

# Life Lessons from Cricket

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Cricket World Cup 2011 will showcase some of the great talents of cricket. Not only is it going to be great entertainment it will also witness joy and agony, elation and tears, at the drama of quickly changing fortunes. It is not only about dreams come true but also about rains that steal victory from the deserving. Cricket World Cup, again, is not only about yelling crowds and great expectations; but it also about great wins, closely-fought contests, and unexpected defeats as well. In that sense, the game of cricket is close to life. It is this exciting aspect of how cricket is closely knit to the game of life that I would love to explore in today's talk, Life Lessons from Cricket.

Cricket is a beautiful game. It not only entertains but educates as well. To a keen observer of the game, cricket teaches motivational secrets that can bring success in life. The basic lesson is that life is a game. It has laws and boundaries. We have to abide by the laws and play according to it. Yet winning remains a great art. Not all players win all the time. But then winning alone is not what matters most; but how one plays the game.

Therefore the question is with what attitude do you approach life? Is it with a negative approach which despairs even before the first ball is bowled? Again, do you approach life with a pessimistic attitude saying that the opposition is strong and their total is big and I will not be able to get there? Or do you believe in your God-given abilities, and try to give it your best shot with a positive never-say-die attitude? Remember, it is the same ball that can take your wicket or that can be hit for a six. Remember that life is short and what is important is to play the game with hope. As King Solomon rightly pointed out; "Anyone who is among the living has hope-even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!"

With that in mind let us look at some life lessons from the game of cricket.

First of all, cricket teaches us that mistakes are common in life. I have often wondered the reason why bowlers are motivated to keep on bowling even when the batsmen are hitting

them for boundaries and sixes? The simple reason is that they bowl in the hope that the batsmen will soon commit a mistake. We as viewers of the game are either delighted with the opposition's mistakes or made sad by our team's mistakes.

But the game goes on. That is perhaps the highlight. We have seen great batsmen get out for a duck or get run-out. We also have seen great bowlers being hit for many boundaries in an over. All this is part of the game. So let us face the fact that mistakes are common in life. The key to success is not to lose heart when a mistake happens. Instead learn from it; make your skills sharper and try again with renewed spirit the next time. And always be alert to the possibility of mistakes.

Secondly, cricket teaches us that each individual is unique and important even in a team. One big difference between cricket and football and many other team games as well is that in cricket there is greater scope for individual brilliance. In the past there were all-rounders or match-winners who could change the game in their team's favour very quickly. Kapil Dev, Imran Khan, Richard Hadlee, Ian Botham, were all consistent players who could change a game with bat or ball. And there were players who epitomized the joy of fielding like Jonty Rhodes who could turn the tide by his brilliant fielding alone. In modern cricket, such players are called game-changers.

What makes a player a game-changer? A player who knows his role well; one who knows what is expected of him at any given moment in the game and does exceeding well in bringing his role to perfection is one who is a game-changer. Sachin Tendulkar, who has won the most number of Man of the Match awards in One day Internationals is a classic example. What is the lesson for you? Many young people think that they are not good enough. This is a mistaken thought. You are created unique. Celebrate your uniqueness and find out your role in life and then be the best in that role. Success will then coming knocking at your doorsteps.

Thirdly, cricket teaches us that success comes to those who enjoy the game. If you take a good look at the great names of world cricket, you'll find that those names that are not forgotten by generations are those of cricketers who played with passion on their sleeves.

To them, cricket was not a means of livelihood or brand promotion. Instead they loved the game, dedicated themselves to be masters of it and did hard work to bring their skills to perfection.

They took to the field with sincerity of purpose, were focussed and sweated it out. But above all, they delighted in the opportunity to play for their national team. They took pride in it. Such players have left behind a lasting legacy. The secret is to enjoy playing the game. Likewise in life too we need to learn to enjoy the work we do. Then success will come naturally. To quote the wise King Solomon once again: "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men." Let us also remember the words of Sachin Tendulkar: "Statistics could be a form of reflection of what a player has contributed but for me it is about enjoyment and not statistics"

A few more points related to Life Lessons from Cricket needed to be noted as well. Cricket teaches us that life needs planning. The way a batsman paces an innings well is a sign of his class as well as the fact that he calculates his moment of acceleration with precision. In test cricket a batsman gets ample time to get used to the wicket and the bowling and then start scoring at leisure. But in the limited overs game things are a bit different. Here the batsman's ability to adapt quickly to the given situation is what makes him a valued player. From the bowler's point of view, test cricket is a test of one's endurance while the limited overs game is a question about how quickly he can get wickets or contain the batsman.

All this requires great planning and preparation which includes studying the opposition. Each individual player's strengths and weakness has to be analysed to have a great game plan. Likewise in life too there should be real planning. Nothing should be left to chance. To quote King Solomon again, "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest." So plan well. Have confidence in your gifts and talents. Play each ball with the merit it deserves. Treat your opposition with respect. Play according to your game plan and be sure to have a back-up plan if your original planning fails.

The next thought is that cricket teaches us that success in cricket as well as in life is a matter of perseverance. All great players have had their moments of failure. Usually with bad performances in consecutive matches, the media goes to attack the player even if his past records speak for itself. This is especially true with the Indian Media and the pressure of critics is very difficult to handle. Sometimes former players pitch in with harsh and unjust criticism. But great batsmen let their bats do the talking taking failures in their stride. Likewise, great bowlers come back with crucial wicket-taking performances.

Note that all such great players have something in common. They're winners and they have the passion to win. They never quit. Criticism only fuels their resolve to do their best. We need to remember this quote now long associated with cricket: "Form is temporary; class is permanent." The life lesson is that you need to weather stormy seasons and endure lean patches in life. You need to always hold on and never quit. Remember the words of Sir Winston Churchill who said, "Never! Never! Never! Never! give up." Do not consider a game over till the last ball is bowled for as Napoleon Bonaparte said, "Victory belongs to the most persevering." Do not blame circumstances; one has to learn to be a good player in fast wickets and slow-turning pitches at home as well as abroad. Learn to play the game of life with great sportsmanship.

Above all else, cricket teaches us that life is about entertainment. The goal of each player is to do well so as to entertain the audience. How is this done? Through a variety of ways. There is nothing more fascinating to watch than a pace bowler bowling great line and length and have the batsman in a mesmerized hold. There is a kind of rhyme and rhythm to the long run up to the crease and completed by a graceful follow through. A spinner on the other hand often tricks a batsman by his flight and varied pace and turn. Or is there anything more lovely than an exciting cover drive, or a straight drive which gives no chance to any fielder, or a lofted six over long off or long on? What about a batsman dancing down the wicket to do so. What about the poetry of a hook shot to a bouncer or the brute force of a pull shot that races to the ropes like lightning. Words fail me to say about the drama of run-outs, stumpings, quick-reflex catches in the slips and forward short-leg, dramatic stops at the boundary line; so on and so forth. The quick running between wickets, the raised bat as a batsman reaches a milestone, a bowler's elation at the sound of the cricket ball hitting

the stumps; the running in of players to the centre to crowd around and celebrate; what fantastic entertainment is this!

Young friends, life is not just about existence. Instead it is about living life to the fullest. It is about utilizing your fullest potential not just to achieve fame or fortune but more to inspire others to do well. This is a great privilege and responsibility. You can inspire others by your great performances. As Helen Keller, who inspired many by her triumph over great odds in life, once wrote , "When we do the best we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another." That is what exactly happened in the 1983 World Cup with Kapil Dev's unbeaten 175 against Zimbabwe. It was nothing short of a miracle as when he came in to bat India were 17 for the loss of 5 wickets. Kapil recently said this about that great knock: "I was too young at that time to understand the emotions. Now after so many years, the achievement has finally sunk in and I realize it was a truly great one. God creates a day for sportspeople and that day was mine."

Finally, cricket teaches us the art of finishing well. Often in the game we find teams starting off well while batting. When everything seems to be going great and commentators start projecting big final scores there is a sudden middle-order collapse which is soon followed by some bowler finishing off the tail. Though not every match goes according to this script, it is vitally important to note that many teams fail to follow through the good work they do at the beginning of an innings. This can be due to overconfidence, concentration loss, allowing pressure of the situation to get the better of one's nerves, carelessness or sometimes poor decision-making. Whatever it be, the team that wins is one that has one or two players who are great finishers.

Finishing well is definitely a great art. For example, during the golden days of West Indian Cricket, there was a kind of habit with the West Indian batsmen to finish off every game with a six. Likewise each one of us should determine early in life to finish well. Otherwise you'll be rattled at the crossroads of life when life takes unexpected twists and turns. Sadly very few cricket players have ended the long innings of their career on a high note. Others waited to be dropped from the team before announcing retirement. But a few like Steve

Waugh and Muttiah Muralitharan finished their test careers in blazing glory as if it were a fairy tale ending.

Let me sum up the main highlights once again:

Cricket is a beautiful game. It not only entertains but educates as well. Cricket teaches us that mistakes are common in life. It teaches us that each individual is unique and important even in a team and that success belongs to those who enjoy the game best. Further, cricket teaches us that life needs planning and preparation and shows us that perseverance is the key to leave a lasting legacy behind. Above all, cricket teaches us that life is about entertainment meaning that life is to be lived out to its fullest God-given potential so that you'll inspire others with your performances. Beyond all this cricket teaches us the art of finishing well in life. To conclude, great cricket legends never die; they just fade away!

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