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# Story of cricket: Asia 1980-2004

By Ravi Shastri

**T**HE 1983 Cricket World Cup, the third in the competition's history, was to change Indian cricket for ever. India began the tournament as rank outsiders but beat hot favourites West Indies in the Lord's final in thrilling fashion. The event raised interest in the game in sub-continent to a new level and the population's appetite for cricket became insatiable.

Watching the final at home in Bangalore aged 10 was Rahul Dravid, now an Indian star of the modern game. "After 1983 people really believed we could be good at cricket," he says. "It did a lot to inspire young kids to play the game in the country."

In the early 1990s, big money came the way of the players and sponsorship is now a major part of the modern game in the subcontinent. At the same time, the television companies became attracted to the growing number of international fixtures on offer. And in the last 10 years, the cost of TV rights has soared to massive proportions.

Sachin Tendulkar, the Indian superstar, has been well positioned to cash in on the interest shown in the game by the big multinational companies. Most companies in south

Asia now recognise their products need to be endorsed either by a Bollywood film star or an international cricketer to sell with any degree of success. Pakistan is not so far behind the sums paid to Indian stars - Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis have earned a huge amount of money too. In the 1980s, there was plenty of

followed that series because it's against India."

In a one-day international between the two sides in 1986, Javed Miandad, needing a four to win the match for Pakistan, hit a six. A momentum was building up for Pakistan and it culminated with a World Cup win of their

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success for Pakistan on the field against their arch-rivals. In the 1982-83 season, Pakistan beat India 3-0 with Imran Khan taking 40 wickets. Imran says: "It was the time when I became a hero in my own country and I had a major hand in it.

"People who knew nothing about cricket

own in 1992.

Man-of-the-match Wasim Akram recalls the post-match events. "We all stopped for prayers at Mecca for two days then flew back home with our Prime Minister on his private jet. "When we finally got back to Pakistan there were people everywhere. We were on

top of our bus and there were people on every street." By then Asia had three Test match nations, with Sri Lanka having joined the party. It took this island ravaged by civil war four years to win their first Test match. But the sport has always acted as a common bond between the various races and religions.

Even now radio commentaries of top games feature an initial 15 minutes of radio commentary in Sinhalese followed by 15 minutes in English and a resume at each break in Tamil. In 1996, with just seven Test match wins behind them, Sri Lanka joined India and Pakistan in lifting cricket's biggest prize. The occasion was probably the happiest day in the lives of most Sri Lankans.

But three years later, Bangladesh came of age when they beat Pakistan in the round robin stage of the 1999 World Cup. Having spent 20 years trying to qualify for the competition, Bangladesh were an overnight sensation and within 18 months they were elevated to Test cricket. Since then they have struggled, and the International Cricket Council admits it was a mistake to award them Test status so soon. But in 100 years time there will be another chapter to write - and perhaps Bangladesh will figure prominently for all the right reasons. —BBC