


Happy Birthday Kapil Dev: Leader in cricket, leader in life

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Today is Kapil Dev's 65th birthday — an occasion to celebrate the life and contributions of an extraordinary person, a phenomenal cricketer, and most importantly, a truly transformative leader. His cricketing career is not just a benchmark of success and excellence, but stands as a testament to his character, marked by humility and self-effacing grace, and is a symbol of hope for millions across India where cricketers once rose only from the major metropolises.

Kapil's career is full of impressive achievements. He took 434 wickets in 131 test matches, while in one-day international (ODI) cricket, he took 253 wickets in 225 games. He remains one of the best all-rounders India has ever produced. He scored 5,248 runs in 131 test matches (including eight centuries) and 3,783 runs in 225 ODI matches (with one century). He is the only player in the world to have achieved an all-rounder's double of 4,000 test runs and 400 test wickets. He was also the youngest cricketer to take 100 wickets (at 21), 200 wickets (at 24) and 300 wickets (at 27). Impressive as he was as a player, as a leader, Kapil was instrumental in defining the future of cricket in India.

Born in a relatively poor family, Kapil rose, through sheer grit and determination, to play cricket at the highest level. The trials and tribulations of life made him disciplined and responsible, qualities that shaped his greatness.

In 1978, he joined the Indian cricket team and barely five years later, he captained India at the Cricket World Cup in 1983. Against all odds, the team won the World Cup, and as Kapil lifted the coveted trophy, he also raised the confidence of 750 million Indians.

Indeed, the World Cup victory proved a defining moment for Kapil, Indian sports and the nation. Four decades after Independence, India was facing numerous challenges — social, political and economic. Above all, though, was a crisis of confidence in an uncertain world. The Indian cricket team led by Kapil scripted a new imagination for India. It had not only won the World Cup but also empowered a new generation of youth by driving its aspirations and self-esteem.

Over the next 40 years, Indian cricket was dramatically transformed. The seeds of this change were sowed under Kapil's leadership. He forged a unique sense of purpose, camaraderie, community and aspiration that not only helped the Indian cricket team win the World Cup and surpass the limits of its performance but which transcended the sport itself.

For that generation and the ones that came after, especially mine, Kapil's career has epitomised hard work, commitment, excellence and national pride. Following him, the rise in the gradual professionalisation of sports and the creation of leagues in the last four decades, helped in the democratisation of the sport itself, enabling new talent to come in from across the country. It also brought with it many new challenges. One such challenge is the need to build a culture of sports in India that is not based solely on corporate funding and the profit motive. The new generation of sports enthusiasts needs to be inspired by the life and contributions of Kapil.

Indeed, influential figures like Kapil Dev need to appreciate the unique and distinct roles they can play in educational institutions compared to corporate settings. Within academic environments, these personalities have the unparalleled opportunity to shape young minds, instil values, inspire dreams, foster aspirations and develop a sense of responsibility. Kapil Dev's story could serve as a compelling source, not only for cricket triumphs but also for the principles of discipline, perseverance, integrity and ethics that extend beyond the realm of sports.

In contrast, within the corporate sphere, their influence tends to lean towards promoting products or services, necessitating a different approach. While educational institutions allow them to mould future leaders, the corporate arena involves contributing to the promotion and success of a brand. By sensitively acknowledging and navigating these responsibilities, influential figures can leave a lasting impact on the hearts and minds of students, and indeed, the consumer market.

It will be ennobling and empowering for young people across Indian schools, colleges and universities to hear Kapil Dev's story so that they understand that the privileges that they enjoy in their lives come with responsibilities. I believe that Kapil Dev, my childhood hero

from Haryana, can inspire the next generation not only to become transformative leaders in the field of sports, but in other walks of life as well.

The greatest lesson that young people can learn from Kapil Dev's life is to pursue a calling in life for the sheer joy that comes with a profound sense of dedication. All other outcomes and benefits are purely incidental and transitory.

The writer is the founding vice chancellor of O P Jindal Global University