

# Jolly Rovers going strong

S. Dinakar

**CHENNAI:** Jolly Rovers has been a formidable cricketing team from the city. The club has nurtured cricketers, provided them a precious platform, and lent lustre to the State's cricketing scene. Over the years, Rovers has also made winning a habit.

In 1966-67, K.S. Narayanan, managing director, India Cements, took over the reins of the club from S. Rangarajan of *The Hindu*. And it was in 1977-78 that Mr. Narayanan's son N. Sankar, then managing director Chemplast, stepped in to take control of Rovers. He has been at the helm since then.

At a function here on Wednesday, Rovers will celebrate entering 50 years under Narayanan and then Sankar. Sankar is now chairman of the Sanmar group.

During the period, Rovers has come up trumps in the TNCA first division league a whopping 18 times and finished runner-up on 12 occasions in the last 49 years. The side has also triumphed in the BCCI Corporate Trophy, a laudable feat.

## 62 titles

During this period, Rovers has won the Moin-ud-Dowla Trophy six times, the Buchi Babu and the KSCA tournaments thrice, *The Hindu* Trophy on 12 occasions, the VAP Trophy on six instances and the YSCA Cup twice. In all, the celebrated side has bagged an incredible 62 titles.

As many as 24 cricketers from the club have gone on to represent the country, a fantastic achievement in itself. In more recent times, State players S. Badrinath, L. Balaji, Dinesh Karthik, R. Ashwin and M. Vijay have all been products of Rovers.

Illustrious cricketers such as S. Venkatraghavan, Salim Durrani, P.K. Belliappa, K.R. Rajagopal and T.E. Srinivasan have turned out for Rovers. In the later years, outstation India stars like Harbhajan Singh and Piyush Chawla have played for the club.

Speaking to this newspaper, Durrani recollected, "I remember my trips to Madras. I



Salim Durrani.



S. Venkatraghavan.

used to stay at the Woodlands Hotel. I became great friends with Rangarajan *saab*.

"I came in touch with some very warm people and had a wonderful time at the club. I remember hitting a six at the Marina ground, it was one of the biggest sixes of my career."

## Inspirational figure

Former India wicketkeeper and Rovers skipper Bharath Reddy is now the club's secretary. He told *The Hindu*, "Sankar has been an inspirational figure for me. He has given me a free hand, never said 'no' to anything, including increment to cricketers. He has been a big factor in all our successes."

K. Rammohan Rao, former State wicketkeeper-batsman, is presently Rovers' cricket-in-charge. He was all praise for the IIT-Chemplast ground, the side's home arena. "We have had this ground for close to 20 years. Everything connected with the ground is beautiful.

"It is green, there is no noise or pollution. We have a wonderful practice facility with 12 pitches, two of them concrete. And we have six centre wickets. There is a lovely pavilion too."

Former India fast bowler T.A. Sekar, who represented Rovers in the early 80s, said, "We played for the passion and the love of the game, our involvement was not commercial. "I had teammates like Bharat Reddy, Moses, and Vijay Kumar. It was great fun but we were very competitive on the field."

In the growth of Rovers, the contribution of its former secretary V.A. Parthasarathy has been immense. The club that was started by a group of cricket enthusiasts from T. Nagar evolved and grew in stature. It had several phases too.

N. Ram, chairman, Kasturi & Sons Ltd., and a former State Ranji wicketkeeper-batsman represented Jolly Rovers in the early to mid-60s.

Remembering his days at the club he said, "Jolly Rovers was run by K. Balakrishna Rao of the Dasaprakash group and then it was passed on to my uncle Rangarajan. He [Rangarajan] showed a lot of enthu-

siasm, organisational skills and also led the side.

"After he started sponsoring the team, star India all-rounder Salim Durrani was roped in. West Indian fast bowler Roy Gilchrist played briefly for Jolly Rovers during that period."

Mr. Ram added, "The teams run by Balakrishna Rao and Rangarajan set the stage for Rovers to be a mighty force when it was taken over by India Cements in 1966-67. In fact, Rovers won the Pallyampatti Shield for 'A' Zone in 1965."

## Memorable

Recalling his days with Rovers, Mr. Ram said, "I was once involved in a 150-run partnership with an Englishman named P. Filmer. The stand ended half-an-hour before lunch and I got 80.

"We had V. Rajaram bowling accurate medium-paced in-swingers and I used to effect stumpings standing up to him. Apart from the turf pitches at the Madras Cricket Club, Madras Christian College and the ICF, we played on matting wickets. The matches were very competitive."

Former Tamil Nadu and Jolly Rovers left-hander K. Balaji said, "Whether we were doing well or not, Sankar was always there to watch the match. This showed his love for the game."

Jolly Rovers is synonymous with cricket in the city and it will be a special occasion to mark the beginning of its 50th year on Wednesday.



R. Ashwin.



M. Vijay.