

Warne showed that cricket speaks a universal language

There are many reasons why the Rajasthan Royals won. Many more will now be unearthed, for every event, significant or otherwise, will now find profound meaning. There are many practitioners of retro-fit, finding weighty answers for normal events when the result is already known. Indeed, Shane Warne will become a better captain with every passing day and he will have a jolly laugh over it — with a beer and a cigarette watching his favourite St Kilda team play footy.

Quite aside from the result, which is more a by-product of great performance than an end in itself anyway, what was wonderful to watch was how a diverse set of people were able to bond under someone they had never met before. The key to it is understanding each player, accepting oddities and insecurities they may have and working with the person as much as with the cricketer.

Many years ago I asked Michael Holding why Clive Lloyd was rated a great captain when really all he had to do was to turn up with the finest set of individuals to take the field together. "Captaincy isn't so much about tactics as it is about knowing your players and understanding that each is different. We respected Lloyd because he took the trouble to understand us and accepted that we all had our idiosyncrasies," he said.

The key to team spirit is communication and this would have been Warne's greatest challenge. The only language that his think tank spoke was also the language that a lot of players in the team would have been uncomfortable with. But by gelling so wonderfully, and it was great to see, Warne showed that the language of cricket and the intent to communicate can over-ride strange nouns and verbs. It is a huge learning, one that enemies of foreign coaches would do well to reflect over. Language and culture can be a barrier for those who choose to look upon it as a barrier.

And yet, having been lucky to have had a ringside view of a lot of the action, if there was one reason I would ascribe to Rajasthan's success, it was that everyone in the team seemed empowered to win. Warne must have made everyone feel special, he certainly did young Ravi Jadeja.

At the DY Patil Stadium, before play started in the Mumbai Indians v Rajasthan Royals game, I saw Warne having a quiet puff and so waited till he finished before going over to say hello. In no time, he was by my side, cheerful grin as ever, firm handshake and eager to talk. The Royals were doing well and I told him I was intrigued by his decision to bat Jadeja at No 6 because we knew him as a left-arm spinner who batted down the order.

"Jadeja?", "Ah, he's a rockstar mate," he said and shouted across to the young kid who was about fifty metres away. "Have you met Harsha?" he said as young Jadeja promptly came skipping across. "Keep an eye on him mate, he's going to be a star," he told me even as the young man grinned from ear to ear.



ATTITUDE - SKILLS - KNOWLEDGE

Such pronouncements could work two ways. With the weak, it might lead to the head-in-the-clouds syndrome that has often hurt Indian cricket. With the diligent and ambitious, it could be just the shot of encouragement that a young man craves for. The Royals lost the game that day, there were some strong words spoken in the dressing room but Warne was game for a drink at a party thrown by the opposition that night.

"Just as well it happened now," he said. "The team needs to know they can get one of these days and it is best it happens now rather than in a knockout game".

I also believe Warne's desire to win from any position was infectious. Teams that go in thinking they can lose inevitably do. And one of the reasons Australia have been a force over the years, and Warne is a typical product of the system, is that they always back themselves to win. And you could see that in a line-up that included no more than five batsmen, two of whom, Asnodkar and Pathan, were happy to slog the first ball they faced and a third, Kaif, who was in no form at all. And yet Warne kept playing five batsmen, even playing himself at seven. It was a strategy that could easily have boomeranged but one of the reasons it didn't, I believe, the fact that the players were empowered to be themselves and to search for a win at all times.

I have also heard it said that they were lucky. It's a strange beast, this luck. Why does it seem to knock more often on the door of those that win? Or is it that it knocks on everyone's door and only those that know how to win recognise it?