

editorial



Cricket Canada in the Eye of the Storm



by Devesh Shankar

A Long-Awaited Triumph Followed by Turmoil

In May 2023, Canadian cricket fans rejoiced as Canada regained its ODI status after nearly a decade. Canada had previously qualified for the 2011 ODI World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

Following that World Cup, the ICC introduced a new World Cricket League divisional structure, making it challenging for Canada to reclaim its ODI status. For those unfamiliar, associate teams

must finish in the top six of the ICC World Cricket League Division 2 tournaments to earn ODI status.

Canada's rankings hit rock bottom in 2017 when they were relegated to Division 3 after losses to the USA and PNG. However, fortunes began to change in 2022 when the board, led by Rashpal Bajwa and Mohd. Sheikh, reinstated Pubudu Dassanayake as head coach.

Dassanayake had previously coached Canada when they last qualified for the ODI World Cup in 2011 but resigned due to board's interference in the team selection. After leaving Canada, he successfully guided Nepal and the USA to ODI status. Meanwhile, Canada continued to slide in rankings due to poor administration, a lack of merit-based selection, and inadequate facilities.

It was only after widespread public criticism of the team's performance that the board decided to bring back Dassanayake in 2022. His return brought immediate improvements, culminating in Canada regaining ODI status in 2023 after more than a decade. However, behind the scenes, power-hungry administrators driven by ego and personal agendas were scheming to take control of the board.

A Board with a Hidden Agenda

In 2017, Salman Khan became president of the Alberta Cricket Association. Since then, with the support of his close associates, Gurdeep Clair and Rohit Aggarwal from Edmonton, he has controlled the Alberta Cricket Association for eight years. However, his ultimate ambition was to join the national governing body.

That opportunity arrived in 2023 when Vimal Hardat, then president of BC Cricket, aligned with Khan and Clair to ensure their chosen candidates entered the board.

During the 2024 Cricket Canada AGM in Ontario, BC and Alberta succeeded in gaining control, and since then, these

two factions have heavily influenced the board decisions, including the selection of coaches, players, selectors, and contracts.

The new board, effectively led by Salman Khan, swiftly overturned previous decisions. Their first target was Coach Pubudu Dassanayake, recognizing that he would oppose non-merit-based selections. Many board members, lacking cricketing acumen, relied on votes from players affiliated with specific clubs. Removing Dassanayake became essential to their plan.

In early 2024, just before the T20 World Cup, the board attempted to orchestrate Dassanayake's removal by pressuring players to sign a letter accusing him of abusive behavior.

The media caught wind of this conspiracy, forcing the board to back down. However, the board continued interfering with the team selection for its political gain. After the T20 World Cup, as anticipated, Dassanayake's contract was terminated. With no alternative, he took Cricket Canada to court for breach of contract.

The board, dominated by Alberta and BC factions, cited a lack of transparency in Dassanayake's appointment—an accusation widely regarded as baseless. Ironically, they then appointed a new coach without any due process.

Meanwhile, in March 2024, two players instrumental in Canada regaining ODI status were inexplicably excluded from the T20 World Cup squad. They subsequently filed complaints with Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (SDRC). Following an investigation, SDRC identified serious flaws in the selection process and directed Cricket Canada to rectify them.

The board complied but cunningly replaced the complainants with their own preferred players.

Adding to the turmoil, earlier this year, former Canadian women's team captain Divya Rawat Saxena wrote to ICC Americas, criticizing the lack of training camps before ICC tournaments. She also accused key board members of mental harassment and abuse.

Further controversy erupted when Salman Khan and the board abruptly terminated their contract with Bombay Sports, the company managing GT20. Bombay Sports, despite instances of financial mismanagement, had provided Cricket Canada with crucial funding for player contracts. This raises the obvious question: why terminate the contract without a replacement in place?

Rumors suggest that the board is negotiating with National Cricket League (NCL), a banned entity, to take over GT20—even though ILT20, a reputable and established organization, had expressed interest in acquiring it.

The Rise and Fall of Salman Khan

As Khan solidified his position, past controversies resurfaced. In 2017, after he left his role at the Calgary & District Cricket League (C&DCL) to become Alberta Cricket Association president, his successor, Sabeel Khan, discovered financial irregularities and reported them to the police.

A police investigation commenced that year, and after seven years of evidence gathering, charges were finally laid against Salman Khan and his close associate, Sayed Ali, in September 2024. Despite facing imminent legal consequences, Khan strategically installed himself as Cricket Canada's CEO without any due process.

The entire board—including President Amjad Bajwa (BC), Vice President Gurdeep Klair (AB), Pawan Joshi (BC), Durriya Shabbir (ON), Praimp Persaud (ON), Charles Pais (QC), Maninder Gill (AB), and Rana Imran (SK)—supported Khan's appointment, despite knowing criminal charges were forthcoming.

The Darkest Day in Cricket Canada's History

On February 6, 2025, after exhausting all possible delays, Salman Khan finally surrendered to Calgary police. He was charged and released on an undertaking.

Initially, the matter remained confidential, as police awaited the surrender of another suspect, who turned himself in on February 27. However, on March 12, Calgary police issued a media release, sending shockwaves across Canada. That day may go down as the darkest in Canadian cricket history.

Despite multiple civil litigations involving financial misconduct, Cricket Canada's president told the Toronto Sun that the board continues to support Khan. Meanwhile, Khan posted on social media, claiming he had been charged without being allowed to present his side of the story—an excuse suggesting either ignorance of Canadian law or an outright refusal to accept the severity of his situation. The board's unwavering defense of Khan raises concerns of deeper complicity. As of now, no action has been taken against the criminally charged CEO, despite mounting pressure from the ICC, Sport Canada, and the sponsors.

Every passing day without action further damages Cricket Canada's reputation and undermines confidence in a sport already struggling to compete with the likes of baseball, basketball, and hockey.

It is now abundantly clear that since this board assumed control, controversy has been the norm. Their decisions consistently suggest an agenda that benefits only a select few. And it doesn't take much to figure out who those beneficiaries are, does it?