

### Of cricket back in those Jolly good days

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**Chennai:** What's cricket without the stories weaved around it?

The leisurely afternoons spent on the sidelines of club games invariably bring out tales to remember. Quite fittingly, the occasion to commemorate Sanmar Group's 50 years of association with Jolly Rovers on Friday at a city hotel was a celebration of the charm of those forgotten times, when cricket was more a sport and not a matter of life, death and money. There were speeches talking about the contribution of Jolly Rovers, V Ramnarayan's book 'Cricket for the Love of It' was launched, but the evening was all about nostalgia, anecdotes and happy faces.

Ramachandra Guha may be the best cricket historian of the country, but he is a story-teller par excellence. The evening was as much about chief guest Kapil Dev, as it was about Guha, who threw away the face of diplomacy and political correctness that have become part-and-parcel of the game these days.

He was speaking on 'Five Forms of Partisanship in Cricket' and Guha didn't need notes — great historians never do. In his 'story-telling' there could even be a couple of factual errors — when Kapil got up to speak he even contradicted Guha on something — but it didn't take anything away from the beauty of his speech. Both Kapil and Guha are stalwarts in their own fields, but like great humorists, they were happy to laugh at themselves, which had the gathering in splits. While Guha called himself "the fifth bowler and the No. 11 batsman of his team", Kapil didn't mind



**PAST PERFECT:** (from l) Historian Ramachandra Guha, Kapil Dev, V Ramnarayan & Sanmar Group chairman N Sankar launch the book 'Cricket for the Love of It' in Chennai on Friday

joking about his struggle with the English language. "The biggest challenge for me this evening is to speak in English....The Indian chief selector ahead of of the 1982-83 tour of West Indies kept saying 'How can Kapil be the captain? He can't speak English?' I always felt like saying, 'Why don't you take someone from Oxford or Cambridge to speak, meanwhile I will play,'" the legend said, as the audience lapped up every moment of it.

Guha, in his inimitable style, said that he is not a "cricket nationalist" and for him his club and state come first. He didn't mind calling Vijay Mallya "a crook" and

spoke at length about his serious apathy for T20 cricket. "If Test cricket is single malt, T20s are roadside country liquor. And let me tell you, I have never watched an IPL game," Guha said. But the true connoisseur can never say 'no' to talent. And that's why Guha acknowledged that when he did watch a bit of the T20 World Cup and Virat Kohli's square drives against Australia, he tweeted: "There goes my boyhood hero GR Viswanath from the All Time India XI. It now reads Sehwag, Gavaskar, Dravid, Tendulkar, Kohli..."

In a flash he merged generations, summing up the mood of the evening.