

## **The Captain's Riddle**

*By Dr. M.R.K.Prasad*

### **A Global Sports Phenomenon called the Big Bang Cricket League**

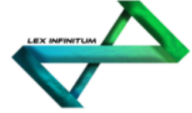
The Big Bang Cricket League (BBCL) is among the wealthiest and most celebrated sports events worldwide. Established in 2014, the league debuted with six Franchise teams: Bombay Vikings, Madras Warriors, Kannada Kanteeravas, Telugu Titans, Delhi Gladiators, and Rajasthan Renegades. The tournament quickly gained international appeal, attracting players from cricketing nations such as Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and the West Indies. Held annually, the BBCL rapidly evolved into a profitable venture and a fan favorite globally. By 2019, its immense popularity led to a substantial fan base for the Franchises. Under BBCL regulations, each Franchise is permitted to assemble a squad of up to 25 players, ensuring competitive and diverse teams. Capitalizing on this success, the BBCL expanded the league to eight Franchises in 2021, introducing two new Franchises, namely Bhopal Badshahs and Kolkata Killers. The next eagerly anticipated tournament is scheduled for October 2025, promising yet another thrilling chapter in the league's history.

### **BBCL Player Auction**

The Big Bang Cricket League (BBCL) is set to hold its next player auction on February 25, 2025, in line with its regulation of conducting auctions every four years. Franchises can bid for players with a maximum purse of ₹120 crore (₹1,200 million). Initially, all players were to be part of the auction, but Franchises objected, citing the need to retain key players to maintain fan loyalty. After deliberations, BBCL approved a retention policy allowing Franchises to retain up to four players at the following rates:

1. First player: ₹20 crore (₹200 million)
2. Second player: ₹18 crore (₹180 million)





3.Third player: ₹15 crore (₹150 million)

4.Fourth player: ₹13 crore (₹130 million)

The last date for Franchises to submit their list of retained players was January 20, 2025. BBCL increased the prize money for the BBCL 2025 champions to ₹20 crore and the runners-up ₹13 crore.

### **The Rise of Kolkata Killers**

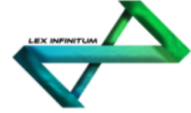
During the BBCL's expansion of Franchise count to eight, Avdhesh Group, a multi-billion-dollar conglomerate chaired by cricket enthusiast Mr Anil Avdhesh, secured the Kolkata Killers with a record-breaking bid of ₹7,000 crores (₹7 billion). During the 2021 auction, Anil personally led his team's player selection. In the selection, Anil made the highest bid in BBCL's history of 18 crores to acquire Sunil Sha, an explosive Indian batsman and the league's top scorer in 2020. Sunil's massive fan base significantly contributed to making the Kolkata Killers one of the most popular franchises in the BBCL. Sunil was named captain of the Kolkata Killers, and under his leadership, the team reached the semi-finals in both 2022 and 2023 but failed to secure the title.

Ahead of the 2024 season, Sunil advocated for hiring a new coaching team, including Daniel Underwood as head coach and two additional staff of his choice. Despite Anil's reservations, he agreed, trusting Sunil's assurance of a title-winning performance. Although Kolkata Killers dominated the league stage, they suffered a humiliating defeat in the semi-finals against the Telugu Titans, registering the lowest score in BBCL history.

### **Anil and Sunil Saga**

Following the match, Anil was seen engaged in an intense conversation with Sunil, with cameras capturing the heated exchange. While their words were inaudible, Anil appeared visibly angry and agitated, while Sunil looked red-faced





and upset. Moments later, Sunil stormed off the field, throwing his bat in frustration.

The incident quickly became a media sensation, with newspapers and TV channels speculating about the fallout between the two. In an interview with a sports magazine, Hamilton Williams, a Kolkata Killers player, alleged interference from Anil in team selection, a process typically managed by the coach and captain. Additional reports suggested that Anil had insulted Sunil, leading to rumours that Sunil was considering leaving the Kolkata Killers. As of now, neither Sunil nor Anil has made any official statements regarding the incident.

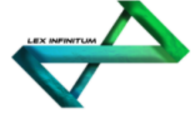
### **Sunil Sha's Retention Drama**

Speculation intensified when it was suggested Sunil might leave the Kolkata Killers amidst of reports of Anil's alleged interference in team selection, with player Hamilton Williams corroborating these claims in an interview.

On December 15, 2024, Sunil sent an email to Anil, expressing his intention to leave the Kolkata Killers and participate in the 2025 auction. At Anil's request, Sunil agreed to a face-to-face meeting to discuss his potential retention. During the meeting, Anil offered to retain Sunil for ₹18 crores and outlined plans for an entirely new coaching and support staff. Anil is also noncommittal about the captaincy. However, Sunil declined, stating he was confident of securing over ₹20 crores in the auction and was unwilling to accept the proposed changes in the coaching team.

On December 17, Sunil gave an interview to the web channel Sportsinfo, where he stated that he was not ruling out the possibility of entering the auction. The channel also reported that the Bhopal Badshahs, who chose not to retain any players, were determined to bid aggressively for Sunil. Speculation grew that Sunil might lead the Bhopal Badshahs in the 2025 BBCL competition.





## **Mediation in the Offing**

The unfolding drama adds yet another layer of intrigue to the 2025 BBCL auction, with fans and Franchises keenly observing whether Sunil will remain with the Kolkata Killers or move to a new team. As tensions escalated, Anil reached out to Sunil, requesting mediation to negotiate terms for his retention. Sunil agreed to the discussions, leaving the cricketing world eagerly awaiting the outcome of this high-stakes negotiation.

\*\*\*

