

Jolly Rovers win league 7th time in 10 years

In a remarkable sequence of standout performances, Jolly Rovers, Sanmar's avatar in the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association's First Division league, won the prestigious Palayampatti Shield, for the seventh time since 2000. The league has a unique structure in that the top four teams—out of 12—compete in a knockout round for the title. This year, Jolly Rovers dealt a resounding blow to archrival Vijay CC, the strongest competition they face in the league, in the semifinal, before defeating Grand Slam CC in convincing fashion in the final, both matches played in torrid summer

weather under a blazing sun. The victory was the result of focused effort, strategic preparation and absolute cohesion among the players. The team's captain R Sathish came up with stellar performances the likes of which have probably not been seen in the league before. The management team of Bharath Reddy and Rammohan Rao were superbly backed by coach Jaikumar and trainer Venkat, Shyam and Vasanth. The training, though strenuous through the season, was imaginatively modified ahead of the knockout, when the players spent time in the swimming pool rather than on the ground or the gym, to deal with heat and exhaustion.

"What is the magic formula?" admirers and rivals alike frequently ask in an attempt to find the reasons for the consistent success of Jolly Rovers. A semblance of an explanation emerged when *Matrix* discussed the matter with Ajay Kudua, the seniormost member of the team, and one of its stars in the run-up to the final, contributing nearly 500 runs at an average of 140 this season, despite missing several matches to make way for youngsters. Kudua, who came to Chennai in 1996 from Kochi and has stayed with Sanmar and Jolly Rovers ever since, puts it down to the thorough professionalism prevailing in the team. The management has provided not only top class facilities at the IIT-Chemplast Sanmar ground, but also a fiercely competitive

atmosphere, where only performance counts. Kudua—and Sathish—make direct references to Bharath Reddy's role to explain the team's and their individual success. "He insists on our playing good cricket, with professional pride, assuring us that success will automatically follow," says Kudua.

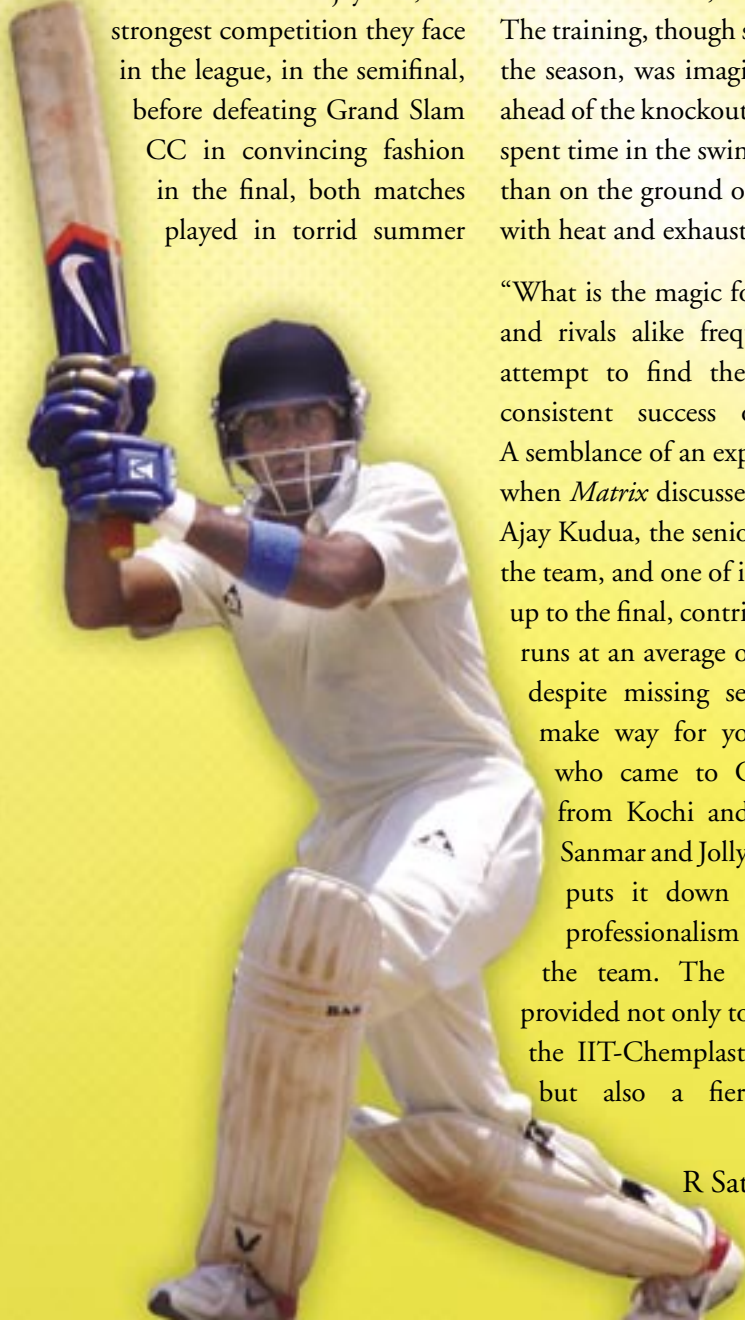
"The years between 1996 and 2000 were dry years for us," Kudua continues. "We had a few international cricketers, but not the same team spirit we have

now, though we have relatively low-profile personnel. The senior players help the youngsters and they in turn look up to us, and are prepared to listen to advice. Our coach Jaikumar is expert at spotting technical faults and finding solutions that work. He is willing to spend hours at the nets with a batsman or bowler with a specific problem until it is ironed out."

Kudua, who is being groomed to assist Bharath Reddy in the management of the team, has really peaked as a batsman in the last three seasons, after

his retirement from first class cricket. "These have been my best years as a cricketer, and I am completely focused on winning matches for my team, my company," says this youthful veteran. He has often entered the crease at vital times with the match poised evenly or in favour of the opposition, but has invariably helped Jolly Rovers emerge victorious. This ability in adversity is probably what has made Jolly Rovers a winning combination. *Matrix* salutes the players as well as the behind-the-scenes people who have made it all possible.

Besides contributing to Jolly Rovers' good performances in the league, Murali Vijay (Chennai Super Kings) performed brilliantly in the Indian Premier League (IPL), while Dinesh Karthik (Delhi Daredevils) too had a good run in the IPL.



R Sathish



Ajay Kudua



Dinesh Karthik



Murali Vijay