

‘Chepauk is a ground that has never failed me’

Prasad.RS@timesgroup.com

The very mention of Tamil Nadu brings a smile on Kapil Dev's face. The smile only gets wider as one mentions the ace all-rounder's exploits at the MA Chidambaram Stadium. In 11 Tests that Kapil played at Chepauk, he has managed to not only accrue 707 runs with two brilliant centuries, but also scalped 40 wickets.

"I have always shared a great bond with the people of this state. I love Tamil Nadu for two reasons — south Indian food and the fact that whenever I have played here, I have done well, both with the bat and the ball. I can proudly say that Chepauk is one of the grounds where I have never ever failed," said a visibly-proud 1983 World Cup winning skipper, who surprisingly has featured in just one one-dayer at the iconic venue. Kapil was here to be part of the valedictory function to commemorate the 50th year of the Sanmar family's ties with Jolly Rovers.

Interestingly, Kapil, a part of the tied India-Australia Test here in 1986, doesn't recall much about that match in which he scored a 138-ball 119. He matched the efforts of Dean Jones who scored a fighting double-hundred and both jointly bagged the Man of the Match award. "It was a game that people talk about even today. As a player, I have always looked at giving nothing but my best each time I had the ball or bat in hand. When you play the game for 10-15 years like I did, there are bound to be matches which you would cherish and the tied Test was one such game," Kapil said.

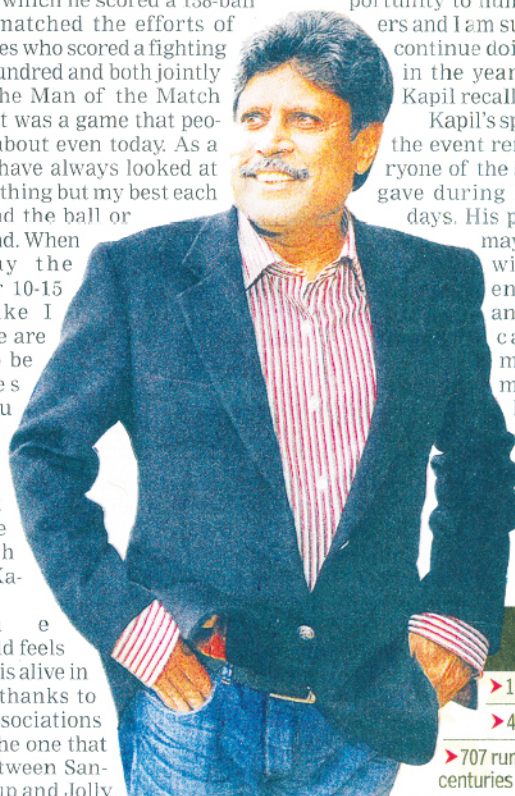
The 57-year-old feels the game is alive in the city, thanks to strong associations such as the one that exists between Sanmar Group and Jolly

KAPIL FEELS GROUPS LIKE JOLLY ROVERS AND SANMAR GROUP PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN KEEPING CRICKET ALIVE IN CHENNAI

Rovers. "Running a cricket club for over five decades is a tremendous achievement and it is such a tradition that keeps the game alive in the country. It's not only the stars who make the game, but also people behind the scenes who liven it up," Kapil said.

Kapil also chose the occasion to heap praise on his good friend and former India teammate Bharath Reddy who has been supporting and nurturing Sanmar Group supported teams for well over three decades. "Bharath was my roommate during the tour of Pakistan in 1978. While, he couldn't speak Hindi, I couldn't speak English. During the course of the tour, I managed to learn a bit of English and he learnt a lot of Hindi and we became great friends. With Jolly Rovers, Bharath has given opportunity to numerous players and I am sure he would continue doing the same in the years to come," Kapil recalled.

Kapil's speech during the event reminded everyone of the sheer joy he gave during his playing days. His playing days may be over, but with his never-ending smile and self-deprecating humour, Kapil managed to hold the attention of the audience, much akin to the good old days.



KAPIL IN CHENNAI

▶ 11 Tests

▶ 40 wickets

▶ 707 runs with two centuries