

A 'jolly' good run so far

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Chennai: Sponsoring and nurturing any sports team for over five decades is not a feat too many institutions can boast of. That's exactly what Sanmar Group has done with regard to Jolly Rovers. The club, which has been existence since the 50s, blossomed into a champion side in the 60s and has never looked back since. N Sankar, chairman of Sanmar Group, spoke to TOI on the journey of the club, its indelible bond with cricket and a lot more. Excerpts:

Ever since your father, KS Narayanan, took over the side in the mid-60s, it has done well. Was there a secret to it?

(Laughs) I think the credit entirely goes to the players. The 1966-67 side had some fantastic cricketers like KR Rajagopal, Najam Hussain and many others who did a great job in winning the first division title in the very first year we began sponsoring the team. Once we began winning regularly in the subsequent years, there was no looking back as



C Suresh Kumar

we dominated the scene. **Talking about domination, there have been incidents where Jolly Rovers faced crowd ire**

True. Such was the domination that the crowd would usually end up supporting the opposition team those days. Even if they were an outstation side, we wouldn't get the support.

How important has Bharath Reddy's contribution been in terms of talent-spotting and managing players?

When he (Bharath Reddy) joined us, he brought a lot of emphasis on spotting talent and maintaining fitness. He also lent a professional approach to the enterprise which has benefitted the side immensely.

Who would be your favourite Jolly Rovers player?

There are no favourites as

such but I would like to mention Raja (KR Rajagopal). He was one of the best players that we had. He was quite unique in his style. He would come to the ground just before the start of the match, borrow a pad and bat from someone and then go on to score a century.

Any anecdotes you could share?

Our Group has always identified with cricket. On one instance when Sunil Valson was on the flight to Chennai to turn out for us, his fellow passenger happened to be the CEO of one of our engineering companies. The two got talking and found out that they were employed with an engineering firm in South Chennai. Sunil then asked him, "which sport do you play?" Later the CEO came to me and said "looks like everyone in our company plays a sport". Another interesting incident was during the Buchi Babu match in the 70s between our team and ACC at the Loyola Grounds. Over 6000 spectators flocked to watch the match as Sunil Gavaskar was playing the game (for ACC) and the cheers were deafening.