

History of the VCA



The game of Cricket permeates the globe. From New Zealand to Norway, Sierra Leone to the Seychelles the game is played officially in over 120 countries around the world on almost every continent. Here in Vietnam, however, Cricket has never gained a foothold on the local sporting landscape. There are historic images of the troops at the 2Comp Ord/2AOD Depot in Vung Tau (now the Lord Mayors Oval) playing on a cement pitch laid by the local Vietnamese women during the American War and, of course, the Hanoi Cricket Club was formed in the northern capital in 1993. But despite the enthusiasm of these pioneers, participation and playing conditions have mostly been confined to the ranks of Cricket-starved expatriates with a taped up ball on a rolled out, sea grass mat.

That was all to change in late 2005, thanks primarily to a pair of passionate individuals determined to bring the Spirit of Cricket to the parklands of Vietnam - Mr. Michael Mann and the late Dr. Laurie Hayward. Together they procured an astroturf pitch, the first of its kind in the nation, on the grounds of the newly established RMIT University Saigon South Campus.

Sadly, Dr. Laurie was only to enjoy this tremendous legacy for a short time before his passing. And it was around that time the League Trophy, first commissioned by the Mann Family, was dedicated as the Dr. Laurie Hayward Memorial Trophy which, to this day, is awarded to the League Champions.

A friendly scratch match to christen the pitch prompted the emergence of a healthy contingent of excited expats from the Australian, English, Indian and Sri Lankan communities all keen to get out there and play. In early 2006, Vietnam's first Cricket League was contested between Australia, Sri Lanka, India A, India B and RMIT. An enthralling first Grand Final between the newly-formed Saigon Australian Cricket Club (SACC) and Sri Lankan Sports Club (SSC) saw the SACC held to 102 runs and SSC cruising in the chase at 1 for 51. Enter Richard 'Chef' Turner with a devastating spell of 6 for 25, leading his team to victory and the first Cricket Championship in Vietnam history!

The English joined the fray during that off-season with a 3-match series against the SACC, in what was hastily dubbed 'The Saigon Ashes'. The tradition continues between the old foes and the teams now contest the Jon Fleming Trophy each time they meet. The English Cricket Club of Saigon (ECCS) officially joined the League for the start of the 2006-07 season and the Saigon Cricket Association (SCA) was born in earnest.

The continued success of the Association is the direct result of invaluable contributions by a group of passionate, committed people during that formative era. Names like Carrington, Gupta, Sogani, Treasure, Fawcett, Deshpande, Perera, Pillay, Cashion, Malcolm, Kutcher, Preston, Pisipaty, Murugesu, Uduwatte and Deepu all come to mind but there are many, many more.

The strength and enthusiasm of the SCA's Indian contingent was there for all to see from a very early stage, consistently able to field two competitive sides. The team names have changed a little over the years - India A became India Blue and they now stand alone as the Indian Cricket Club of Saigon (ICCS) - India B became India Green before settling independently as the Indian Sports Club of Saigon (ISCS).

ICCS, along with the Sri Lankans, dominated the next two League seasons with SSC opening their title account in 2007. But in 2008, in their 3rd straight Grand Final, ICCS turned the tables and won their first Hayward Trophy.

In 2008-09, ECCS pressed hard as serious title contenders. Only a late batting collapse in a thrilling Grand Final prevented them from going all the way and SACC were the beneficiaries, emerging as League Champions for the 2nd time. United Cricket Club (UCC) entered the competition - a reworked RMIT team with a sprinkling of new blood. Their maiden season would produce just the one win - ironically in their first match, against the eventual runners-up - but it wouldn't be long before UCC were commanding a healthy respect from each of their opponents.

2009 also ushered in a new era for both the Clubs and the governing body. Teams shifted to "Limited Overs" style uniforms displaying their respective Club colours and the SCA changed its name. Former VCA President Terry Gordon explains in the 2011 Wisden Cricketers Almanac: "The SCA was renamed the Vietnam Cricket Association in 2009 in an attempt to ease our passage into the Asian Cricket Council. But it has proved difficult to cultivate the local talent. Most Vietnamese, encouraged not to get a sun tan as it may lower their social standing, try to avoid direct sunlight during the middle hours of the day - a cultural phenomenon reflected by the amount of whitening agents in cosmetics, sunscreens and moisturizers."

The VCA continued to expand in 2009-10 as the Pakistan Saigon Cricket Club (PSCC) were welcomed into the competition, bringing the number of Clubs to seven (7). ECCS were again enjoying success, taking the minor premiership and storming into the Grand Final as favourites for their first title. However, SSC had other ideas and veterans Suhard Amit and Nalin Uduwatte batted superbly to guide their team to an emphatic 62-run win, joining the SACC as two-time VCA Champions.

The 2009-10 VCA Season was punctuated with the Inaugural Saigon International Cricket Sixes. A resounding success, the event has become a feature on the regional social Cricketing calendar. Attracting visiting teams from as far afield as Thailand, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, England and Australia, many teams return each and every year to enjoy the friendly competition and famous Vietnamese hospitality.

The VCA adopted the T20 Format for the 2010-11 season with the intention to provide more matches for all the Clubs. However, a particularly lengthy wet season, an extended Christmas break and Bob Dylan's ground-breaking concert held on our hallowed turf resulted in an abbreviated VCA League. Finals could not be contested and the Hayward Trophy was awarded to the Minor Premiers, SACC.

The new format proved exciting and popular among the Players and Supporters alike and was implemented permanently for the 2011-12 season. ISCS, living up to their as yet unrealized potential, dominated the regular season winning 11 of 12 matches....only UCC were able to stay in touch and a Semi Final win against SACC sent them into their first VCA Grand Final. In the other Semi Final, SSC used late momentum and their previous Finals experience to upset the Minor Premiers, going on to defeat UCC in a rain-affected finale and claiming their 3rd VCA crown.

The disappointment of 2012 seemed to instill a steely resolve in the Indian Sports Club. ISCS went on to blitz the competition in 2012-13, sweeping all aside on their way to a maiden VCA Championship. PSCC were also on an upward curve, gaining a reputation as a big-hitting outfit capable of beating any team on their day.

The most recent 2013-14 VCA League provided arguably the highest standard competition to date. ISCS picked up where they left off the previous season, claiming their 3rd straight Minor Premiership. UCC and PSCC cruised into the Finals while SACC were able to win four straight games to sneak in to the post-season. Two exciting Semi Finals saw UCC and SACC progress to the Grand Final, with the latter completing a remarkable 6-game run to take their 4th VCA title.

Cricket in Vietnam has come a long way since those humble beginnings nearly 10 years ago and the future looks bright. The VCA will continue to foster this greatest of games in this part of the world....who knows, the locals may even take to the sport one day. But we strive forward remembering always the cornerstones set by Messrs. Mann and Hayward, the countless, selfless volunteers who continue to give their time and effort..... and the Cricket-mad expats with the taped up ball and the sea grass mat.

Benjamin Daley
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Saigon Australian Cricket Club