

IBL | benefited Players and Fans

[Rupha Ramani](#) : Wed, Sep 04 2013.

It started with top Badminton players, with racquets and cricket pads instead, staring out of the posters, posing to the words: "Is this what it takes to get your attention to Badminton?". Was the promotional campaign an attempt by the Indian Badminton League (IBL) to try and establish themselves in a space that is dominated by the Indian Premier League (IPL)?

The positives have been the matches and what the IBL has given many of its Indian players. It brought Indian shuttlers face-to-face with some of the big names in the sport and it was all served with freshness.

"I was on the same team as [Taufik Hidayat](#). He is the most experienced campaigner in Hyderabad Hotshots and was extremely helpful. He is my childhood hero and sharing the same court with him was inspiring in itself," says [Ajay Jayaram](#), who clinched the fourth match of the tie against Awadhe Warriors to help the Hotshots lift the inaugural title on Saturday.

"If I was a junior, I would have been thrilled to play with some of the best in the world, talk to them, learn from them and travel with them—I wouldn't have got the opportunity otherwise. It was a great experience for me to play alongside someone I had always admired ([Joachim Fischer Nielsen](#))," says [Ashwini Ponnappa](#) of the Pune Pistons.

Players from China were absent but the organizers believed that didn't affect the league. "I would have loved to see the Chinese here but their absence doesn't affect the standard of the league. If we have a [Lin Dan](#) then yes, but nobody beyond him. We are successful because [Saina](#) (Nehwal) is successful; so too is [P.V. Sindhu](#) and [P. Kashyap](#). Today, we are able to celebrate their success and people in different cities want to watch them play," says National Coach and a member of the IBL Governing Council, [Pullela Gopi Chand](#).

Title sponsor Vodafone, which has been associated with cricket, had no doubts about joining a Badminton league. "We are confident the popularity

and consumer appeal of the IBL will increase in the coming years," says [Vivek Mathur](#), chief commercial officer, Vodafone India.

The faith in the league also comes from within. For the franchises, it would appear, the interest in the sport took prominence over monetary gains.

"All franchises took considerable risks in getting involved. You will have to give the team owners credit," says [Prasad V. Potluri](#), Chairman and Managing Director of the PVP Group which owns the Hyderabad team. "For the first year, none of the franchises have taken any revenue share from the central pool. All the money has been invested in the league itself. I'm not saying this because Hyderabad is sitting on the prize money. We all wanted the league to succeed and not just be a one-year wonder."

Experts believe that the modest ratings tell only one part of the story—the turnout at stadia and the overall social media conversations have been encouraging.

Given that this is the first season, all indicators point towards a successful future for the sport, players, sponsors and fans," says Ajit Gurnani, head, MEC West, an agency involved in media planning, performance marketing and social media management.

With the World Championships, Commonwealth and Asian Games all taking place in 2014, finding space in the calendar for the second season of the IBL will be challenging. Also, the misplaced sense of competing with the cricket league has not escaped conversations.

"For whatever beginnings we have had, for the end product, the players who have benefited, the kind of money, the number of people who have come to watch and the general perception of the sport, if cricket started with X and went to Y, our X may be smaller but our Y is bigger. We have moved from thoughts of 'Will Badminton sell?', 'Who will put all the money?'; from that kind of cynicism and pessimism, to people coming up and saying 'Wow, this is the real thing'," says Gopi Chand.