

The World Cup final and our obsession with winners: At what cost?

The ICC lost an opportunity to create a defining moment. By awarding both England and New Zealand, a precedent could be set to reward excellence equally, a concept that can translate to the market economy

BY BAPPADITYA MUKHOPADHYAY



Years from now, people will remember the ICC 2019 World Cup Final as perhaps the greatest Cricket Final ever played. It may also find its place among the greatest final ever played, but as the heart battles with the mind, one wonders how it could have been much more—it could have been the defining moment of modern cricket.

The ICC had to follow its own rules. It had to pick a winner when it could have done much more. The ICC lost its chance to create that defining moment when we stood up, questioned our own made rules and awarded excellence without

differentiating. We have once again reinforced, “no one remembers the silver medalist”...and to devise the method of picking a winner, always, even when all are equal, is an exercise we will never give up.

Most fans on social media opine how New Zealand is hard done by, courtesy the tie breaking rule. Simon Taufel, the former respected umpire has even pointed out how the umpires erred—perhaps the game should not have even reached the Super Over stage. The debate has both sides: One group questioning the rule, while the other pointing out that the rule was known by all and in advance.

Meanwhile, New Zealand was as gracious in defeat and evidence of them questioning the rule is yet to surface. The entire debate at this juncture is now on how to improve operational efficiency. Thus, we are debating whether deciding the outcome based on boundaries scored is sensible. If we go along this line, sure, we will come across a better rule perhaps, one that will stir less controversy. But maybe we need to ask a more fundamental question: Why do we need such rules? Of course, to determine the winner in the event of a tie. But then, why do we always need to pick up a winner, especially if picking up a winner isn't a must for progress? Somewhere in our endeavor to come up with a better rule, we will lose again what is essential: How to maintain the balance between excellence and humanity.

Does this practice make one more equal than the other? The most popular retort I have come across is how the market economy decides that this is part of how society has evolved, and can't now be changed. This is only partly true. Market economy incentivizes and subsequently awards winners; this is perhaps a straight-jacket way of looking at what the market economy does. True, market economy provides incentives and rewards accordingly. But does it have to be winners or can it be excellence”

To begin with, neither winning implies excellence nor vice versa. Thus, to pin incentives with winning is too narrow a way to analyse things. Incentive structures are consistent with both scenarios, creating winners as well as promoting excellence. Scenario one, most prevalent, is where one incentivises people or teams to win. Here, the winner gets rewarded and has

disproportionately higher gains than others. The beneficiary of such a structure, the winner, now believes in this system and when it is his turn, goes on to repeat this ‘incentive-outcome’ cycle subsequently.

Scenario two, far less popular, is perhaps to incentivise excellence. Here, we need not use a finer dissection to rank excellence. All that is excellent is equally acknowledged and rewarded. Presumably, the beneficiaries of this system will now go on to design systems that incentivise excellence, and not winners. The ICC had a chance to do the latter. It could have declared joint winners. Sure, there would have been opposition and heartbreak there too, but the signal that day would have been defining. The world would have acknowledged that when two teams have put their best forward, and there exists nothing to separate them, both are treated as equals; none is more equal than the other. Children could have learned that we can do our best and not need to come first in class.

Sometime in 80AD, in the Flavian Amphitheatre, stood Priscus and Verus, face to face—the two greatest gladiators of their time. “As Priscus and Verus each drew out the contest and the struggle between the pair long stood equal, shouts loud and often sought discharge for the combatants. But Titus obeyed his own law (the law was that the bout go on without shield until a finger be raised). What he could do, he did, often giving dishes and presents. But an end to the even strife was found: equal they fought, equal they yielded. To both Titus sent wooden swords and to both palms. Thus valor and skill had their reward. This has happened under no prince but you, Titus: two fought and both won.” – Martial, ‘Liber spectaculorum.

It appears somewhere between 80 AD and 2019, we have lost what was essential.

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The article can be read online [here](#).