



Cricket's million-dollar men¹

... AND OTHER
TOP AUSTRALIANS



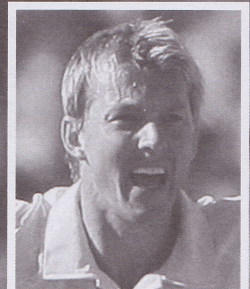
DHONI
\$1,650,000



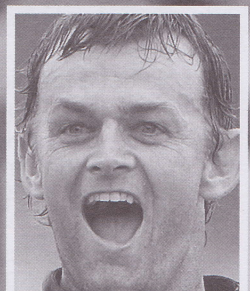
JAYASURIYA
\$1,065,000

SYMONDS
\$1,470,000

2



LEE
\$982,000



GILCHRIST
\$765,000

By **MARIO XUEREB**

IT WAS the moment cricket joined the free market or sold out – depending on your point of view.³

The game's centre shifted violently from the green of Lord's⁴ and the MCG to the Indian subcontinent, riding on the ready millions of India's business tycoons and Bollywood stars.⁵

An expensive auction for players has decided the composition of the Indian Premier League, the brash, upstart Twenty20 competition that will pit international players in an eight-team tournament over 44 days from April 18.⁶

Andrew Symonds, who has had a problematic relationship with Indian crowds and players, topped the foreign player bids. The Hyderabad side claimed him for \$1.47 million, his price propped up not only by his all-round

talents, but his decision not to tour Pakistan, which could have conflicted with his IPL commitments.

Symonds' price was second only to the \$1.65 million for Indian Twenty20 captain Mahendra Dhoni.

The attention of the cricket world⁷ was fixed on the Mumbai Hilton's ballroom as each of the franchises spent up to \$5 million and 78 cricketers went under the hammer.

The money goes directly to the players involved in the 44-day tournament, which has set new standards for the commercialisation⁸ of the game. The television rights were reportedly sold to Sony Television for \$1.08 billion for 10 years, while Channel Ten is showing the series in Australia, having shelled out more than \$10 million over five years.

The league's co-founder, Inderjit Singh Bindra, did not spare the

hyperbole when he said the sight of all the money on display was more arresting than even the game itself.

"The market is determining the price. That's how a free market economy should flow," he said. "I have never seen anything so riveting and so absorbing and so exciting, even on the field. It's amazing drama."⁹

While Indian players were heavily favoured, Australians were in high demand. Joining Symonds in Hyderabad is Adam Gilchrist, who fetched \$765,000.

He was being chased by IPL glamour side Kolkata, owned by the biggest star in Bollywood, Shah Rukh Khan, who turned up in trademark bangs, dark aviators and with leopard-skinned wife in tow.¹⁰¹¹ Instead, Khan picked up Ricky Ponting for a relatively modest

Continued in paper