

The Pakistani team won the first Test match against India after an exciting fourth day's play at Madras last Sunday. Overjoyed at Pakistan's thrilling victory, I kept watching television as the prize distribution ceremony was held. Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister handed the Man of the Match trophy to Tendulkar, the master batsman. What struck me was the setting of the podium on which the ceremony took place. It looked like a publicity stall in a fair – the name and trade-mark of a well-known soft drink were to be seen everywhere. Even the trophy presented to Tendulkar carried the drink's name written in big letters. Advertising isn't bad but when carried to such lengths it does annoy us. Look at another annoying phenomenon. During the Test matches these days, the graceful white uniform of the cricketers bears the names of different companies on the sleeves and on the chest. The sponsors are mostly multinationals which manufacture soft-drinks or cigarettes. The national insignia of the players, the crescent and the star in Pakistan's case, are either missing from the uniform or they look insignificant compared with the sponsor's names printed more conspicuously.

The disgusting effects of advertising mar the joy of watching sports on television as well. As you are glued to your TV screen to enjoy a cricket match, PTV would rush back to the studio to air a few ads after every dismissal or after every over. You are dying to see the action replay of a dismissal or what goes on between overs, but you are forced to watch three or four damned advertisements being repeated again and again. Apart from sports, it is also very annoying to watch popular programmes on TV, plays in PTV's case – because of advertising. After every ten minutes, the programme will be inter-

The age of advertising

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rupted with an interval to telecast ads running for the same period of time. This not only significantly reduces your enjoyment of your favourite programme, this also wastes much of your precious time. I don't say advertising is totally bad or it should be banned from sports or TV channels, but the parties which benefit from it ought to display sense and good taste. They include sportsmen, sports organisers, TV channel owners and officials and, of course, the advertisers.

We are living in the Age of Advertising. Advertising and publicity are among the prominent features of the capitalist society of the West which effectively leads the world in nearly every field ranging from politics to fashion. Under the Western influence in a rapidly shrinking world (often called a Global Village), excessive advertising has become a common phenomenon in all parts of the planet. In Western countries, especially America, multinationals and big businesses give millions of dollars to popular sportsmen, actors, singers and super-models to appear in their advertisements. Sponsorship of sports is a favourite technique adopted by the capitalists to promote their products. They sponsor national and international tournaments as well as football clubs and basketball teams. They even "buy" megastars like Michael Jordan or Ronaldo through contracts which bind them to appear in advertisements and

publicity events for a certain company for a specific period of time. Of course, the sporting heroes receive shockingly high prices for selling their images.

Who benefits from advertising? Of course, the advertisers who spend huge amounts of money on advertising and the sportsmen, show-biz people and models who receive the money in this respect. But there are other less visible beneficiaries as well. Sports organisations like the Cricket Board in Pakistan and TV channels make much money through sponsorship and advertising. Companies and businesses contend that the public also benefit from them. They maintain the spectators at present buy tickets to enter the stadium at relatively low prices as a considerable part of the money spent on arrangements and payments to players is provided by the advertisers. If there were no ads or less ads, sports fans would have to pay very high prices for tickets. Similarly, they point out you can watch your favourite teams in live action on television because of advertising. TV channels have to pay millions of rupees or dollars to the organisers to telecast a match live and it is advertising that enables them to do so. Finally, advertising and sponsorship play a key role in promoting sports. If players receive high payments due to them, directly or indirectly, they would naturally compete hard to win and work hard to improve their game. Moreover, the best talent would be attracted to-

wards sports. On the other hand, the opportunity to watch games free or for a low payment is increasing the number of people who love sports. If advertising promotes sports, then it definitely deserves praise. Nobody can deny the positive role played by games in the healthy development of the individual and society.

Apparently advertising harms no one, or so the advertisers pretend. But it does have a number of negative effects. First of all, it becomes annoying and disgraceful when carried to extreme limits as illustrated in the opening lines of this article. Secondly, the consumer has to pay a high price for advertising. After all, the companies and businesses shift the cost of publicity to the buyer of their products and services. We all are consumers and we have to pay extra money in the market because of advertising. Another major evil influence of excessive publicity is that it encourages what you can call "money mentality" among sportsmen. When they see their country's honour and one's sense of decency being sacrificed to advertising and sponsorship and their colleagues selling themselves to the highest bidder, some of them come to believe money is more important than anything else, including their country's name and moral principles. Gambling, match-fixing and the use of prohibited drugs by sportsmen are all unfortunate results of this tendency. The first two have especially

disgraced the game of cricket – once known to be the gentleman's game. Who can better know this than us, the Pakistanis.

Another ugly side of sports-related advertising is concerned with smoking. Two or three big tobacco companies are among the common sponsors of sports, especially cricket. New everybody knows how harmful smoking is. In fact, many developed countries have either totally banned the publicity of tobacco or imposed strict restrictions on it. But in our part of the world, the tobacco companies are free to attract people towards smoking, especially so in the name of promoting the game of cricket. One cigarette-maker is a major sponsor of cricket in India and Pakistan.

Advertising benefits only a few. It harms many. As regards the argument that the masses also benefit from it, it is wrong. If there will be no sponsorship in cricket, the fans would not necessarily have to buy tickets at higher rates. Because in that case, the remuneration of the players will also be brought down to keep the ticket prices at a reasonable level. The advertisers' claim of promoting sports is also fallacious and misleading. Money is not the only or the best incentive for sportsmen to achieve the heights of their skills or victory in the field. The fact is that the capitalist (whether the industrialist or the businessman) is all powerful today. This is the age of capitalism, of Big Business – the heyday of free-market economics. All-pervasive advertising and sponsorship are indeed symptomatic of the power and influence enjoyed by the capitalist. Today, he is capable of almost everything – helping politicians to form governments, forcing the governments to adopt favourable policies, using the media to propagate favourable ideas, creating demand among the public for unnecessary products and so on.