

'83': Many years on, India's World Cup win is still electrifying to watch



CHENNAI: Indians obsess over three aspects of life, cricket, Bollywood and marriage. The sport fever is as intense as, for example, the soccer story in England. One of the most enduring memories many of us have is the excitement the 1983 World Cup aroused in India with the team lead by Kapil Dev clinching a totally unexpected win over the West Indies, who had been the champions for a couple of years. They were considered unbeatable with Viv Richards and Clive Lloyd at the helm. "83," which closed the recent inaugural edition of Saudi Arabia's Red Sea International Film Festival and is now on Netflix and Disney+, takes us through the series.



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With lilting music by Pritam and brilliant photography by Aseem Mishra, “83” is a shining example of what a movie on sport ought to be. Kabir Khan, who co-wrote the script with Sanjay Puran Singh and Vasan Bala, mostly sticks to the field, but occasionally gets out to the dressing room or the commentators’ box to give us a certain perspective on the progress of the matches. He takes us through several matches that India played with Zimbabwe, Australia and the West Indies, but is wise to keep to the highlights that have been captured exhilaratingly.



"83" tells the true story of Indian athlete Kapil Dev (Singh) who led the country's cricket team to its first-ever World Cup victory in 1983. Supplied

The film touches on the captain's steely determination and Indian patriotism. We see Dev (Ranveer Singh) telling his players – first on board the flight to the U.K, and later in the dressing room – that they are there to win the cup, and do-or-die, they must. His team is not sure whether this is achievable. Indians were clearly considered underdogs then, and were rubbished by the British press in no uncertain terms. One sports journalist said that the West Indies victory was a foregone conclusion. Dev, whose English language skills were poor, faced this hostility stoically. Encouraging him to carry on was the Indian manager, Man Singh (a wonderful performance by Pankaj Tripathi), who says that “we won independence in 1947, but not respect.”

Many will be aware how the tournament went. Maybe the West Indies became complacent in the face of the popular notion that they could not be vanquished, and this is blatant on the field, bowling body bouncers to Indian tail-enders.



The film premiered at Saudi Arabia's Red Sea International Film Festival in December. Supplied

As an aside, Khan talks about the arrival of Dev's wife (Deepika Padukone, the real-life spouse of Ranveer Singh) and a rather tense political drama back in India with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi telling her cabinet to promote the World Cup matches as a way to get people diverted from the communal tension then. This appears slightly farfetched.

But, otherwise Khan wisely refrains from going overboard , keeping the players' personal stories to a bare minimum. Also, it was a casting coup to bring Singh on board, who brilliantly sinks into the character mixing the captain's energy and introspection. The resemblance is uncannily similar, making this sports drama an electrifying watch after all these decades.
