



**‘CHAMPIONS
BELIEVE IN
THEMSELVES
EVEN WHEN
NO ONE ELSE DOES’**

SUBRAMANIAM RAMAKRISHNAN (RAMKY)

In a country where cricket is religion and the Indian test players are worshipped as Gods, can you imagine a virtual nobody looking them straight in the eye in their dressing room and telling them “you guys may be the best players in the country, but I have more intelligence than all of you in this room put-together?”

Unimaginable, but this is exactly what Ramky, a former banker told the Indian cricket team in 2004.

A banker....? Telling the Indian cricket masters? Seems incredulous?

Yes it would seem as incredulous as the story of how Ramky came to be where he is today. And how, in the process, he changed the way cricket is being played in India today. Or for that matter several other sports in the world.

A PROMISING START

As a school boy growing up in south Chennai, Ramakrishnan, took to cricket like any boy from this cricket-crazy country would. Playing street cricket, school cricket and even book cricket – as long as it was cricket. Changed schools for cricket from P.S. Senior Secondary School, Mylapore to Santhome Hr sec school, Ramky represented the school team. Later on in Vivekananda College he represented the college team and captained the college team. Showing great promise, Ramky started playing league cricket and was soon playing first division league when he joined Prasad CC and ended up scoring 650 runs in his debut season. A berth in the Tamil Nadu team was almost virtually his and with a couple of years of hard work his dream of joining the Indian team could have been true.

CHOICES AND REALITY

Then came graduation. Post-graduation, Ramky had to decide how he was going to spend his life - playing cricket only with a tenuous job at a private company or take up a ‘safe job’ which allowed him to indulge in cricket. Coming from a conservative family

meant there were a lot of opinions and advices in favour of the latter. So, latter was the route he was forced to choose. He joined Indian Bank under the sports quota and played for the bank. But the Indian Bank team not being in the First Division League in Tamil Nadu meant that Ramky had climbed down the cricketing hierarchy sacrificing his growth while choosing the safe option. He gave his best, helping the bank team win several tournaments and get promoted to first division. But by that time he had grown older and past the age to catch-up on his journey to his dream of paying for the country. His future as a cricketer was virtually over.

FATE’S TWIST

It was the end to Ramky’s dreams as an aspiring Indian cricketer. And it was time to settle down in his banking career. But fate had other things in store for him. A very gregarious, likeable and energetic person, Ramky, while working for Indian Bank at its southern suburban branch at Gandhi Nagar, Adyar, endeared well to its customers. Not the typical banker, he would go out of his way to help customers while dealing with the bank. Soon, many customers specifically sought his services or intervention in getting their transactions done at the bank. Ramky would always oblige and keep the customers happy. One such happy customer noticed Ramky’s energy and enthusiasm and decided that Ramky’s future did not belong in a nationalized bank.

Sankaran, an engineer-cum-MBA had just quit a cushy job as CEO of a private media company to pursue his entrepreneurial dream. He was in the process of assembling a core team for his dream project in the payment gateway business. A customer of Indian Bank, Gandhi Nagar branch, Sankaran could not but notice Ramky. Quickly deciding that Ramky should be on his core team, Sankaran approached Ramky with an offer to join the start-up. At that time Ramky’s wife was a home-maker and his two

daughters were in primary school. Ramky tossed this offer around in his head, discussed with his family members, weighed the pros and cons and decided that he had to follow his heart. It was time to leave the safe shores of a bank job.

ANOTHER TWIST...

The birth of the start-up, Meru Technologies Pvt Ltd, coincided with the dotcom melt down. Being in the internet banking space, the fledgling company came under tremendous financial pressure. Its viability was under question. The company was kind enough to offer a choice to Ramky to either join the main stream or chase his passion for sports. Ramky chose the latter and thus started the dream journey.

THE INNOVATION

One of the initial measures that the company took to survive the onslaught was to take up the distribution of a video based motion analysis system product offered by a New Zealand company. This was a product that analysed players’ performance and actions through videography and statistics and laid the ground for substantial improvements. Ramky quickly understood the benefits that this software could bring to Indian cricket and launched the visual based coaching campaign in early 2000. Impressed by Ramky’s cricketing background and his enthusiasm, the New Zealand company offered Meru Technologies the right to distribute the product in the whole of India.

Laptops were expensive and not so common those days. And with severe strain on resources, the company offered Ramky a laptop but only if he sold ten licences of the product. Ever ready to face challenges, Ramky hit the road lugging a boxy PC for demos to cricket bodies across the country. While most rejected the idea of a computer software teaching them cricket, some did see sense in using the software. But here again, the cost of the licence fees made them balk. Ramky realized that the way out would be to provide analytics

as a service. This would mean that Ramky will have to come with the hardware and software, study the matches and provide analysis of the match to the team. This idea found takers in several cricket associations.

JACKPOT

Soon an opportunity came to make a presentation before John Wright, the then coach for the Indian team. What was scheduled as a one-hour presentation at the National Cricket Academy on transition from naked eye coaching to visual based

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coaching, was extended to the full day. John Wright cancelled all other meetings and even called in the captain, players and selectors in to the presentation. At the end of the presentation, John Wright asked Ramky if he would be willing to accompany the Indian team as a performance analyst and also added that the money was not great.

Ramky was in seventh heaven and replied to John that no Indian would refuse the offer and the passion of a billion people was more important than the money. He joined the team in 2003 after being assessed by the big five at a pre series camp in Bangalore.

REJECTION

Ramky then started his job earnestly going around with the Indian team and studying and analyzing their performance. However, like all good things, this concept of analytics too had to pass a few tests to become acceptable. His cricketing background notwithstanding, the ‘Gods’ that they were, some Indian team players were skeptical about the value addition of computers



and Ramky. Their rejection and aloofness took such a serious turn that one day during the eve of a India –Pakistan game in 2004, a senior player confronted Ramky asking sarcastically whether he had played cricket. Ramky confidently retorted “you guys may be the best players in the country, but I believe that I am far more intelligent than all fifteen of you put-together”. It took guts to say that, but it was more to highlight the value creation. The players realized the value addition brought about by a unique combination of junior cricketer and technology. The players embraced the facility with an open mind and started reaping the benefits of a scientific decision support system.

TAKE-OFF

Touring with the Indian team all over the World, Ramky spent countless back-breaking hours behind the screen analyzing the actions of bowlers, batsmen, fielders, wicket-keepers and even umpires. He was able to correct the techniques of several top players, advise on game strategy and eventually contribute in making

the Indian team a force to reckon with in the world of cricket.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In early 2006, Ramky felt the urge to strike out on his own. With the encouragement of Sankaran and his colleagues at Meru Technologies, Ramky set out on his journey by founding Sports Mechanics Private Limited. Ramky worked on developing his own tools for analytics and succeeded in making one of the finest sets of software tools for use in sports analytics. A completely web-based platform, this gave huge advantages in terms of costs and flexibility to Ramky and his team. He went about building a strong team comprising mostly of sports persons who had the passion for the game and were willing to undertake grueling travel and timelines.

GODS AS PARTNERS

On a flight to the West Indies, Ramky was seated between the two greats Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag. As the conversation went on, Ramky suddenly voiced his opinion that both Sachin and Virender should be more involved in the sports than just being players in the Indian team. Sachin was skeptical ‘but how can we be more involved?’ ‘You can team up with me’ was Ramky’s response. They were interested. Thus, Sachin and Sehwag, the two legendary cricketers became Ramky’s partners by investing into his company and remaining so till this day. There was no looking back. Ramky and his team at Sports Mechanics, next signed on the cricket teams of several other countries. Not only cricket, governing bodies of many other sports like hockey, squash etc. came knocking on Ramky’s doors for analytics.

FAMILY & REALITY

Once, during a long tour of Bangladesh in 2007, Ramky got an e-mail from his younger daughter who was in school. The e-mail said ‘Dad, we are your family, have you forgotten us?’ and that did it. It shook up Ramky and brought him to his



senses. He realized that he had spent very little time with his wife and daughters. It was time now to hang up his travelling boots. He succeeded in passing on the baton to his colleague Dhananjay who continued the journey with the team.

SPORTS MECHANICS – PRESENT & FUTURE

Today, Sports Mechanics has emerged as a one-stop solutions provider for Performance Analytics for multiple sports. It provides real-time analytics to players and teams across the world. It creates and maintains online properties including portals, media rooms and promotional videos & streaming for sports bodies. His customers include ICC, BCCI, Hockey India, Squash Federation of India, Sports Authority of India, IPL teams – CSK, Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers and many more. Future plans include getting into outsourced sports management services, online sports news and many more. Not one to rest on his laurels, Ramky is gearing up for the next phase of growth for his company while keenly being aware of his responsibility to deliver good returns to shareholders who had placed their faith in him by investing in his company.

CREDITS

The ever humble Ramky does not take credit for what he has achieved. He credits his success to the many persons in his life-

- Sankaran, Subbu, Vichu – for mentoring and putting him in the right orbit

- John Wright – for his far-sighted approach to coaching
- Sachin and Virender – for believing in him
- Dhananjay and Venky - for the support
- TNCA, BCCI and ICC HPP – the anchor partners
- His parents, wife Pushkala and daughters Varshini & Ranjani – For their silent and continuous support without which he could not have achieved anything.

CHAMPION OF CHENNAI

An aspiring cricketer-turned-banker-turned-cricket analyst-turned successful entrepreneur, Ramkrishnan has come a long way to where he is now. Along the way he has helped in transforming the way cricket is played in the country, drove home the importance of techniques and strategy to hundreds of players and aspiring players across the country, helped realise the dreams of millions of cricket fans in India, helped many other sports persons realise their dreams of winning. He has helped many of his colleagues at work, former sports persons to continue to be associated with and earn a living out of the sport they love. Ramky firmly believes that India becoming a global leader in sports analytics is a very high probability in the near future. For this pioneering effort in sports and for many more achievements to come, Ramky stands tall as a true Champion of Chennai.