

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Major League Cricket's Blueprint for Growth in the U.S.

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## Abstract

This paper will examine the franchise economics of the Indian Premier League (IPL), as well as several other emerging franchise leagues based in the U.S. to determine if implementing a hybrid framework can help scale the Major League Cricket (MLC) in the U.S. Through analyzing existing research papers, statistics, and first-hand interviews with professional players, this paper will investigate significant differences between the two cricket leagues, roadblocks to cricket's success in America, and how to overcome them to expand the game's exposure. Player interviews, existing research papers and statistics analysis outlined repeatable tactics such as revenue sharing, media rights, star-player signings and grassroots and community developments.

Despite notable setbacks, such as the lack of support for the league from the nation's governing body of cricket, limited existing exposure for the sport, and slow entry into a saturated market, cricket certainly has the potential for growth in America through the MLC and by combining what made leagues like the IPL work with researching how niche sports leagues began to break into the American market.

**Keywords:** Major League Cricket; Indian Premier League; Media Rights; Sponsorship; Scaling in U.S. Markets

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## 1. Introduction

Cricket, the second most popular sport in the world, with an estimated 2.5 billion fans around the world (Burke 2025) has evolved from its origins in England into a global game played across countries such as India, Australia, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, and many more. At its core, cricket is a bat and ball sport played between two teams of 11 players with the objective of scoring runs while limiting the opposing team's ability to do the same. Over time, the sport has undergone shifts in its format, going from the original Test format, which had matches that were played over five days, to increasingly shorter formats. In the early 1970s, the format of One Day International (ODIs) began, where one match would last around 8 hours, effectively condensing gameplay to cater to the shortening attention spans of the public. The crowd at the first ODI ever, played between Australia and England, doubly surpassed forecasts, with 46,000 spectators gathered at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. This initiative further reflects a broader effort to modernize the sport from a dwindling, traditional pastime to more fast-paced formats that would allow the sport to be commercialized globally.

In the early 2000s, cricket's longer formats, such as Test matches and One Day Internationals, were starting to lose popularity as fans were becoming more interested in faster-paced sports like soccer, which led to declining spectator interest overall. In response to such changing audience preferences,

the Twenty20 (T20) format was introduced by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in 2003 (Longmore n.d.) reducing matches to 20 overs per innings and shortening total game time to under four hours. Below, Table 1 depicts the average times of several American sports leagues, with the addition of the IPL and MLC.

**Table 1.** Average game length of major sports leagues

| <i>League (Sport)</i>   | <i>Average Game Length (hours:minutes)</i> |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| NBA (Basketball)        | 2:00–2:30                                  |
| MLB (Baseball)          | 2:40                                       |
| NFL (American Football) | 3:00                                       |
| MLC (Cricket)           | 3:00–3:30                                  |
| IPL (Cricket)           | 4:00                                       |

The time, formatted as hours:minutes, is ordered above from shortest to longest. Data from “How Long Is a Basketball Game?” (n.d.), Foster (2025), “All You Need to Know” (2024), and Monga (2023).

However, the introduction of the IPL in 2008 is what truly allowed the format to expand exponentially. Founded by businessman and Indian cricket administrator, Lalit Modi, in 2008 (Majumdar 2011), it soon became the most profitable league in cricket history and skyrocketed the popularity of cricket in India. IPL’s unique business model of establishing franchises for each major city, run by prominent celebrities and cultural figures, modernized the IPL by turning the archaic game into a spectacle of modern entertainment. The emergence of the T20 franchise model is a key moment in cricket’s transformation into a commercially driven entertainment product (Downward et al., n.d.) In less than two decades, the IPL has become the most valuable cricket league in the world, with an estimated valuation of \$18.5 billion as of 2025 and continued rapid growth of 12.9% year over year (“Houlihan Lokey Launches” n.d.).

Many similar T20 franchise leagues, following the blueprint established by the IPL, popped up in cricketing hubs around the world, such as the SA20 in South Africa and the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) in the Caribbean. Recently, the US has entered the T20 franchise league market with the establishment of Major League Cricket (MLC) in 2023, backed by \$120 million in early-stage funding (Libit 2022). The emergence of MLC coincides with a sharp increase in cricket’s popularity in America. The men’s national team played in both the 2024 and 2026 T20 Cricket World Cups, with notable performances from American players: in the 2024 World Cup, the U.S. defeated Pakistan, a full-member nation, at Grand Prairie (Vaziri 2025), and in 2026, American pace bowler Shadley van Schalkwyk finished as the third-highest wicket-taker of the World Cup (Nag 2026).

As the South Asian diaspora in the US increases, so does the nation’s interest in the sport. With the growing demographic of Indian immigrants, growing from 1.8 million in 2000 to an estimated 5.2 million 23 years later (“Facts about Indians” 2025), the diasporic community soon began building local recreational leagues and clubs, growing to eventually the highest level of professional cricket in the nation. Each season, the MLC, as well as local and domestic leagues in the US, breaks viewership and participation records: in 2025, MLC ticket sales rose 5% year over year, with more than 80% of spectators watching first-time, while broadcasting spanned more than 90 countries overseas (“Minor League Cricket” 2025). Also in 2025, Minor League Cricket saw a 258% uptick in digital viewing (“Minor League Cricket” 2025). Together, these set the precedent for significant growth for American cricket in the coming years.

This paper will evaluate which elements of the IPL’s business model can be effectively adapted in the U.S. market and where structural differences may limit direct transferability. It argues that despite challenges such as a dysfunctional governing body, with USA Cricket’s International Cricket Council (ICC) suspension since September of 2025 (“ICC Suspends” 2025) and a limited cricket-oriented customer base, franchise cricket in the United States has strong growth potential since the Indian Premier League model—through its revenue-sharing model, breaking out media rights to mainstream sources, and strong domestic and grassroots development—can be successfully adapted to the American sports

market.

## 2. Literature Review

Research on the IPL generally focuses on how its organizational structure, revenue model, and use of media and branding have helped it become one of the most successful cricket leagues in the world. The IPL, which began in 2008, created a franchise-based league with eight city-based teams (Majumdar 2011), and has since expanded to 10 franchises (“Houlihan Lokey Launches” n.d.). These teams are owned by a mix of private individuals and large conglomerates. Many researchers point out that this ownership model helped the league gain strong financial backing and immediate popularity because it connected the sport to well-known business figures and brands in India (Majumdar 2011; Downward et al., n.d.).

A major focus in existing research is the IPL’s revenue system, especially its dependence on media rights and sponsorships. The league earns a significant portion of its income from broadcasting deals, including partnerships with networks such as Star Sports (“Indian Premier League Business Analysis” 2024). Between television and digital rights to Star and Viacom, respectively, media rights encompassed over 70% of income for the IPL in 2025 (M 2026). For instance, the 2025 final match alone had a reported 678 million views on JioHotstar, alone (“Houlihan Lokey Launches” n.d.).

Sponsorship is another key part of the IPL’s financial model. The league’s title sponsorship, currently owned by the Tata group, is worth around \$300 million USD (“Houlihan Lokey Launches” n.d.), and has strong visibility across all matches and promotional materials, where companies sponsor specific in-game elements such as umpiring decisions (PayTM) and strategic timeouts (CEAT Tyres). CEAT, along with three other associate sponsors, brought in a 25% increase in revenue over the previous cycle (“Houlihan Lokey Launches” n.d.). This structure allows the league to maximize advertising opportunities throughout the broadcast experience.

At the franchise level, each team also secures its own sponsors, creating multiple streams of income beyond league-wide deals. Research suggests that this combination of centralized and decentralized sponsorship makes the IPL financially more flexible and commercially strong compared to many other sports leagues (Kumar 2024; “Indian Premier League Business Analysis” 2024). The central revenue is also divided, as the IPL distributes roughly half of its central revenue among the franchises (M 2026), underscored as the revenue-sharing model characteristic of the IPL and many major American leagues.

Another commonly studied feature of the IPL is its fan engagement model. The layers of fan engagement go beyond matchday merch signings, as social media campaigns, brand partnerships with key players, advertisements, and charity events take place all throughout the season. Specific aspects like fantasy teams retain fan interest, even in the off-season. Its partnerships with hotels, e-commerce sites, and food delivery services lead to a self-sustaining ecosystem that helps build traction long after the actual playing season has ended.

Unlike many other professional sports leagues where fans are primarily loyal to teams, the IPL is often described as more player centric. This means that individual players have a major influence on audience interest. Studies show that when high-profile players switch teams, it can significantly affect merchandise sales, ticket demand, and viewership, sometimes shifting thousands to millions of dollars in revenue. This highlights the commercial importance of star players within the IPL system.

The IPL’s success is strongly due to its partnership with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). This relationship ensured that domestic players were consistently available for the league and connected the IPL to India’s existing cricket infrastructure, allowing talent trained in domestic and age-group pathways to enter the professional setup. In addition, a certain number of international stars can be auctioned into each franchise team, increasing its global visibility and competitiveness. Global stalwarts of the game such as the South African, A.B. de Villiers, or the Australian, David Warner, gave the league credibility and built a global fanbase.

In comparison, research on MLC, shows several major differences. One of the biggest challenges is that cricket remains a niche sport in the U.S., with most fans coming from diaspora communities from

South Asia and other cricket-playing regions. This limits the league's ability to connect with mainstream American sports culture in the same way the IPL has in India. To then examine the possibilities for scaling the sport in the US, separate factors must be considered for the diasporic and non-diasporic community. Currently, MLC has been largely funded by its private investor, American Cricket Enterprises, who have contributed more than \$150 million to scaling the sport in the U.S. ("Minor League Cricket" 2025).

It must be noted that the league has entered multiple broadcasting agreements to reach different audiences due to the geographic spread of its fan base. Leagues like MLS and IPL have sold their media rights to very limited broadcasters. The former signed an exclusive 10-year deal with Apple (Nicholson 2022), while the IPL's rights through 2027 were sold to differing companies for both TV and digital rights, of which the owners have since merged ("BCCI Hits Jackpot" 2022). A large portion of revenue comes from the broadcast rights, especially when only one provider streams to the whole country. Such is not the case with MLC, who have signed with Willow to stream matches across the Americas, among smaller regional television networks to grow exposure on a local scale ("Major League Cricket Begins" 2024). The early-stage nature of the MLC, combined with limited long-term institutional support, the inconsistency of an elite domestic player pipeline, and the relative novelty of cricket in the U.S., has made it difficult for MLC to replicate the scale and stability of the IPL. However, with continued investment and growing interest in global sports formats, MLC still has potential for long-term growth.

Overall, existing research shows that the IPL's success is driven by strong governance through the BCCI, a highly effective sponsorship and media rights system, a large talent pool, and a deep cultural connection to cricket in India. These factors have helped it become one of the most commercially successful cricket leagues in the world. In contrast, emerging leagues like the MLC are still developing and face structural and cultural challenges that make direct comparison difficult at this stage.

### 3. Methodology

To contextualize the case study of the Indian Premier League (IPL), various research papers and statistics were used to understand the history of the league, how it began, and key factors of its success. This research draws on a combination of secondary and primary sources. Secondary research included academic papers, league reports, and statistical analyses to examine the IPL's origins, growth, and key factors contributing to its success. These sources were used to establish an understanding of the league's business model, as was mentioned above.

To apply these insights to the emerging context of MLC, primary research was conducted through qualitative interviews. Several cricketers and coaches with experience in professional cricket were interviewed to provide firsthand perspectives on the development of the sport. Each participant was asked a consistent set of three questions focused on the growth of American cricket, current barriers to scaling, and key differences between the development structures of India and the U.S. Each of the two interviewees was a coach affiliated with the Major League Cricket Academy in Seattle. Their insights were analyzed to identify common themes and practical recommendations for increasing popularity and success of MLC in the United States.

### 4. Results

After consulting existing papers on the structure and profitability of the IPL, it was concluded that the league's success stems from its incorporation of multiple revenue streams and strategic marketing as more than just a sporting event. Instead, the IPL is positioned as a centerpiece of popular culture in India, combining cricket with appearances by popular actors and celebrities, as well as musical performances ("Indian Premier League Business Analysis" 2024; Majumdar 2011). This approach broadens its appeal to a wider target market, incentivizing both casual viewers and dedicated cricket fans alike to attend and stream matches.

With experience playing for the Mumbai Indians and Delhi Daredevils in the IPL, as well as the Seattle Orcas in MLC, Sujit Nayak highlights that "one of the biggest strengths of the IPL is how franchises

stay active beyond just the season” through “fan engagement [in] social media, events, [and] content” (Sujit Nayak, interview by author, May 2, 2026). He further explains that the “IPL benefits from a huge domestic system” with “development pathways, scouting, [and] academies,” meaning that “player development is tracked continuously, not just during matches,” which “is key for long-term competitiveness.”

Experienced fast bowler for the LA Knight Riders and the US national team, also the third highest wicket-taker in the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup, Shadley van Schalkwyk, explains some of the biggest contributors to the growth and popularity of cricket in the U.S. have been the launch of several competitions in 2021, including MLC and Minor League Cricket (MiLC) (Shadley van Schalkwyk, interview by author, May 2, 2026). MiLC serves as a developmental league focused on developing domestic players from cities across the U.S., with 26 registered for the current 2026 season (“MLC” n.d.). Van Schalkwyk notes that the “2024 World Cup and the Super 8 qualification” were pivotal moments for the popularity of cricket in the U.S. He adds that the success of the national team in World Cups is significant “because there are more eyes on cricket in [the] USA, and this creates more following for MLC.” From a player’s perspective, “more players and cricket fans are following [the] progress of players who participated in the World Cup,” allowing for continuity from succeeding on the international stage to bringing the talent back home by performing again in the MLC.

## 5. Discussion

After conducting player and coach interviews, along with reviewing existing research on what contributed to the financial and cultural success of the IPL, it is evident that the MLC has the potential to grow to a similar level with the correct strategies in the near future. Since the IPL’s success was largely influenced by the existing knowledge and infrastructure of the sport in India, the United States still has a long way to go in developing grassroots and community-centered initiatives that can grow interest in the sport beyond the diasporic community.

One initiative which the MLC should adopt comes from examining the revenue streams of IPL. Although a majority does come from sponsors and media rights, a sizable portion comes from ticket sales, as most stadiums, regardless of location and stage of the match, are full or very nearly so. If the MLC translates this model exactly, it won’t be widely successful. If the baseline ticket to an MLC match is \$20 USD, that would be around \$100 for a family of four to attend, accounting for concession, parking, and other expenses. This shifts the underlying issue from a price gap to a knowledge gap. To gain market share in the industry of niche sports, MLC should offer programs directly targeting the non-diasporic community. For example, they could collaborate with local baseball and softball leagues by inviting those players to watch a local match. Such initiatives would be focused on educating those unfamiliar with cricket about the game to increase exposure and build credibility.

Rather than strictly adhering to the IPL’s growth model, it may be more beneficial for the MLC to look to leagues of other niche, internationally popular sports and examine how they were successfully expanded into the American market. One example is, after MLS signed David Beckham, an English soccer legend, attendance of the league’s games went up 40%. To attract a player of Beckham’s caliber, MLS first had to create an exception to its normal salary cap rules in order to make the signing financially possible, which came to be known as the Designated Player rule, nicknamed after its namesake, the “Beckham Rule” (Baxter 2020). In the case of MLS, this decision later encouraged other well-known international players, such as Zlatan Ibrahimovic, to join the league in future years. Similarly in MLC, the San Francisco Unicorns signed Ravichandran Ashwin, a highly renowned bowler and former Indian national team cricketer, for the 2026 season, making him the first India international to be signed into MLC (“Cricket Legend Ravichandran Ashwin” 2026). This move shows that the MLC is implementing strategies like the “Beckham Rule” by making exceptions to traditional salary rules to attract star players. Although internationally recognized players often demand much higher salaries than local talent, they can play a major role in bringing media attention, investment, and global interest to cricket in the United States. This can ultimately create a ripple effect that leads to increased funding, greater news coverage, and more opportunities for American cricketers.

For example, in Grand Prairie, Texas, a world-class stadium was built for the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup, generating more than \$100 million in economic benefits for the state. The 2024 World Cup also hosted matches in several locations across the United States, including New York and Florida. Overall, the tournament generated an estimated \$618.4 million in economic impact nationwide (ICC 2025). These numbers demonstrate that cricket has the potential to become more than just a growing sport in America; it can also become an important contributor to local economies and the broader sports industry. If the MLC continues to invest in marketing, infrastructure, youth development, and international talent, it has the opportunity to establish cricket as both a culturally significant and economically valuable sport in the United States.

## 5.1 Limitations

This study has some limitations that affect how its subsequent conclusions should be viewed. The study consisted of primary research in the form of online interviews with only two coaches from the Major League Cricket Academy in Seattle, both of whom play in international and franchise leagues around the world, and coach locally in the Seattle area. Since both respondents are affiliated with an MLC academy, their speculations about the league's success could be skewed. This could be improved upon by including the perspective of coaches, league executives, and players from a more diverse range of locations, leagues, and affiliations, and non-diasporic fans. It must also be noted that MLC does not publish comprehensive financial data, as it and its parent company are not publicly listed. Therefore, much of the financial data in this paper is estimates rather than official figures. Future improvements on this research could track the growth of franchise cricket in the U.S. post the inclusion of cricket at the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

## 6. Conclusion

The importance of expanding the MLC and bringing cricket to the United States can be seen not only through the opportunities it creates for aspiring American cricketers but also through the economic benefits it may provide to local communities and businesses in the future. Existing cricket venues across the country have already experienced the impact that large cricket events can have, not only through stadium attendance but also through increased tourism, restaurant activity, job creation, and consumer spending in surrounding areas, given the U.S.-hosted fixtures in the 2024 World Cup generated \$52.9 million in concession sales alone (ICC 2025), although it must be noted that the revenue gained through a world cup is unlikely to be replicated at the smaller scale of MLC as a domestic franchise league. This reveals that, based on the franchise economics and valuation of the IPL, expanding global exposure through the international approach of the MLS, and interviews conducted with professionals domestically in American cricket, implementing a hybrid of MLC and MLS' strategies may be able to similarly scale the MLC.

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