

Decks cleared to run the Board on corporate lines

By NIKHIL KULKARNI
Cricket Punjab Staff Writer

MUMBAI, December 4: The new cricket board chief Sharad Pawar must have had a pleasant surprise presiding over for the first time the working committee meeting in Mumbai on Sunday as he may not have expected it to be so smooth and meaningful. It was over even as Jagmohan Dalmiya was seeking the chair's permission to leave so that he could catch an afternoon flight back home.

There was speculation in the media that Dalmiya might be handful for the new executive of the Board and would even speak his mind out as he had promised to say whatever he has to only after attending his first working committee meeting without absolute power for over a decade. Nothing of the sort happened and he is believed to have had little to say as some of his diehard supporters were seen commending the alacrity with which the new team set off with its agenda.

Dalmiya apparently was uncomfortable when his bluff was called. He insisted that allegations about the communication between the Board and the International Cricket Council on the venues for next year's Champions Cup in the country were "baseless." When Treasurer N. Srinivasan read out the communication the Board had with the ICC, detailing the venues when the matter was neither discussed by the Programmes and Fixtures Committee nor by the Working Committee, he started squirming. The clandestinely chosen venues were Mumbai and Delhi and the semi-finals and final in Kolkata! He was peeved when a member called the clandestine letter, perhaps, an aberration if not downright crafty.

There was also a heated debate over the professionalisation of the Board, particularly the appointment of directors and senior executives. Dalmiya raised the bogey of constitutional amendment, leading to the removal of office-bearers. This was seen as a clever move on his part to cause a rift in the ruling group. His tactics were similar when he thwarted his predecessor A C Muthiah's sincere attempts to set in motion the process of recruiting managers and executives after advertising in the newspapers. This time around the legal counsel was that there was no need for any constitutional amendments and backed the idea of the appointment of professional managerial staff.

There was, however, no disagreement over the appointment of a Cricket Development Committee comprising Kapil Dev (chairman-North), Hanumant Singh (Central), Dilip Vengsarkar and Ravi Shastri (West), Arun Lal (East) and Sivaramakrishnan (South).

The committee also decided to remove the post of chairman for the Grounds and Pitches Committee and it was felt that the Board secretary could convene the meeting and assign work to them. The members are: Daljeet Singh (North), Dhiraj Parasana (West), Tapash Chatterjee (Central), Probir Mitra (East) and P R Viswanathan (South).

The National Cricket Academy Board has also been reconstituted. It has Sunil Gavaskar, Raj Singh Dungarpur, Ajay Shirkey (West), Shivalal Yadav (South), Lalchand Rajput (West), Ashok Bhagwat (Central), Sunil Dev (North) and Gopal Bose (East). Yadav will be the new director replacing Brijesh Patel. Pawar has been authorized name the chairman.

The high-powered Marketing Committee will have Sharad Pawar as its chairman and the other members are: former Board presidents Inderjit S. Bindra, A C Muthiah and Ranbir Singh Mahendra, all Vice-presidents and all office-bearers.

A Constitution Review Committee has been set up with Shahshank Manohar as chairman. Inderjit Bindra, Arun Jaitley, N Srinivasan, Ratnakar Shetty and Lalit Kumar Modi as members.

The Headquarters Committee will have Inderjit Bindra, N Srinivasan, Niranjana Shah and Lalchand Rajput.

The Vision Paper came in for appreciation, but it was decided to engage a professional agency to suggest a corporate governance structure within the ambit of the existing constitution of the board. The Board president wanted the whole exercise to be completed within 30 days and the next Working Committee meeting will be held soon after to take a final decision. The board members have been asked to send in their views within the next ten days. The proposal got wholehearted backing from the corporate chiefs as well as a noted legal luminary who are all members of the Working Committee.

The openness of the Board was seen when the secretary contacted India captain Rahul Dravid to get his views on the itineraries of the England's tour to India and before that India's visit to Pakistan. Dravid and his teammates were jubilant to have been made part of the decision making of the Board. The skipper suggested a couple of minor changes like allowing the team to leave for Pakistan on January 6 instead of the scheduled January 1, in view of the cancellation of the Asia Cup, and that will give the players time to spend the New Year with their families. The players also wanted at least three days gap between the Test matches and two days between the One-Day internationals. The Board took care to see the gap is maintained.

The offshoot of the interaction is that the warm-up match in Lahore before the first Test will now be of three days instead of two as agreed by the previous regime.

Another important decision the Board took is that all Tests against England will have Saturdays and Sundays unlike in the past when certain select centres seldom got the weekends and the gates suffered during the week days.

The working committee had also been informed what some of the boards think of Indian board's functioning in recent years. The ICC, the England and Wales Board and the Pakistan Board have described the functioning of the Indian Board as abysmal. Their complaint is the lack of communication, no replies despite repeated reminders, at times the letters running into a huge pile. Their view is that even smaller boards and associate members were better organized than the Indian Board. Interestingly, the ICC chief had no objection to getting quoted on the subject.

Though it might have been all hunky dory for Pawar at the first meeting, he knows that the wheels of administration have to be well oiled and he promised to have a mechanism in place to monitor the Board's functioning.