

‘Non-IPL’ experience and chance to do something different drew crowds to IBL

by Shashank Venkat in Sports • 01 September '13



If crowd support was the only indicator for the popularity of a sport, Badminton would not have been too far behind Cricket yesterday. One had to be at the National Sports Club of India (NSCI), Mumbai to witness the atmosphere during the Indian Badminton League (IBL) finals played between Hyderabad Hotshots and Awadh Warriors. The elements associated usually with a big Cricket match were all present – huge traffic snarls outside the Stadium, presence of Dignitaries (Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan was here), and a turnout almost to full capacity (more than 3000 people). Loud cheers for players and spectators alike emanated from all corners of the Stadium. As Saina Nehwal admitted in the

post match press conference, she had not witnessed crowd support like this during any National Tournament. The Badminton aficionados and the event Organisers would surely be exulting after the success of the inaugural IBL.

Badminton though is a niche sport and its enthusiasts are known to be a very closely knit community. During the two league games and the finals yesterday, many people among the spectators had played the game before or knew some of the players. Another interesting point was that many of the spectators present in the stadium were well dressed. While the spectators cheered during the games, the usual hooting associated with Cricket was not present. Perhaps stemming from the fact that the sport itself appeals to a very limited and niche segment of the crowd.

But what was encouraging was the fact that many who are not a part of this small community, had also come with their families to watch the finals. So what was really drawing them in to watch a game of Badminton on a Saturday evening instead of spending a nice time out with family at a restaurant or go drinking with friends?

For many people it was the comfortable experience of sitting and enjoying a game which brought them to the stadium. "I have been to the IPL matches. But this experience is more enjoyable. In IPL, the stadium is not as comfortable, the ticket and food prices are exorbitant and the toilets are also not very clean. I can come and see a good match here along with the comfort of sitting in an air-conditioned hall while enjoying good food with the family at half the price of an IPL game."

Another spectator was here to have a good time with family and friends. "My idea of coming here was to do something different on a weekend and spend some good time with friends and family. My children have just started following IBL but they already know many players in the league," he said.

Ironical that for a Tournament which borrows its format from the IPL, it is the 'Non-IPL' experience which is drawing the crowds to the IBL. The organisers and players though are not complaining!