

Dear All

Yesterday was a big cricket match between India and Pakistan. Pakistan had not beaten India in 29 years at the Cricket World Cup. By all accounts, India were supposed to beat Pakistan. However as Sunil Gavaskar, the ex- India cricketer put it “Pakistan hammered India “yesterday. This match was watched by more than a billion people, roughly 14 % of the global population. Cricket is now the second most watched game globally after football. Everything I heard and read last evening was the triumph of the underdog, this made me reflect on the concept and why we are invariably drawn to it. Here are my learnings:

1. Inherently we know that life is full of ups and downs, so we never imagine that anyone can keep winning nonstop, that nonstop winning somehow doesn't go well with most people. Think of the old Australian cricket team, the US basketball team, the New Zealand All Blacks in rugby etc.
2. We want a contest, we don't want a one sided match and hence we automatically support the underdog in every contest. More than two thirds of the people in any contest root for the underdog.
3. We are also drawn to stories of the underdog triumph and the archetype is etched in our memories as folklore. People find surprising joy in unexpected success, success that wasn't a given.
4. Even great athletes know when they are the underdogs – how do they prepare themselves when they are the underdogs in a contest? They learn how to deal with negative thoughts, they don't linger on a negative moment or match, they control their emotions to the situation, and they visualize using technology what they should be doing or not doing. What makes you sit on the top of an elite sports ladder is emotions, not just capability at the sport.
5. We love stories of the underdog. The underdog story is the one we relate to easily. The underdog story relates to what we feel about ourselves and what we seek in others. Watching an underdog win gives all of us hope. I am listing some of them here.
6. Sylvester Stallone had \$106 in his bank account when he submitted the script for Rocky. The producer agreed to produce the movie if Stallone wasn't in it. Stallone didn't relent. The producer then put an impossible budget of \$ 1 million to produce the movie. Stallone used friends etc. and produced the movie below \$ 1 million. Stallone sold his dog, made the movie, won 3 Oscars, bought his dog back for \$15,000.
7. Tesla is another story of the underdog over 20 years. Last week Tesla market cap crossed \$ 900 billion, more than the top 3 automakers combined. It is a story of grit, of resolve and fighting all odds vs the auto giants.
8. The industry where the underdog story plays out again and again is the hi-tech industry. Every start up started in a garage, and we all love the garage picture. Never mind that each of the tech giants is worth billions and trillions today. Here it started in the 1970s with the nerd dropouts beating the smart PhDs and ivy league professionals. This folklore continues with Jobs, Wozniak, Gates, Zuckerberg etc. We see this in every start up, there is no start up story which is about the Goliath, every start up is a David story.
9. Many brands do the same in their story telling, they portray themselves as the one fighting a larger system.
10. Sometimes an elite athlete towards the end of his career becomes an underdog. Roger Federer in this year's Wimbledon is an example, Tiger Woods when he comes back after recuperating from his accident is an example. In these cases, we want the person to succeed, one final swansong. It happened with Muhammad Ali years ago. The worst feeling for people is to see an elite athlete lose in his final set of matches.

11. Dwayne Johnson had \$7 in his pocket at his lowest point before becoming a millionaire, the same is true for Richard Branson. Branson has consistently positioned his businesses as the underdog challenging British Airways etc.
12. Every business that thinks like an underdog has a sense of energy and drive, every business that thinks like an established player is slow.

Agility comes as much from hunger as anything else.

Enjoy, feedback welcome

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