

The Indian Premier League

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In the mid-2000s, the Indian cricket ecosystem stood at a crossroads. Traditional formats—Test cricket and One-Day Internationals—had loyal audiences, but viewership was becoming fragmented, younger fans were shifting to fast-paced entertainment, and competing sports leagues were beginning to capture attention. The Indian cricket board sensed an opportunity to rethink how cricket could be consumed, commercialized, and experienced.

The Indian Premier League (IPL), launched in 2008, represented a bold strategic departure. Rather than competing head-to-head with existing cricket formats, it sought to redefine the sporting experience altogether. The league fused sport with entertainment by introducing city-based franchises, athlete auctions, cheer squads, music, celebrity team owners, and prime-time scheduling. These elements created an entirely new value proposition for fans, players, broadcasters, and sponsors.

For fans, the IPL delivered fast, high-intensity matches condensed into a three-hour window—mirroring the rhythm of contemporary entertainment consumption. Stadium atmospheres resembled live concerts, and television broadcasts emphasized storytelling, personalities, and instant engagement through graphics and analysis. This contrasted with the slower, more traditional cricket narrative built around technique, endurance, and national rivalry.

For players, the league opened a new income horizon. Domestic athletes—who historically struggled for financial security—gained unprecedented earning potential, international exposure, and the chance to train alongside global stars. Young, unrecognized talent could be discovered, showcased, and commercialized in a matter of weeks.

For broadcasters and sponsors, the IPL unlocked a scalable commercial product. Prime-time scheduling, guaranteed match frequency, and mass youth appeal created a reliable advertising platform. Brand integration—from team jerseys to stadium

experiences—generated revenue streams that had not previously existed in cricket. Franchise ownership attracted investors from entertainment, corporate, and emerging business sectors, helping build a financially sustainable league ecosystem.

Instead of competing head-to-head with the conventions of traditional cricket, the IPL reframed the experience of the sport itself. It shifted the focus away from long, drawn-out formats and the traditional rhythms of play, positioning cricket as a fast-paced, high-energy spectacle designed for broader appeal. The league blended sport with elements borrowed from entertainment industries—star personalities, off-field excitement, and a strong media presence—which collectively reshaped how audiences engaged with the game. At the same time, the introduction of franchise teams rooted in specific cities fostered new forms of identity and belonging, transforming the tournament into a seasonal celebration rather than merely a series of matches. This reimagining expanded cricket's reach and engaged groups who had previously been on the periphery of the game.

Within a few years, the IPL had reshaped global cricket economics. It became one of the world's highest-valued sports leagues, attracting wide international viewership and inspiring similar franchise-based tournaments elsewhere. Its success underscored a fundamental principle that growth emerges not from competing within industry boundaries but from reconstructing those boundaries to unlock new demand.

Traditional Cricket

Before the rise of franchise-based leagues, cricket was anchored in long-form formats that emphasized national pride, technical

mastery, and strategic depth. Test cricket—lasting up to five days—was considered the pinnacle of the sport, attracting purist audiences who valued endurance, discipline, and historical rivalries. One-Day Internationals offered a shorter alternative, yet still required a full day's commitment.

The economics of traditional cricket were relatively constrained. Matches were scheduled infrequently, revenue relied heavily on national board broadcasts, and player compensation varied greatly across countries. Domestic cricket, in particular, struggled for visibility and financial viability, limiting career prospects for emerging players. Spectator engagement was often challenged by long durations, inconsistent match timings, and limited entertainment elements outside the sport itself.

This environment represented well-defined industry rules, intense competition among nations, and limited innovation in format or commercial model. While traditional cricket retained cultural and emotional significance, it faced pressures to adapt to a generation seeking faster, more immersive entertainment experiences. This backdrop created the ideal conditions for a strategy shift, which the IPL capitalized on by reimagining what cricket could offer to fans, players, and commercial partners.

Position in Course

This case is best positioned in the mid stage of a strategy or innovation course, after students have been introduced to the foundational concepts of competitive dynamics and value creation. It serves as an application-oriented module within the Blue Ocean Strategy segment, enabling students to move from understanding frameworks

conceptually to using them analytically in a real-world context.

The case can be taught after students have covered topics such as industry analysis and competitive forces, strategic differentiation, and value drivers in mature industries. It sets the stage for deeper discussions around market reconstruction, non-customer insights, and value innovation, making it suitable just before or alongside modules on innovation strategy, business model redesign, or platform-based ecosystems. The IPL case helps bridge theory and practice by demonstrating how a legacy sport can be transformed into an entirely new entertainment category, making it an ideal integrative case in the strategy toolkit.

Learning Outcomes

- Analyze how new market space can be created by redefining industry boundaries through blue ocean strategy tools and frameworks proposed by Kim and Mauborgne.
- Evaluate the interplay between reducing costs and enhancing customer value to understand how value innovation shapes distinctive strategic positioning.
- Identify and assess different customer and non-customer segments to understand how untapped demand can be activated in mature industries.
- Examine how shifts in format, structure, and complementary offerings can transform a traditional product into a broader entertainment experience, leading to sustained competitive advantage.

Assignment Questions

1. Using the IPL vs. traditional cricket context, identify how the IPL created value

innovation and for whom did it create value. Analyze how the league managed to simultaneously streamline certain aspects of the game and enhance the overall appeal for various stakeholders.

- a) Draw a Strategy Canvas comparing IPL and traditional cricket on at least 8–10 factors.
2. Based on your canvas, construct an ERRC Grid for the IPL by analyzing what the league:
 - a. Eliminated from traditional cricket:
 - b. Reduced relative to traditional format norms:
 - c. Raised above industry standards:
 - d. Created that did not exist before: Describe how these four actions collectively shaped IPL's new value curve and enabled it to break out of red-ocean competition with established cricket formats.
3. Identify and analyze two customer groups and two non-customer tiers that the IPL successfully tapped into using Blue Ocean principles. Explain why these non-customers were previously disengaged with traditional cricket. Describe how IPL's value proposition converted its non-customers into fans or viewers. Provide examples of specific choices (ex. event design, broadcast innovations, scheduling, and format changes) that expanded the demand beyond core cricket enthusiasts.
4. Using the Six Paths Framework, analyze how the IPL reconstructed market boundaries to create a blue ocean and for each path, provide one insight into how the IPL broke away from traditional cricket and created new demand. Path 1: Alternatives (e.g., movies, other sports leagues)

Path 2: Strategic Groups (elite vs. domestic cricket)

Path 3: Buyer Groups (fans, broadcasters, advertisers)

Path 4: Complementary Offerings (entertainment, celebrity culture, cheer squads)

Path 5: Functional–Emotional Orientation (shift toward entertainment + sport)

Path 6: Time (emergence of short-attention-span viewership, rising corporate sponsorship)