

## 2013 IPL Match Fixing Controversy- An analysis with respect to Betting in Sports

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### Introduction

It is a well-known fact that as per the central legislation, the Public Gambling Act of 1867, betting on cricket matches is illegal. Betting on sports in India is mostly prohibited excluding betting on horse races. However, the subject of sports comes under the state list. Thus, different states have drawn up separate rules concerning gambling and betting in sports. But none of these states permit illegal match-fixing and betting. The dispute concerning the legality of online betting is still not resolved in India.

Cricket is undoubtedly India's most popular sport. The Indian Premier League, popularly known as "IPL", is India's most-watched sports match. Over the years, IPL has played an important part in the economic growth of India. The 2015 IPL season allegedly contributed 11.5 billion rupees<sup>2</sup> to the GDP of the Indian economy. A few years after the league's inception, rumors relating to match-fixing and betting started making rounds. The owners and franchisees repeatedly denied the speculations, nonetheless, the fraud was discovered in 2013.

### What is Match-Fixing?

Match-fixing is the practice of fixing the result of the game. It is a violation of the rules of the game and law. It disturbs the spirit of sports and sportspersons. Match-fixing or spot-fixing takes place between team franchisees, players, gamblers, or umpires. Individuals involved in placing illegal bets and match-fixing in cricket are popularly known as "Bookies. A bookie sets odds, accepts, and places bets, and pays out winnings<sup>3</sup> on behalf of other people. They are generally associated with illegal activities. Some of the most infamous incidents of match-fixing have occurred in the sport of cricket.

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<sup>2</sup> IANS, *IPL 2015 contributed Rs. 11.5 bn to GDP: BCCI*, The Hindu, (07 Sept. 2021, 11:55 AM), <https://www.thehindu.com/sport/cricket/2015-indian-premier-league-ipl-contributed-rs115-billion-182-million-to-indias-gross-domestic-product-gdp-says-bcci/article7823334.ece>.

<sup>3</sup> James Chen, *Bookie*, Investopedia, (07 Sept. 2021, 12:05 PM), <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bookie.asp>.

In the International as well as the national history of Indian cricket, many players have been banned from tournaments and matches for match-fixing. Several controversies relating to cricketers being involved in betting have also emerged in the past. Speculations of match-fixing and betting in IPL have become very common since the 2013 controversy. Instances of match-fixing are also one of the reasons for IPL's backslide.

### 2013 IPL Match Fixing Controversy

On May 16, 2013, the news of the arrest of three Rajasthan Royals players, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, Ankeet Chavan, and Ajit Chandila by Delhi Police on charges of spot-fixing broke out. Spot-fixing is undertaken to influence the outcome of a certain ball or certain over in the match. E.g.- Placing a bet on the number of runs that would be scored in an over or whether a ball would be no-ball or wide ball, etc. Spot-fixing is different from match-fixing. Spot-fixing does not necessarily influence the final result of a match, unlike match-fixing. The arrest took place in Mumbai in a post-midnight operation. The team had played a match with Mumbai Indians on the previous night. It was suspected that the cricketers had agreed to make a certain amount of runs during their overs in several games in the 2013 season. For this purpose, a payment of Rs. 6 million was made to the players.

As a result of the arrest, the contracts of all three players were suspended by the owner franchise till the inquiry was over. The players were also banned by BCCI till further investigation. Along with the three players, twenty-three other people were arrested in the case. Around 14 bookies were arrested for spot-fixing. The Delhi police alleged that the players and bookies were working under the orders of Dawood Ibrahim and Chota Shakeel, the underworld criminals.

The Pakistani Umpire Asad Rauf's name also came up during the 2013 controversy and the Mumbai police charged him with illegal betting, cheating, and fraud. Three years after the controversy, the BCCI found him guilty of corruption was banned for five years since February 2016. The police officers were conducting a deep investigation into the case and arrested many people, mainly bookies.

The well-known actor Vindu Dara Singh was also arrested for having connections with the bookies in spot-fixing. He was released shortly after his arrest. After Vindu Singh's arrest, it was found out that he had connections with Gurunath Meiyappan, Chennai Super Kings' team principal and son-in-law of the then BCCI's president. It was alleged by Mumbai Police that Meiyappan had connections with bookies and after the investigation against him was over, he was arrested for betting, conspiracy, and cheating. Nevertheless, he was released on bail a few

days after his arrest. BCCI took stringent action against Meiyappan and set up a three-member committee to investigate his role in the spot-fixing and betting scandal.

Businessman Raj Kundra, whose name recently made it to the headlines due to pornography speculations, was also questioned in this controversy. At the time of the arrest of the three players of Rajasthan Royals, Kundra was a co-owner of the franchisee team. During the investigation, he confessed to placing bets on his team through a bookie but also claimed that he was not engaged in spot-fixing. After this incident, he was suspended from IPL by the BCCI in 2013. Soon after his ban, an RTI application was filed with Delhi Police and he was given a clean chit as evidence of betting charges against him was not found.

In July 2015, Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals teams were prohibited from participating in IPL for two years because of the betting activities of their team's executives, Gurunath Meiyappan and Raj Kundra in the 2013 controversy.

### Current Position

In September 2013, Sreesanth along with Ankeet Chavan was banned for life by BCCI. However, two years after the ban, in 2015, the Delhi High Court declared Sreesanth's acquittal in the spot-fixing case. In 2019, the Supreme Court of India asked BCCI to reconsider the life ban imposed on Sreesanth. Subsequently, the lifetime ban was reduced to 7 years. It was revealed that Sreesanth had confessed to the police officers to spot-fixing however, he had alleged that the confession was obtained by coercion. Chavan was also acquitted by the Delhi Court in 2015 and was cleared of all the charges of spot-fixing. Recently in June 2021, the lifetime ban imposed upon him by BCCI was lifted.

Unlike the other two players who were banned by BCCI in 2013, a life ban from all forms of cricket was imposed upon Chandila by the BCCI in 2016. Even though he was acquitted by the court of all charges due to lack of evidence along<sup>4</sup> with the other players in 2015, the BCCI stood firm on their decision of imposition of the ban. While the other two players have been successful in rescinding their life-ban suspension to seven years, the same cannot be said of Chandila as he is yet to appeal to BCCI on reduction<sup>5</sup> for the ban.

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<sup>4</sup> ESPNcricinfo staff, *Court drops charges against Sreesanth, Chavan and Chandila*, ESPN cricinfo, (07 Sept. 2021, 12:25 PM), <https://www.espncricinfo.com/story/court-drops-charges-against-sreesanth-chavan-and-chandila-903075>.

<sup>5</sup> CricTracker Author, *Former Rajasthan Royals all-rounder Ajit Chandila approaches court to get his ban lifted*, CricTracker, (08 Sept. 2021, 12:25 AM), <https://www.crictracker.com/former-rajasthan-royals-all-rounder-ajit-chandila-approaches-court-to-get-his-ban-lifted/>.

As of September 2021, Meiyappan and Kundra stay prohibited for a lifetime from participating in the sport of cricket in any capacity.

### Betting in Sports

Despite the prohibition of illegal betting and match-fixing in sports in India, these unlawful activities are quite rampant. Since the position of the legality of gambling/betting is not settled, people always find ways to engage themselves in these unlawful activities. Betting in cricket is not prohibited in India in its entirety. E.g. Bet365 is an online betting app where people place bet on the outcome of a wide range of sports events including cricket. But apps like Bet365 or Dream11 do have their operation base in India, they operate from foreign countries, therefore, they don't come under the jurisdiction of India. This is one of the loopholes in India's legislation relating to betting and gambling.

The Indian betting market is huge in terms of capital. Every year it generates wealth in millions. E.g. The Indian online gambling<sup>6</sup> market alone is valued at 930 million dollars. During the IPL season, people around the world place gigantic bets and engage in spot-fixing and match-fixing. Of course, all these activities go undetected due to a lack of evidence. In the first half of the 2021 IPL season, BCCI arrested two alleged bookies that attempted spot-fixing with the help of a cleaner<sup>7</sup> at the stadium. This speaks volumes about the betting activities taking place during the IPL season.

The number of Indian users participating in online gambling and betting in sports is increasing. There is a possibility that in the coming years India might legalize betting in sports. But there is a fine line between lawfully placing bets and participating in match-fixing and violating the rules of the game. Match Fixing cannot be legalized as its very purpose is unlawful. Separate legislation criminalizing it needs to be formulated as it has become a source of corruption in cricket. Introducing such an act would prove to be very effective for protecting sports in India.

Sri Lanka in 2019 criminalized match-fixing with punishments including 10-year imprisonment and became the first major cricket-playing country in South Asia to do so. Indian government must also take efforts in this area to curb corruption in sports rather than overlooking the consequences of these unlawful activities.

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<sup>6</sup> The Signal, *What Happened To India Online Gambling Market 2021?*, (08 Sept. 2021, 01:05 AM), <https://signalscv.com/2021/06/what-happened-to-india-online-gambling-market-2021/>.

<sup>7</sup> Press Trust of India, *IPL 2021: Bookies attempted fixing with the help of a cleaner at Delhi stadium, says BCCI ACU chief*, Scroll.in, (08 Sept. 2021, 10:22 AM), <https://scroll.in/field/994133/ipl-2021-bookies-attempted-fixing-with-the-help-of-a-cleaner-at-delhi-stadium-says-bcci-acu-chief>.

## Conclusion

After the 2013 controversy unfolded, BCCI received a lot of backlashes for not performing its functions efficiently. Consequently, it undertook certain measures to strengthen the rules. In 2015, the Supreme Court of India set up Lodha Committee to recommend measures for improving BCCI's functioning and its rules. The committee in its report suggested a separate governing body for the IPL and BCCI and to declare match-fixing and spot-fixing as criminal offenses. The controversy upset many cricket fans in India and the consecutive season there was a 14% drop in viewership<sup>8</sup> after news broke.

The legality of betting in India is still a grey area. The government should regulate it by developing laws and demarcating legal and illegal forms of betting. If betting is regulated, it would ensure transparency in sports and curb bribery generating through the illegal activities taking place illicitly like match-fixing or spot-fixing. Severe punishments must be prescribed for criminal offenses in sports. Regulating betting and gambling would help in detecting fraud and money laundering.

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<sup>8</sup> Pratap Alexander Muthalaly, *Case study of the IPL spot fixing and betting case*, Ipleaders, (08 Sept. 2021, 11:42 AM), <https://blog.iplayers.in/case-study-of-the-ipl-spot-fixing-and-betting-case/>.