



Gallup Pakistan History Project's Weekend Read 40:

Reflections on the Pakistan Super League: An Analysis of Trends in 2016 by Abdullah Waqar Tajwar, Research Executive at Gallup Pakistan

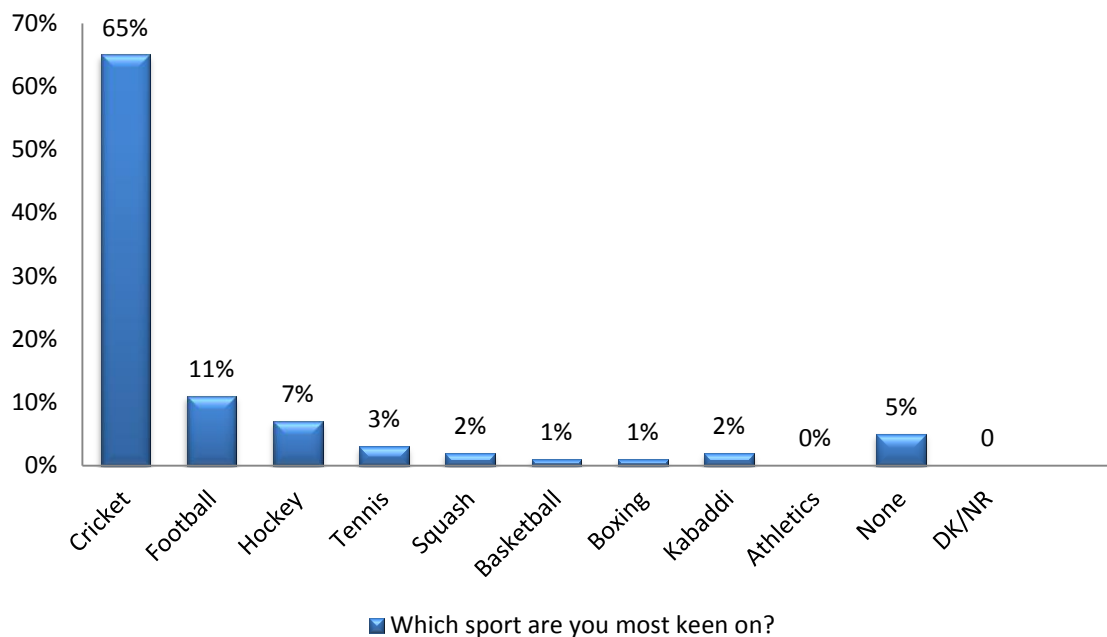
Abstract: The analysis presented in this article is predicated on the findings gleaned from a Gilani Research Foundation Survey carried out by Gallup Pakistan. A nationally representative sample of men and women from across the four provinces was asked, "Please tell: what are the chances that with the inauguration of Pakistan Super League the performance of Pakistan's cricket team will improve?" In response to this question, 40% said that there is a lot of chance of improvement of Pakistan's national cricket team, 35% said that there is a somewhat chance, 11% said that there is no chance to an extent and 8% said that there is no chance at all.

This weekend read will begin with a question that was recently asked by Gallup Pakistan from a representative sample of the Pakistani population. The question that was put forward to the people was: 'Which sport are you most keen on playing?' Out of an expansive list, one sport stood head and shoulders above the rest at a massive percentage of 65. Anyone remotely familiar with Pakistan would have already guessed the name of that sport. Yes; I am talking about cricket. A game that was first introduced to the Indian subcontinent by the British; it has now become an integral part of Pakistan's identity. Pakistanis love cricket above all other sports. From the urban metropolises to the rural villages, the entire nation is hooked onto their respective televisions and radios whenever the Pakistan National Cricket Team is playing a match. That fervour reaches a crescendo when the team opposing Pakistan belongs to India. Such is the popularity of the sport among the masses that it would not be unfair in the least to state that a unanimous majority of sporting celebrities in the country solely belong to one sport; cricket. On the other hand, one would be hard pressed to find a person who would be able to tell the names of all the first team players of the national football (soccer) team. There might just be a higher probability of a person knowing more about Manchester United Football Club than the Pakistan Football Team. This is certainly not meant as a slight to other sports. It just serves to further highlight the love affair that Pakistanis have with cricket.

That popularity has risen even more with the introduction of a much shorter format of the sport, namely the 20-20 or T-20 version. That is because in the T-20 format, a cricket match lasts only a couple of hours as both teams have to play for 20 overs whereas teams have to play for 50 overs in a standard one-day format. A test match lasts even longer, as both teams have to slug it out for five whole days.

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Needless to say, the introduction of the T-20 has enhanced the commercial viability of cricket on a scale previously unimaginable. Watching an entire cricket match has now gotten rather feasible even on a normal working day for a majority of people as a T-20 match only lasts for around three hours. Enhanced viewership has translated into greater revenues for corporations broadcasting these matches. Cricket's popularity trend is therefore on the rise. However, before venturing to the subject at hand, namely the Pakistan Super League, let us take a look at the results of the Gallup Pakistan poll that we just talked about above.



Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

The graph above clearly illustrates the commanding position that cricket enjoys in Pakistan. **Football, the second most popular sport in the Country, is a massive 54 percentage points below cricket at 11% whereas the other sports aren't even able to cross the 10% mark.** Thus, having an empirical proof of the popularity of this sport in Pakistan, we now turn towards the popularity and the impact of one specific format of cricket, that is, the Twenty Twenty or T-20 format. This format was proposed in the early 2000's by the Cricketing Board of England (ECB). As this format became a success in England, it was also adopted by other cricket boards, with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) being one of them. Soon enough, the International Cricketing Council (ICC), cricket's

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primary international governing body, gave this format the final seal of approval by deciding to have a World T-20 tournament every two years. There have been five hugely successful editions of this World T-20 Tournament, thus cementing this format's place in the game of cricket.

However, it would be unfair to mention T-20 cricket and not speak about the IPL. For the uninitiated, IPL is an acronym for the Indian Premier league which as an annual T-20 cricket league contested by franchise teams that represent Indian cities. Ever since its inception in 2008, the IPL has taken the world by storm. Before the introduction of this league by the Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI), such professional cricket leagues were never really run as businesses. However, the IPL changed all that. The participating franchise teams were open to private ownership. That move enabled the entry of India's business elites and Bollywood into mainstream cricket for the first time. Famous Bollywood celebrities including the famous Shahrukh Khan bought ownership rights to the franchise teams. Furthermore, the participating teams also spent a lot of money on attracting international cricketing superstars, retired or otherwise, into their team line-ups. A considerable international presence in the teams certainly propelled the IPL into a truly global dimension and it has sustained that lure ever since. One only needs to look back at the inaugural edition of the IPL when the Rajasthan Royals, a team captained by the retired Australian cricketing great Shane Warne, shocked everyone by winning the tournament and writing their names in cricketing folklore. With money making as a high priority, the IPL has spared no expense in commercialising cricket in India and the world. International brands like Adidas and Volkswagen have also jumped on the advertising bandwagon along with Coca Cola and Pepsi, as everyone clamours to become associated with the IPL; such is its appeal. The T-20 format of the game has surely helped in this endeavour, as games that normally stretched on to the point of boredom now remain action packed, adrenaline laced, and edge-of-the-seat type affairs for a much shorter duration of three to four hours. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the IPL has become for cricket what the Super Bowl is for American Football.

It is primarily the unprecedented success of the IPL that has started a chain reaction among the cricketing boards of other countries for the need to have their own leagues akin to the Indian Premier League. Money is the primary motivator but there are also other benefits associated with having such a league, especially for the host nation. That brings our attention to the primary subject of this article which is the Pakistan Super League (PSL), or, as I would have it, Pakistan's response to the IPL. The recently concluded tournament, held in the UAE (security concerns once again proving Pakistan's bane in being unable to host matches within the Country) and featuring five franchises representing the five cities of Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi and Lahore, showcased enough fireworks throughout its duration for it to be considered a success story, albeit relatively. Success, however, is measured here on a number of factors, with the financial factor not the primary motive. First and foremost, the fact that

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the Pakistan Cricket Board was even able to undertake this colossus of a project, that too outside Pakistan, has to be acknowledged. Even though it occurred on a scale that could not be compared to the IPL, the PSL still struck the right chord with fans, both local and international. The presence of International cricketing celebrities like Chris Gayle, Kevin Pieterse and the immortal Sir Vivian Richards as well as sold out stadiums in the United Arab Emirates epitomised the international appeal of this league. The print and media coverage that the PSL was able to garner during its duration as well as the many enduring moments that it delivered (from Ahmed Shehzad and Wahab Riaz's heated confrontation to Muhammad Nawaz's magical delivery that sent the experienced Australian batsman Brad Hodge packing) have at least ensured that the PSL is here to stay. Shortcomings and avenues for improvement will undoubtedly be discussed, but at least it can safely be assumed that the PSL has been a hit with Pakistanis.

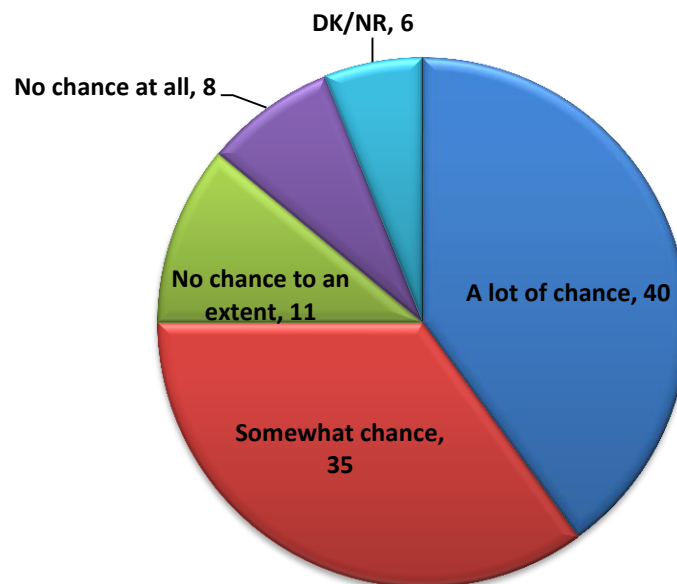
More importantly, the benefits of such a venture for Pakistan need to be thoroughly discussed. The first positive has to be seen from a financial point of view. Pakistan has already caught on to this trend late enough as it is. India, Australia, West Indies and even Bangladesh have started their own leagues before Pakistan. Therefore, the PSL is actually a case of better late than never for cash and cricket starved Pakistan Cricket Board to put itself on the road towards commercial viability and greater professionalism. However, it would be unfair to assume that the profits would start rolling in from the get go. The PSL, like all new products, is still in its nascent stages. It should be given reasonable time to establish itself before a monetary dissection is performed on it. Furthermore, it would even be a tad unfair to evaluate the commercial success of the PSL, seeing as how it wasn't even held in Pakistan. For instance, ticket sales would arguably have been higher in Pakistan and the cost of organising the tournament would substantially have been reduced seeing as how the PCB would be paying in rupees and not dirhams. For now, the fact that people are eagerly anticipating the next edition of the PSL is enough of a success for now. Thus, debates on the money making prowess of the PSL seem more apt for the future.

Focusing attention on the cricketing benefits that the PSL will bring, the foremost advantage that it promises to have is on the growth and development of domestic cricket in Pakistan. The inaugural Pakistan Super League featured approximately around 60 to 70 local players, and some 20 odd international players, including cricketing heavy weights like Chris Gayle, the hard hitting West Indian, and Kevin Pieterse, the legendary Englishman. For young local Pakistani players drafted in one of the franchises of the PSL, this presents a great opportunity to share a dressing room with international stars and seniors from the Pakistan team. An exposure of this kind is a tremendous learning opportunity for the local youngsters hoping to make it big for their country one day. One not only learns about cricket, but also becomes more aware of the demands of cutting it at the international level. Furthermore, with

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the teams having former world class players such as Wasim Akram and Sir Vivian Richards as coaches, one can reasonably claim that the local and national team players would have learnt a lot from this unique exposure.

Gallup Pakistan, taking note of the buzz surrounding the Pakistan Super League, also gathered public opinion on the impact that the PSL would have on cricket in Pakistan. A nationally representative sample of men and women across the four provinces was asked the following specific question: “Please tell, what are the chances that with the inauguration of Pakistan Super League the performance of Pakistan’s cricket team will improve?” In response to this question, 40% said that there is a lot of chance of improvement of Pakistan’s national cricket team, 35% said that there is a somewhat chance, 11% said that there is no chance to an extent and 8% said that there is no chance at all.



Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

As can be seen from the pie chart above, a resounding majority of Pakistanis has a positive opinion on the impact that the Pakistan Super League will have on the performance of the national cricket team. This optimism is borne primarily because of the unique opportunity that projects of this sort present for budding local cricketers. Not only do they allow players to learn from top class international players and coaches, they also establish an incentive for cricketers to perform domestically so as to enhance their probability of being drafted into one of the franchises. Such an incentive system is crucial to the growth

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and development of a local cricketing infrastructure. Even the now big Indian cricketing names of Virat Kohli and Suresh Raina got their big breaks in the IPL. One can expect something similar for Pakistan, as successive editions of the PSL churn out more and more potential Pakistani stars in the making. However, there will always be a proportion that sees this development with a little less enthusiasm than others. The 19% of Pakistanis that feel the PSL will not have much of a chance of improving the performance of the national cricket team also necessitate the pointing out of some potential repercussions of the PSL and other leagues like it. Since the cricketing calendar for each international team is already quite jam packed, the addition of such leagues often elevates the risk of player burn-out or/and injuries. Thus, fatigue and niggling injuries by too much cricket can have a negative impact on the performance of players and subsequently on the performance of the national team. Then there is the old argument of whether such hit and miss tournaments actually qualify as determinants of a player's true worth. There is some weight to the argument that one tournament is simply not enough to adequately judge what a player is capable of. However, to that, the optimists would argue that for the ones truly hungry for success, such tournaments are the exact opportunity that such players are looking for; a template where they can showcase their talents to a much larger audience.

There will nevertheless be a fair share of critics and supporters on an enterprise of this magnitude. Only time will tell whether the positives outrun the negatives, or vice versa. However, what cannot be doubted is that, for now, the Pakistan Super League promises to have a transformative impact on cricket in Pakistan. Most importantly, the PSL has given the cricket hungry nation of Pakistan something to cheerful for.

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