant. With a cheer, they dispersed to their positions in the field. Mayank had the ball in his hand. Maanit and Dhruv from the Dazzlers were at the pitch.

Radha – “Here is the second innings now. Mayank is starting the proceedings for the Grade V Titans. Maanit is taking strike for the Grade IV Dazzlers. It is going to be a stiff chase for the Dazzlers. They are up against the best bowler of the Titans. Mayank bowls very fast. They have to score at more than 10 per over. They don’t have much space to play out the initial bowlers.”

Nargis – “Here is Mayank with the first ball. SIX. Maanit comes forward and effortlessly lifts him back over the bowler’s head. Off the first ball of the Dazzlers’ innings. The crowd is vociferously cheering up Dazzlers. Tansi has the mask on for Maanit. This is a pleasant surprise. The ease with which he stepped forward and lifted him brooked no fear. This is going to be fun.”

Harsha – “Mayank is not pleased. He did not have a good day with the bat and he has been hit for a six off his first ball. He is going all guns blazing at Maanit. He runs in faster and bowls one on the leg side. FOUR. He has been flicked away for a boundary. Maanit is taking the Titans on. 10 for no loss after 2 balls.”

Adya– “This is a good start. Very morale boosting for the Dazzlers. They are cheering every run. They need to. It is a long way to go. If Maanit and Dhruv can give them a good platform, we have a game on hand.”

There were no more fireworks in the opening over. At the end of the first over, The Dazzlers were 14 for no loss. Dhruv was on 3 and Maanit on 11.

Garv was starting the next over. He was to bowl to Dhruv.

Shanaya – “Here is Garv to Dhruv. He swings the bat and the ball is in the air. GONE. A straight catch to Vivaan. He takes it easily. The first wicket is down for the Dazzlers. Garv has struck with his first ball. The strategy of belligerence has not worked. 14 for 1 now. The Titans are celebrating. It was an ill-timed shot against the pace of Garv. Vivaan took the catch very patiently.”

Harsha – “The next man in is Aarav. They need to play out Garv. Be patient. There are enough overs to bat. Is it going to be Aarav who will save the Dazzlers?”

Radha – “Here is Garv again, Maanit hits him on the ground past cover. They run a single, and Oh. A misfield by Sraj and Aarav quickly calls for a run more. 2 more runs to the Dazzlers. Maanit moves on to 13 off 6 balls. There was an awkward bounce for Sraj and it cost them a run more. More importantly, it allowed Aarav to be off the strike.”

Nargis – “GONE. Maanit is gone. He tried this a ball too much. Garv put some bounce on the ball. The ball hit the toe end of the bat and ballooned up. Priam ran in from cover and took an easy catch. Maanit is gone for an unlucky 13 and Garv has two wickets now. The match really belongs to him. He anchored his side with a well-paced 60 and now has sent the openers packing with his first 3 balls.”

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Harsha – “It was bound to be. This was a risky play. The inexperience is showing. Maanit got carried away and threw caution to the winds. The openers are back in the tent. The Dazzlers are demoralized. They had planned for days on their strategy. The big total they are facing has taken their strategy off the table. They became ambivalent about whether to hit or play with caution. Maanit paid the price for this.”

Adya – “Shlok is in next. The two best batsmen for the Dazzlers are at the crease now. They have to play sensibly. Here is Garv with the next ball. Shlok lets the ball pass to Joey. He looks very confident.”

By the end of the 2nd over, the Dazzlers were 17 for 2. 3 runs were scored in the over by Garv. Shlok was on one and Aarav on nought.

Shanaya – “Here is Mayank to Shlok. SIX. Shlok emulates Maanit. He hits him back over the bowler’s head and Mayank’s pace carries it over the boundary ropes. It was an amazing shot. Well played Shlok.”

Harsha – “The Dazzlers are too unpredictable. One moment they are hitting boundaries and the next moment, they are giving up their wickets. They need to steady the ship. Shlok has the temperament. He needs to anchor the innings.”

Radha – “True. Mayank bowls this on the leg and an easy single is taken. Aarav is on strike now. What is going to be his approach? Hit or Defend?”

Nargis – “Here is Mayank again. The ball is in the air. DROPPED. Aarav has been dropped off the first ball. The culprit is HV. Butter fingers. The ball was right above his

head. Was an easy catch and Aarav would have been back in the camp for a first ball duck. The ball grazed his fingers. HV was too late to react. Sraj came in from the mid-off boundary and Aarav completed a couple of runs. The Dazzlers were in trouble if the catch was taken.”

Adya – “Yes, that might be a costly drop. HV just did not see the ball coming. He was taken by surprise at the ball coming towards him.”

Mayank ran towards Harsh and patted him on the shoulder. He really pampered him. He assured him that all was well. Harsh gave his characteristic nod.

Shanaya – “Here is Mayank again to Aarav. GONE. Aarav is gone and Mayank has his revenge. Mayank bowls a short one. Aarav puts up his bat to defend and the ball lobs back to Mayank for an easy catch. Aarav misread the bounce on this one. The Dazzlers are deep in trouble now. He should have gone the earlier ball, but for the dropped catch.”

Harsha – “The most relieved chap on the field is HV. He was the first person to run to Mayank and hug him. He knows the price of the dropped catch. They have not paid it. HV is relieved that he would not be blamed. Garv is there too and they are celebrating. They know that Aarav was an important wicket.”

Radha – “Aarav walks back and is replaced with Vishwas. The logical choice should be Aadit to be in. However, Preyaa wanted someone to play a quick-fire cameo. They need to fire up their innings.”

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Nargis – “Here is Mayank to Vishwas. FOUR. Off the first ball, Vishwas drives it past the lunging Priam at point. Good shot. Mayank is unhappy with the fielding. He shows his displeasure. But it four more runs to the Dazzlers.”

Adya – “Vishwas takes a single off the next ball and takes strike. Adi Nagpal is now pressed into the attack. He will be bowling to Vishwas. SIX. Vishwas has swept Adi over the fine leg boundary for a six. Amazing shot. 11 off 3 balls for Vishwas Kankaria. 37 for 3 for the Dazzlers after 3.1 overs.”

Harsha – “They are scoring briskly. The problem is in the second column. They don’t have the wickets to keep the momentum going. They are trying too hard to hit boundaries. They need to pace their innings. There is a certain impulsivity which exhibited here.”

Shanaya – “In comes Adi to Vishwas. GONE. Vishwas skied it and Sraj ran in from mid-off. He completed an easy catch and Vishwas was gone. Adi got him. That was a bad shot. The Dazzlers are down at 37 for 4 now. Are we having an early lunch today? They are losing wickets in every over now.”

The Dazzler camp was certainly a dejected camp now. They still had 178 more to win. That was a momentous task. Shlok was signalling for Aadit to come and bat. However, it was Adit Patel who was walking out to bat. Preyaa did not wish to put both Aadit and Shlok on the pitch at the same time. If Adit could support Shlok, then Aadit could come in and hit the ball later.

Radha – “They need to stop eyeing the boundary and instead run singles and couples. Here is Adi to Adit. SIX. A massive

hit over cover. The ball is way over the ropes. These guys are hitting sixes at will. The Dazzlers are not giving up.”

Nargis – “The crowd is enjoying every hit. The Dazzlers are making a nice impression. Here is Adi with the last ball of his over – FOUR. Smashed through mid-off. The fielders are chasing it, but the ball outruns Harshvardhan and Sraj. Fifty up for the Dazzlers after 4 overs. Adit is now on 12 runs off 3 balls. Shlok is on 9 off 6 balls.”

Harsha – “It is interesting that both the teams scored 50 runs in their first 4 overs. The Titans are ahead here due to the 4 wickets they have taken. However, if Shlok and Adit can hold the fort here, they can make a match of this.”

Sraj came now to bowl. Shlok was facing him. The first ball was a tight ball. Shlok swung and missed. The ball went over the stumps but missed them. Sraj stood with his hands on his head. Shlok allowed the next ball to go to the wicketkeeper. He calmed himself down. Sraj got more confident.

Adya – “Here comes Sraj with the 3rd ball of the over. FOUR. Shlok cuts it past the slip area. Mayank at third man has no chance to stop it. This was a delicate shot and well timed. Here comes Sraj again, on the leg side and FOUR. One more ground shot and the ball is through midwicket for a boundary. Back to back boundaries for Shlok. He is turning the heat on. Here is Sraj with the fifth ball and FOUR. Hit back over the bowler’s head, one bounce and over the ropes. 3 boundaries in a row. This is a good phase for the Dazzlers. That was what they wanted.”

Shanaya – “Last ball of the over and Shlok taps it for a quick single. He runs but is sent back by Adit. Wise decision. Priam

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was on the ball in a flash. Adit would have been run out. Shlok is now like an eager hunter. He wants to be on strike. 62 for 4 after 5.”

Mayank tossed the ball to Ashutosh. This was the fifth bowler he was using. He had yet to get Aarsh into the attack. He planned to save Garv and Aarsh for the later overs. Ashutosh was a slightly difficult bowler to hit, especially with a tennis tennis ball as he looped the ball.

Radha – “Here is Ashutosh with his first ball. High in the air and GONE. Adit has been caught by Vivaan Chiripal on the long off boundary. He tried to hit a six, and Vivaan was right on the boundary. A simple catch and the Dazzlers have lost half their side for 62. First ball wicket for Ashutosh. Another small innings from the Dazzlers.”

Harsha – “They come in and play a 4 or 5 ball innings. It helps the run rate, however, when the wickets fall; they are get demoralized. Finally, we see the captain walk in. Aadit walks in. He confers with Shlok and settles down to take strike. This is the last recognized pair. One more wicket and the Titans are into the tail.”

Nargis – “Here is Ashutosh to Aadit. The ball is looped and FOUR. Aadit sweeps with ease and the ball is out like a rocket. A diving Garv cannot stop the ball. It was such a powerful shot.”

Harsha – “Here is Ashutosh with his last ball. Aadit hits it to point and runs for a single. GONE. Aryan has picked up the ball and thrown it to Joey. Aadit was off for a non-existent single. Shlok tried to send him back, but Aadit was not watching either the ball or Shlok. He thought Shlok was

running and Aadit kept running towards the non-striker's end. And it is SHLOK who sacrificed his wicket. He ran towards the striker's end knowing fully well that he will not reach in time. Joey took off the bails and Shlok has to go back to the camp. Sudena calls for an early drinks breaks. The Dazzlers are 72 for 6 after 6."

Adya – "That was an amazing sacrifice from Shlok. He had tears in his eyes when he walked back. But he knew what he was doing. In the context of the game, he felt that it was better for Aadit to be there at the crease. A terrible mix up. This was the last thing the Dazzlers needed at this time. This match is over. They simply don't have the wickets to chase down 214. What can Aadit do alone? Shauryavardhan now joins the captain at the crease.

Shanaya – "What Sudhir uncle had said about team work had really rubbed off on Shlok. I hope Aadit can make good of this sacrifice. There is gloom in the Dazzler camp. Kiera and Tansi are too stunned. Vansh and Dhwanit are blowing the bugle. Preyaa is in tears too."

The drinks break was over. Aarsh was pressed into the attack. Aadit took 7 runs off the first 4 balls. He was hitting the balls into the gaps and running twos off every ball. He was avoiding the aerial shots and instead making ground shots. Shaurya was matching him for the running between the wickets.

Radha – "Here is Aarsh to Shaurya. SIX. Off the first ball. Straight down the ground for a six. Shaurya came forward and lifted him into the sight screen. The Dazzlers are not giving up yet. 13 runs off this over and still one more ball to go. FOUR. Shaurya has cut past the point fielder for a

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boundary. 17 runs off this over. The score climbs to 89 for 6 after 7.”

Nargis – “Everyone has come in and hit a six. But they don’t last. Will Shaurya last? Aadit is careful to hit ground shots. Will he run out of partners?”

Ashutosh bowled 2 more overs and conceded 15 runs in it. Aadit farmed the strike. Aarsh gave 10 in his next over. No boundaries or sixes, only singles and doubles were hit. The wickets had stopped falling. The Dazzlers were now 114 for 6 after 10. Aadit was on 42 and Shaurya on 10.

Adya – “Here is Aarsh with the eleventh over. Shaurya is on strike. SIX. One more off Shaurya’s bat. No boundaries off the previous three overs. The run rate had been dipping a bit and Shaurya has broken the shackles.”

Harsha – “Aadit’s presence in the middle is making a lot of difference. He demonstrated that one can score patiently as well. He has climbed to 42 in no time. At 120 for 6 after 11.1, the Dazzlers have a chance. The Dazzler camp is looking up now. If they are able to go through to the next drinks break without losing a wicket, they definitely have a chance.”

7 more runs were taken in that over. Aarsh had now conceded 40 in his 3 overs and was expensive. After 11 overs, the score was 127 for 6. Mayank tossed the ball to Harshvardhan.

Shanaya – “Here is HV with his first ball. He had an amazing batting cameo and now is in to bowl. Can he recreate that magic again? First ball to Aadit and SIX. Aadit lifts him over the extra cover fence and that brings up his fifty. Captain’s

knock. This is a well-deserved half century. The happiest person on the field is Shlok Lavsi. Aadit waves towards the crowd and specially acknowledges Shlok. If not for Shlok's sacrifice, Aadit would have been sitting in the camp. FOUR. Cut past point for a boundary. Aadit is turning on the heat now. The Dazzlers have crossed 130.

Aadit played the next 2 balls defensively and took a single off the fifth ball to give the strike to Shaurya.

Radha – “Brother to Brother for the first time in this match. SIX. Shaurya moves to the leg side and lofts him for a six over cover. Harsh has been creamed in this over. 17 off the twelfth over and the Dazzlers are looking ominous. This is a superb show from Shaurya and Aadit.”

Adi Nagpal and Garv bowled the next 2 overs very tightly. Adi and Mayank bowled one more over each. Neither Shaurya nor Aadit could score well in these overs. The Titans were pegging things back. Garv and Mayank were treated with the respect they merited. Neither Shaurya nor Aadit wanted to take any risk. They were applying themselves where the earlier batsmen had failed. They had the overs to bat. One good over and they would be back into the game. At the end of 16 overs, the Dazzlers were 161 for 6. 54 needed off the last 4. Aadit was on 77 and Shaurya on 22.

The game was evenly poised now. It seemed that the Dazzlers were a shade ahead with the captain at the crease and batting beautifully. However the run rate was a problem and the pressure was showing on Aadit.

Here was Mayank with the 17th over. He was going to bowl himself out. He needed a wicket. Or he could bowl very

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economically and make the run rate for the Dazzlers more difficult to get.

Harsha – “Here is Mayank with the first ball. FOUR. Aadit comes forward and smashes it past the covers for a boundary. He is taking it to the Titans now. If he plays through, he will get a century. This is an excellent innings from him. Here is Mayank again with the next ball. FOUR. One more boundary, this time through midwicket. No one can stop this. The Dazzlers are turning favourites now. The spectators are on their feet and applauding Aadit. The captain has come to the rescue for the Dazzlers. Tansi has the put on the mask of Aadit and she has not had a chance to remove it. Aadit moves on to 85 now. Fabulous innings.

Nargis – “8 runs off the over so far. 2 more balls to go. The Dazzlers need 48 off 20 balls. It is getting a bit risky now. Here is Mayank. GONE. Aadit is gone. He cuts the ball but it takes the edge and flies to point where Aryan takes a superb catch. The Titans are celebrating. Aadit is still standing at the crease. He cannot believe it. His head is down. Tears are flowing down his cheeks. Mayank comes up and puts an arm around his shoulder. The Titans are smelling victory here.”

Adya – “The match is over for the Dazzlers now. Aadit was the man who could have taken them there. Now it is over. Gone for 85 off 54 balls. Fantastic knock. He anchored the Dazzlers and brought them close to the target. Mayank’s strategy has paid off. They got their man. The Dazzlers are now very very depressed. Shlok is lying on the ground. He cannot believe it. Aadit walks back. This is a very emotional moment for the entire crowd. Tansi takes off the mask. She has tears in her eyes as well.”

Harsha – “Well played Boy. That was a gutsy knock. We still have 3 overs and a ball to go. Difficult for the Dazzlers now. Krish is the new man in. Mayank bowls a fast one. It takes the edge of the bat and runs away to third man. There is no fielder there. Aryaan runs from point and saves the ball just inside the boundary ropes. Krish collects 3 and is on strike for the next over.”

Shanaya – “The Dazzlers had the match in their hands. The pressure of the run rate got to them. They could not score between the 12th and 16th overs and that brought about a lot of pressure on them. They had to score fast. Aadit misses out on his century and the Titans are firm favourites now.”

Radha – “Garv is going to bowl the 18th over. The Titans had reserved him for the last. He has the 18th and 20th overs. Not easy to score off him. Here is Garv with the first ball of the 18th over to Krish. GONE. He hits it up in the air, Priam runs forward and takes the catch. The Dazzlers have lost their 8th wicket. They are now falling like ninepins. Garv and Mayank are bowling too fast for them. Garv has picked up his 3rd wicket. The batsmen crossed over. Shaurya is on strike now. The only hope if any that the Dazzlers have rests on Shaurya. Kanishk is the next batsmen in.”

Harsha – “Garv runs in and bowls fast. FOUR. A delicate shot by Shaurya. He cuts it late and Garv’s pace takes the ball to the boundary. Terrific shot. Garv is smiling. He acknowledges the shot and claps for Shaurya. Garv has a lot of affection for Shaurya. Shaurya returns the compliment with a nod.”

Adya – “The next ball from Garv on the leg side and the shot is played towards fine leg. Shaurya collects 2 off this one. He

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is running hard. He wants the strike. He does not want to expose Kanishk to Garv. Shaurya knows that if they are to win the match, he will have to keep the strike. And hit boundaries.”

The next 2 balls from Garv were played by Shaurya trying to hit a boundary. The ball went to the fielder and even though a single was possible, he refused it. He took a single off the last ball and took the strike. 18 overs gone, and the score was 179 for 8. 36 required off the last 2 overs. Huge task.

Mayank handed the ball to Sraj. Shaurya hit the first 2 balls for a couple of runs each.

Shanaya – “Here is Sraj with the ball. Shaurya rocks back and hits the ball through midwicket. Aarsh is after the ball. They run two. Will the ball go over the boundary? Aarsh pulls it back just before the ropes and Kanishk runs a third one. This brings Kanishk on strike now. The Dazzlers need to come up with boundaries. Mayank does not mind giving these singles and doubles. He has Garv to bowl the last over. He looks relaxed.”

Radha – “Here is Sraj with the ball. Kanishk jumped forward and hit the ball. FOUR. One bounce and over the bowler’s head. Just what was required. 25 now needed off 8 balls. This is turning out to be closer than what was thought. Shaurya came down and talked to Kanishk. He wanted him to calm down and not take risk.”

Harsha – “One must admire the Dazzlers. They have played really well to reach here. At one stage when they lost the wicket of Shlok, they looked down and out. To fight till this stage has been superb. Aadit played a controlled knock and in

Shaurya's company, he took the match to this stage. It is now up to the last 3 batsmen to see if they can win it for him."

Nargis – "Here is Sraj with the ball. GONE. Kanishk has hit this straight back to Sraj and he catches it on his chest. The 9th wicket is gone. Kanishk in his exuberance has managed to hit the ball back to Sraj for an easy catch. He walks back. Shaurya is looking furious."

Adya – "The last man in for the Dazzlers is Kushan Mehta. It seems increasingly impossible for the Dazzlers. Shaurya is talking to Kushan. He does not want him to play any adventurous shots. Shaurya is stranded at the non-striker's end. In comes Sraj and outside the off stump, Kushan hangs out his bat. The ball kisses the inside edge and narrowly misses hitting the stump. It runs away to the deep fine leg boundary. Kushan runs a couple. There was a chance to run a third one, but Shaurya looks away. He wants the strike for the last over. 13 off this over. 23 to win off the last over."

Harsha – "The score is 192 for 9. The Titans are firm favourites now. 23 to win off Garv Mittal seems difficult. The Titans supporters in the crowd are already celebrating. Vansh and Dhwanit are singing and dancing. The Dazzlers are quiet.

And now here today for the last over of the match, we have a new guest between us. For the first time in his life, having spent over a decade on the other side, we have in the commentary box, the captain of the Indian Cricket team – Mahendra Singh Dhoni. Welcome MS. How does it feel to be in this box today?"

MS – "It is a fantastic match so far. I have enjoyed every bit of it. These boys really have talent. I congratulated Kiran and

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Geet just now. They have a fantastic group of students and she has educated them well. It has been such a tense match and yet they have maintained the on field behaviour superbly. We really need to learn from these kids.”

Harsha – “That is so true. I have been overwhelmed by how these guys have played. Simply outstanding. What do you think of the match at the moment? Whom are you betting on?”

MS - “The Titans are favourites now. Looking at the way, that Garv has bowled, 23 runs looks difficult. But not impossible.”

Harsha – “Here is Garv with the first ball of the last over. FOUR. Shaurya goes on the back foot and cuts him through point for a boundary. That was a beauty. 19 now off 5 required. The Dazzlers are now waking up in their camp. They are praying that Shaurya emulates his brother. FOUR again. SHOT OF THE DAY. In Brendon McCullum style, Shaurya scoops the ball over the wicketkeeper’s head for a boundary. No fielder on that boundary and the ball runs away for a four. Shaurya’s face shows no emotion. The Titans are looking a bit tense. For the first time in the match, Mayank is looking perturbed. He comes to Garv and talks to him.”

MS – “This is fantastic hitting. Shaurya has shown the right temperament. He has taken the strike. To show this maturity at this age is fantastic.”

Harsha – “Here is Garv again. On the leg side and FOUR. This one is lofted over midwicket and beats Ashutosh who has no chance of stopping it. 3 straight boundaries off Garv. Garv is not amused. He is staring at Shaurya with fury now.

His fondness is wearing thin. He knows the importance of these 3 boundaries. The Dazzlers are now jumping up and down. Tansi is wearing Shaurya's mask."

MS – "The crowd is in for a fantastic finish. Both sides can win. These 3 boundaries have brought the match alive. Till this point, it seemed that it was the Titans, but this match is going to the wire now."

Harsha – "Here is Garv, running very fast, he jumps and OH, he slips on landing. Sudena signals a dead ball. Amira comes in with the painkiller spray. But Garv is limping. He cannot walk anymore. I don't think he is going to bowl any further."

Shanaya – "Garv is going off the field now. But whom are the Titans going to get in for the substitute? They don't have anyone. They would have to get a girl to come in."

Harsha – "That is not their only problem. Who is going to bowl the last 3 balls? Mayank has finished his spell. Aarsh has gone for a lot of runs. Shaurya hit him for 2 sixes and a boundary. Sraj has bowled the previous over. So those 3 are out. It has to be either Adi or Ashutosh. Suryaja is signalling Mayank to give the ball to Ashutosh."

Radha – "The Titans signal to Dhwanit. He is drafted into the team as a substitute player. Dhwanit gives the bull horn to Garv and joins the team. He is overjoyed to be on the field. The ball is with Ashutosh. 11 required off 3 balls. This is going to be a close finish now."

MS – "The Dazzlers are favourites now. As long as Garv was bowling, the Titans were going to be ahead, but now surely

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Ashutosh can be hit more than Garv. In the way that Shaurya is batting, he will hit those runs.”

Harsha – “DRAMA again on the field. Ashutosh was going to bowl. Mayank stopped him and asked him to give back the ball. He threw the ball to HV. What is he doing? Harsh was hit for a lot in his first over. This is suicide. Suryaja is holding her head in her hands. But it is the captain’s decision. Shaurya will cream Harsh.”

MS – “Strange are the ways captains make decisions. This is very very interesting; brother to brother now.”

Harsha – “SIX. Shaurya takes 2 steps forward and lifts his brother over the bowler’s head. High and handsome. The Titans are silent. The rest of the crowd is deafening. Mayank has paid the price for his strange decision. HV is looking at the ground. He knew that it was a loose ball.”

Nargis – “With that six, it is HALF-CENTURY for Shaurya. He has batted beautifully. He played second fiddle to Aadit while the latter was playing a majestic knock. Once Aadit exited, Shaurya took upon himself to win this match for the Dazzlers. Even when wickets were falling around him, he remained calm and composed. The Half-century has come off just 28 balls. 54 off 28 balls. Superb, superb knock. One more blow and the Dazzlers are the champions.”

MS – “Five off two balls. Shaurya is going to finish it in the next ball itself. He won’t leave it to the last ball. The Dazzlers are lucky. And look at Preyaa and Aadit. They are eager to run on the field and take hold of Shaurya.”

Harsha – “Here is Harsh again and DROPPED. HV tries to put the ball in the block hole, Shaurya comes forward and hits it straight back to Harsh, he dives to his right but cannot hold to the ball. DROPPED. Shaurya breaths a sigh of relief. Butter fingers again. Wait. Did I hear right what Shaurya said to Harsh when he dropped the catch, MS?”

MS – “Yes, Harsha, you heard right. Shaurya said – You just dropped the OMEGA bro.”

Harsha – “Ha, Ha, Ha. I cannot stop laughing. The famous Steve Waugh line. For those of you, who are unaware of the significance of what Shaurya said, let me explain. In the 2003 ICC cricket world cup in England, Australia was playing South Africa in a must win league match. Australia was tottering in a hopeless situation when Steve Waugh hit the ball straight to Hershelle Gibbs at square leg. Gibbs dropped the catch and it is rumoured that Steve Waugh told Hershelle Gibbs - “You just dropped the world cup, son.” Both Steve Waugh and Hershelle Gibbs subsequently denied it, but it has become the most famous line of the World cup. The rest is history. Steve Waugh, who was the captain of the Australian cricket team, went on to hit a century and Australia went to win the match. In the semi-finals Australia were facing South Africa. In a very low scoring match, Lance Klusner hit the ball and from the non-striker’s end, Allan Donald; the South African speedster ran for a non-existent run and was run out. The result was a tie and by virtue of the win in the league match, Australia was declared winner. Subsequently, Australia beat Pakistan in the finals and won the world cup. That taunt of Steve Waugh still haunts the South Africans.”

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MS – “Last ball of the match. Five to win. This is anybody’s game now. All three results possible. A four will get a tie and into the super over, a six will seal it for the Dazzlers and less than four will be the Titans. This is a photo finish. I am so glad that I am here now. It has been a fantastic day. I just love these kids. A last ball finish. And Kudos to the Dazzlers. Irrespective of the result, irrespective of what happens on this ball, they have played a fantastic match. They have chased this mammoth total. They have truly been the challengers. And remember, if a six is required off the last ball, it will be hit.”

The atmosphere in the stadium was electric. I caught Gauri’s eye. She was tense too. We both knew what was happening. We knew that one of our sons would be the winner and the other the loser in today’s match. However, that it would be so close was beyond our imagination. The stakes had suddenly changed for our family. The entire grade depended on our children. Victory for one meant defeat for the other. I did think that the Titans were the favourites before the match started. I had hoped that both Shaurya and Harsh would perform well in their individual capacities; however, that they would be involved at the deciding moment was not even in the realms of my fantasy. Harsh bowling to Shaurya with five to win off the last ball was inconceivable. In that sense, both were carrying the burden of their grades on them. The entire stadium was looking at them with expectations. I could not have asked for a better finish.

The VIP box was tense. Everyone was on their feet. How could anyone stand? No one had anticipated this state. The Dazzlers had won the match psychologically. They were favourites now. Parthiv Patel stood with his hands on his

head looking very interested. Kiran had her hands clasped in front of her. Geet was covering his face with his hands. Sanjit, Sudhir, Amit, Paresh, Aditi and Surabhi were in the VIP box and looking at the middle. The Titans camp was pin drop silence. The Dazzlers looked ready to run and grab the trophy. Aadit and Shlok were at the edge of the boundary. The crowd was on its feet. Vansh, Kiera and Tansi were paralyzed. The result could go anyway.

Mayank was marshalling his boys. What must be going through his mind? Was he regretting his decision to give the ball to Harsh? Garv was in the Titans camp and had his head in his hands. Tears were flowing down his cheeks. He badly wanted to be out there in the middle, but it was impossible. Joey was behind the stumps. He had come forward now. Aarsh at the deep fine leg boundary, Aryan was at point, Mayank himself was at the long on boundary, Dhwanit substituting for Garv was at midwicket, Sraj was at long off, Ashutosh was at extra cover boundary, Adi was at third man boundary, Vivaan was at cover and Priam at slip.

Shaurya came to Kushan and told him that there was no running. Either it was a boundary or nothing. No point in running. So stay behind the crease. He did not want a run out in any way. He went back to the crease and took his guard. Harsh looked at the ground. He felt a mountain of guilt. Garv broke the deafening silence. With Dhwanit's bull horn, he said – "Go HV."

Harsha – "Presumably the last ball of the match. Here is HV. He runs in and bowls. Shaurya steps forward and hits the ball high in the air. Is it going to be a six? Shaurya is standing with his arms held high in a victorious manner and he is shouting

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– “I am better than you in everything”. HV is running with his eye on the ball. It is a very high shot, HV is not giving up, He lunges and OUT!! HV has taken the catch one handedly inches off the ground and just inside the boundary ropes. He tumbles twice and comes to a halt. His spectacles are flying in the air, but most importantly he has held on to the ball. The catch is complete. Sudena raises her finger and Shaurya is out IT IS NOT A SIX. Against the run of play, Harsh has taken the catch. What a finish. I thought the ball was going to go over the ropes and out of the blue, Harsh’s hands came between the Dazzlers and victory. The Titans have snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.”

MS – “The Titans have won the match. The scenes at the stadium are unbelievable. HV cannot believe that he has caught the ball. Mr Butter Fingers has taken the catch of his life. He caught it when it mattered the most. He is gradually coming to his feet. Mayank runs to him and flings himself on him. Harsh is down on the ground again. The entire grade V are now throwing themselves on the group. It is Aarsh on top of Mayank. Joey runs into the melee, Garv limps and runs and limps and runs and reaches the group. He throws himself into the middle of the group. Ashutosh joins in and now Sraj climbs on top of them. They are all piling on, football style.”

Harsha – “The Dazzlers are stunned. They thought the ball was going for a six. They were ready to celebrate and one moment later they were dumped. They are frozen to the ground. Aadit, Shlok, Aarav and Preyaa are stuck to the ground. Dhruv is the first one to break the silence. He is crying. Tansi has removed the Shaurya mask from her face.”

Adya – “Look at Shaurya. He is looking at everything around him and he cannot understand what is happening.”

I ran to Shaurya and hugged him. It was that moment of realization for him. He gave a big cry of “NO” and buried his face in my chest. Gauri reached Harsh and took him in her hands. She found his spectacles and put them on his eyes. They both walked towards us. From the corner of my eye, I found Harsh’s eye. He looked to the ground and away, the same sheepish smile. They reached us. Gauri and I stepped back. This was a moment for the two brothers. Harsh dropped the ball and gave Shaurya a tight hug. He also dropped the bat and clung onto Harsh weeping inconsolably. Both Gauri and I had tears streaming down our cheeks as well. We put our arms around the boys and hugged them. It was the most emotional moment of our lives.

Shanaya – “This is it. The most amazing and fitting end to a fantastic match. What a match. From start to finish. The crowd is on its feet and applauding. The noise in the stadium is unbelievable. Kiran and Geet are in the Titans camp and congratulating them. The Dazzlers have come over. Aadit congratulates them. Mayank hugs Aadit and tells him “Well played”. Garv is lifted by his team mates. Shlok, Aarav, Vishwas, Kanishk and Kushan congratulated the Titans. Preyaa came to grips with the defeat and congratulated Suryaja. Suryaja still is recovering from the shock of Mayank handing the ball to HV for the last 3 balls. She is shaking her head vigorously and admonishing him. Mayank is laughing as usual.”

Harsha – “This has been an amazing match. Till the last moment, it was not clear who would win. And with HV to

bowl, it was certain that Shaurya would hit the ball for a six. This reminds me of the inaugural Twenty20 world cup final between India and Pakistan. On the last ball, Misbah, the Pakistan captain needed to hit a boundary and India snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. It is poetic justice here that the man who was the captain that day is here in the commentary box with us today. What do you say MS?”

MS – “Pakistan should have won that match that day. When I handed the ball to Joginder Sharma for the final over, there was many a critic in the commentary box, who disagreed with my decision. However, Joginder is a difficult bowler to hit and he did prove me right in the end. It was a relief when Sreesanth took that catch the final ball. I felt the same gut wrenching feeling today when HV was running to take the catch.”

Nargis – “This has been a fantastic match. The Titans ran away with the match in the first innings. Garv and HV helped them amass a mammoth 214 in 20 overs. The Dazzlers looked dead when Shlok departed. Aadit and Shaurya turned them around and they looked menacing. The last over was the most dramatic over in the whole match. Shaurya was the quiet marauder just like MSD. And the last ball was the epitome of a finish. The Titans are the champions, but the Dazzlers will go home with their heads high. They gave a fantastic reply and made the crowd get their time’s worth. The dignitaries are overjoyed with what they got. The efforts of the grades and the parents as well as Kiran, Geet, Parthiv, MS and Harsha have been repaid in a fitting manner.”

Radha – “Vansh and Dhwanit are back at it again. They are leading the victory lap around the ground. The Titans are

waving to the crowd and thanking them for the support. They will end at the VIP box. We head over to the presentation ceremony for the last leg of this amazing spectacle.”

Harsha Bhogle – “Welcome to the last and final part of this seesaw match. I am here with the presentation party. That was a fantastic match. One of the best I have ever seen in my life. The Titans and the Dazzlers played a fantastic duel. The two brothers Harsh and Shaurya had everyone’s heart beating vigorously at the end. In the end, the Titans held the nerve and are champions.

First, I invite Ms. Kiran Sethi to give the prize of the best fielder. The winner for his two outstanding catches and superb fielding is Shlok Lavsi.”

Shlok came forward and took the trophy from Kiran Sethi.

Harsha – “The next prize is for the best bowler. I invite Mr. Geet Sethi to give the trophy for the outstanding bowler for his five wickets to Aarav Gupta.”

Aarav came forward and took the trophy. He waved to the crowd. It had been an amazing bowling spell from him.

Harsha – “For the best batsmen award, I invite Parthiv Patel to give the award. The winner is Aadit Desai for his amazing knock of 85 off 54 balls.”

Aadit was smiling. He took the trophy from Parthiv and waved to the crowd. They applauded him.

Harsha – “Now for the man of the match award. There were many contenders for this trophy. However, for his all-round

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performance of 60 runs and 3 wickets, the man of the match for today is Garv Mittal. He will collect the trophy from MS Dhoni.”

A loud cheer went up from the crowd. Garv came forward and took the trophy from M S Dhoni. He congratulated Garv and praised his performance.

Harsha – “Now I call upon the losing captain – The Dazzlers. Aadit and his team will take the medals from Geet. Aadit, please come here for a few words.”

Aadit went over to Harsha.

Harsha – “Well played Aadit. It was a fantastic match, however, hard luck. How do you feel now?”

Aadit – “I thought we played really well. When Shaurya and I were batting, I thought we would make it. I applaud Shaurya for the way he took us to the final ball. It was fantastic playing. My special thanks to Shlok for the way he sacrificed his wicket for me. However, in the end, I think we gave away too many runs. Harsh and Garv played really well to take them to 214.”

Harsha – “What would you like to tell your teammates?”

Aadit – “I thank them all for being there today. Boys, you played really well. I am proud of being your captain today. We will win tomorrow if we play like this. I also thank all my classmates who supported us today.”

Harsha – “Where to from here?”

Aadit – “More practice I guess. We hope to play more matches. For us, this day has been special. For the first time, we have played as a team. We could justify the lecture that Sudhir uncle gave us.”

Harsha – “Thank you Aadit. You and your team should collect the medals from Geet.”

A loud cheer went up from the crowd. All the Grade IV Dazzlers, including cheerleaders and support staff took their medals from Geet Sethi.

Harsha – “Now we come to the winning team. Mayank, please come and accept the trophy from Parthiv Patel.”

Mayank came forward and took the trophy. Parthiv congratulated him. The entire team ran forward and grabbed the trophy. It was passed from player to player and support staff. All the cameras were clicking.

Harsha called Mayank for a few words.

Harsha – “Congratulations Mayank. It was a close call. How do you feel winning the match?”

Mayank – “It was indeed a close call. When Shaurya hit the ball and I saw it flying towards the boundary, I felt my gut wrenching, but HV brought up this magnificent catch. Especially since he had put down 2 sitters earlier, I did not expect him to catch it. But in the end, he did catch it and we won the match.”

Harsha – “When Garv was injured, you had a lot of options to complete the bowling – Aarsh, Adi, Ashutosh. Yet you chose Harshvardhan. Very bold move. If he had not got the

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catch, you would have been responsible for the loss. Any particular reason?”

Mayank – “It was a cricketing decision. Adi, Ashutosh and Aarsh were options. However, the way that Shaurya was playing, he would have easily hit them. If he could hit Garv for 3 straight boundaries, it would be easy to hit the other three. However, some balls that Harsh bowls are pretty difficult to hit. He was my best bet and he delivered.”

Harsha – “What would you like to tell the Dazzlers?”

Mayank – “Well played. I am truly encouraged with the way you challenged us. You would have won it. Especially Aarav, Aadit and Shaurya. It was a fantastic performance. Thank you for making it so competitive.”

Harsha – “What about your teammates?”

Mayank – “Thank you boys. Let us party now”.

Harsha – “Thank you Mayank. Please collect your medals from Parthiv.”

All the players collected their medals from Parthiv. Parthiv congratulated Harsh for his batting and the final catch.

Harsha – “Now for the moment of the match award. There were many moments in the match. Aarav bowling Mayank, Shlok sacrificing his wicket for Aadit, Harsh catching Shaurya off the last ball. However, the jury has decided that the moment of the match was the dropped catch of Shaurya by Harsh and Shaurya saying – You just dropped the Omega, bro. For this award, Shauryavardhan please collect your trophy from Kiran.”

Shaurya came forward and sheepishly accepted the trophy from Kiran Sethi. He was over the trauma of losing the match by now. She hugged him and yet admonished him for his remark. She was laughing and tousled his hair. She was proud of him.

Harsha – “Now for the final award of the day. Ladies and Gentleman, Dr. Darshan who played a pivotal role in the organization of this match had a personal request. He wanted an award – his Omega watch to be given to one of his two children. To the child whose grade won the match. That would make it for Harshvardhan. To give this award is our beloved MS Dhoni. HV, please come forward and collect the award from MS.”

Harsh came forward, but instead of taking the award, he took the mike and said – “Dear Shaurya, I know that I won the bet. However, you deserve the award. My runs were a fluke. I was just swinging. I took the catch to win the match. That was just a coincidence. You played like a true champion today. In my heart, you deserve this award. So please come forward and take this award.”

The crowd stood to its feet and applauded this gesture. Shaurya came forward and took the Omega from MS Dhoni. Shaurya then hugged Harsh and tears were streaming down their cheeks. Gauri and I had tears of victory in our eyes. Both Harsh and Shaurya had done a great job. They were both the heroes of the day.

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SCORE CARD

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1ST INNINGS

BATTING

GRADE V TITANS

S. No.	Player	Runs	Balls faced	Sixes	Fours	Strike rate
1	Aarsh Patel caught Shaurya bowled Aarav	25	9	2	2	277.77
2	Joey Rao caught Shlok bowled Aarav	25	12	1	3	208.33
3	Aryan Shah caught Shaurya bowled Aarav	20	9	1	2	222.22
4	Mayank Lalchandani bowled Aarav	5	3	0	1	166.66
5	Garv Mittal not out	60	59	3	2	101.69
6	Sraj Patel caught Krish bowled Aarav	0	1	0	0	0.0
7	Harshvardhan Shah caught Dhruv bowled Shlok	46	13	4	4	353.84
8	Ashutosh Pathak caught Shaurya bowled Vishwas	20	7	2	1	285.71
9	Adi Nagpal caught Shlok bowled Aadit	20	7	1	3	285.71

SHAURYAVARDHAN & HARSHVARDHAN

10	Priam Rao not out	0	0	0	0	0.0
11	Vivaan Chiripal did not bat	-	-	-	-	-
	Extras	0				
	TOTAL (FOR 8 WICKETS) IN 20 OVERS	214				10.7

BOWLING

GRADE IV DAZZLERS

S no.	Bowler	Overs	Maidens	Runs	Wickets	Strike rate
1	Vishwas Kankaria	4	0	40	1	10.0
2	Kanishk Kankaria	4	0	43	0	10.75
3	Aarav Gupta	4	0	31	5	7.75
4	Aadit Patel	4	0	34	1	8.5
5	Shlok Lavsi	2	0	40	1	20.0
6	Krish Shodhan	2	0	26	0	13.0

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2nd INNINGS

BATTING

GRADE IV DAZZLERS

S. No.	Player	Runs	Balls faced	Sixes	Fours	Strike rate
1	Dhruv Harivallabhdas caught Vivaan bowled Garv	3	2	0	0	150.00
2	Maanit Patel caught Priam bowled Garv	13	7	1	1	185.71
3	Aarav Gupta caught and bowled Mayank	2	2	0	0	100.00
4	Shlok Lavsi run out	21	12	1	3	175.00
5	Vishwas Kankaria caught Sraj bowled Adi	11	4	1	1	275.00
6	Adit Patel caught Joey bowled Ashutosh	12	4	1	1	300.00
7	Aadit Desai caught Aryan bowled Mayank	85	54	2	6	157.40
8	Shauryavardhan Shah caught and bowled Harshvardhan	54	30	4	5	180.00
9	Krish Shodhan	3	2	0	0	150.00

SHAURYAVARDHAN & HARSHVARDHAN

	caught Priam bowled Garv					
10	Kanishk Kankaria caught and bowled Sraj	4	2	0	1	200.00
11	Kushan Mehta not out	2	1	0	0	200.00
	Extras	0				
	TOTAL (FOR 10 WICKETS) IN 20 OVERS	210				10.5

BOWLING

GRADE V TITANS

S no .	Bowler	Over s	Maiden s	Run s	Wicket s	Strik e rate
1	Mayank Lalchandani	4	0	40	2	10.00
2	Garv Mittal	3.3	0	30	3	9.09
3	Adi Nagpal	3	0	30	1	10.00
4	Sraj Patel	2	0	26	1	13.00
5	Ashutosh Pathak	3	0	25	1	8.33
6	Aarsh Patel	3	0	40	0	13.33
7	Harshvardha n Shah	1.3	0	23	1	17.69

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MATCH SUMMARY

1 ST INNINGS 214/8 in 20 overs	
GRADE V TITANS BATTING	GRADE IV DAZZLERS BOWLING
Garv Mittal* 60	Aarav Gupta 31/5
Harshvardhan Shah 46	Aadit Desai 34/1
Aarsh Patel 25	Vishwas Kankaria 40/1
2 ND INNINGS 210/10 in 20 overs	
GRADE IV DAZZLERS BATTING	GRADE V TITANS BOWLING
Aadit Desai 85	Garv Mittal 30/3
Shauryavardhan Shah 54	Mayank Lalchandani 40/2
Shlok Lavsi 21	Harshvardhan Shah 23/1

Grade V Titans beat Grade IV Dazzlers by 4 runs.

Umpires – Arjun Shah and Sudena Jain

Man of the Match – Garv Mittal

Best Fielder – Shlok Lavsi

Best Bowler – Aarav Gupta

Best Batsman – Aadit Desai

Moment of the match – Shauryavardhan Shah

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EPILOGUE

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The match got over. All of us dispersed. It had been a fantastic day. The culmination to a week of tremendous effort. For me, it was a personal triumph. Both Harsh and Shaurya had performed to the optimum. They had become stars in their own grades. For months to follow, this match was the talk of the grades. I sent a mail to all the parents to thank them for this wonderful effort. There was a lot of media coverage and Riverside got a lot of positive news space the next day. The newspapers praised the school and the grades for the kind of organization they had done. The next week, I went to school to thank Kiran and Geet for what they had done. They were also feeling very proud for the way the match had gone. I sent a letter of appreciation to Parthiv Patel, Harsha Bhogle and MS Dhoni for being there. I got letters of appreciation from all of them, thanking me for the opportunity to be there as well.

Effort well worth.

Years later –

- Aadit Patel and Shlok Lavsi turned to football. They both went on to represent India at the national level.
- Aarav and Garv went on to play cricket at the international level. Garv went on to be the captain of the Gujarat Ranji team and Aarav was his deputy.
- Harshvardhan and Shauryavardhan played cricket and football for a few years and then turned to academics. They established a company called Riverside Legends. Shauryavardhan turned a sports products designer and Harshvardhan became a sports brand manager. Riverside Legends bought an IPL team termed

SHAURYAVARDHAN & HARSHVARDHAN

Ahmedabad Lions. Garv, Aarav were the stars of the team. MS Dhoni was the coach.

- Mayank became a businessman and joined his father. They became the main sponsors of Ahmedabad Lions.
- Kiran and Geet Sethi finally relented to open more Riverside schools. Today Riverside Education has become the benchmark for the education system in the world.
- The Omega bet continued through the life of Harshvardhan and Shauryavardhan. It became a symbol of healthy rivalry and success between them.

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THE END

