

Runners Up

A pioneering compilation



Hockey Yearbook 1995

by K. Arumugam

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By KRISHNA PRASAD

THE Indian hockey team played 32 matches last year. It won 14, lost eight, and drew 10; scored 67 goals and let go 39. If you ignore Atlanta, but that was this year, it was as good a performance as that of India's cricket team, probably better. But, if the sticksters' show doesn't come to mind as easily as, say, the last time Javagal Srinath ran himself out, which is almost every time, it just shows the depths the Original National Game of India is plumbing.

And the almost complete absence of literature beyond tomorrow's sports pages to preserve their feats for posterity. A game's literature is only as strong as the game. That hockey should have taken so long to acquire what (hopefully) will become an annual tome of its own is a pointer to its health. That the *The Hindu Cricket Book*, pushing 40, should be flourishing tells the other side of the story.

Admittedly, Arumugam's labour of love is no great literature—not even by a long shot—but it's a brave one. In its size, contents and casual design, it is reminiscent of the *Sportsweek* cricket annuals of yore—recording with almost mechanical precision the highs and sighs of the national team.

The light at the Indo-Pan American championships, the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup, and the SAF games; the darkness at the violence in the Aga Khan Cup finals; the postponement of the nationals; the absence of any academies to train youngsters, it's all there.

The author's choice is there too. Player of the year (rightwinger Mukesh Kumar), crowd puller of the year (Dhanraj Pillai), comeback of the year (Pargat Singh), rising star (Baljit Singh Saini), goalkeeper of the year (A.B. Subbaiah), neglect (sic) of the year (Punjab's Rajbir Rai).

It may not be the last word on the subject, but at least a beginning has been made. "Towards Prosperity?" asks Arumugam. If it's goals, not shovels of cash, the author has in mind after asking for Rs 390 a stab, he has our vote. For, who doesn't know what prosperity has brought Indian cricket? ■