



A Chennai Super Kings fanzone display at JioStar's headquarters in Mumbai JioStar

IPL 2026: Behind the scenes at JioStar — ‘The future of sports broadcasting’

The humidity hits on a Mumbai summer afternoon.

The cab was headed to Urmi Estate in Lower Parel, a skyscraper home to one of Indian broadcaster JioStar’s two production hubs in the city, when it ground to a halt in the gridlock. The office is still a block away but, with all approaches choked by traffic, getting out and walking is the only sensible thing to do.

The marble-floored foyer at least brings air-conditioned relief. Inside, a tablet registers details, a guest card is issued and you are ushered to the lifts. The first thing you notice stepping out on the sixth floor are the boxes. The dugout, they call it — brightly coloured packages of healthy snacks stacked on fold-out tables for a crew working through a relentless Indian Premier League.

This year's 64-day, 74-game tournament reaches its climax on Sunday with the final between the holders Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. The 2025 showpiece was the most-watched T20 match ever at the time, drawing 55million concurrent viewers. Those numbers will be eclipsed this time round.

According to JioStar, this year's tournament has already surpassed 1.1billion viewers across television and digital platforms.

Ahead of the 2026 final, *The Athletic* spent two days with JioStar, the streaming service pushing one of the most eagerly anticipated one-off sporting events to a global audience — in 12 languages.

The production facility in Urmi Estate was once the headquarters of Disney Star, which ran Star Sports and the Hotstar streaming platform. In November 2024, Disney combined their Indian operation with those of Reliance Industries, and their subsidiary Viacom18, to form JioStar in a deal valued at \$8.5bn (£6.3bn). The broadcast engine already running in this building became the new entity's bedrock.

The tour begins at a wall map of the entire operation. This floor was once part of a six-storey car park. When space ran out in the building, the only option was to re-purpose what was already there. They cut through concrete to gain ceiling height.

Follow the map and you pass room after room of computers, pulsing with the heat of CPUs running overtime; dozens of screens covering every angle of the footage. Then

come studios lit by cinema-grade lighting, crammed with cameras. The crews are going through their routine checks ahead of Kolkata Knight Riders' game against the defending champions, RCB.

The whole place hums with a quiet urgency.



One of the studios at JioStar's production hub in Mumbai JioStar

“Think of this building as a mini international broadcast centre (IBC) — but a permanent one,” says Prashant Khanna — known to all as ‘PK’ — head of production services and production technology. “The team decided to build their own empire here.”

IBCs are normally massive nerve centres built for events like the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup; venues where every broadcaster converges in one place, but they are usually temporary. JioStar's never stops.

Since 2015, the facility has been operational between 220 and 330 days every year and that number, Khanna notes, is rising.

One of the production studios boasts an ASB GlassFloor; German-engineered, the LED panels embedded beneath the glass surface are capable of displaying team graphics,

sponsor content and live data in real time. At the time of installation, Khanna says, there were only two like it in a broadcast facility anywhere in the world. The other was at Sky Sports in London.

From the same set, cricket, football, kabaddi and tennis broadcasts can all be produced.



JioStar

For IPL 2026 alone, the combined operation runs 25-plus simultaneous feeds across 12 languages. Every feed operates from an independent control room with its own dedicated crew, graphics and audio. Studios are redressed up to 20 times a year. No other network or sporting organisation in the world broadcasts in more than five or six languages.

Technology, Khanna says, is like a banana. “The moment you peel it, it becomes stale. What happens over 2025-26 is what would typically happen over three to five years.”

And yet, inside this building, one machine stands its ground quietly: an EVS replay server. It controls every replay the viewer sees and runs on MS-DOS. “You can’t afford

for it to have complicated software that can go down,” Khanna says. The latest technology drives the innovation. The oldest guarantees every replay the viewer sees.

Khanna spent 10 days with Fox Sports in New Orleans around the Super Bowl. He studied the scale of that operation, gaining a grasp of what Fox had built for a one-off game. “That operation was over one day,” he says. “We do the same operation over 60 to 65 days of the IPL.”

IPL on JioStar is also one of the only tournaments in the world to produce natively in 4K, from acquisition to delivery. The Super Bowl still up-converts from 1080p. The mothership model, one facility plugged into venues anywhere, is what makes the scale possible.

In 2024, the T20 World Cup was played in the United States and West Indies. Every feed — all nine language versions — was produced from this building in Lower Parel. But producing a World Cup match for Disney Star (television) and Viacom18 (digital streaming) in Mumbai while the game is playing out in the Caribbean is one thing. Doing it in that many languages, each telling the story differently — what Khanna calls “an insane orchestra” — is another entirely.

And yet that is what they do daily throughout the IPL tournament.



One of the television studios at JioStar's building in Mumbai

Day one ends in his office, a dugout box open on the desk.

The walls are a fan's archive: a framed photograph of Nemanja Vidic celebrating a goal, newspaper cuttings from matches attended years before he ever worked in sport, a Manchester United share certificate and memorabilia accumulated across decades as a supporter. Khanna is a serious football man, holding a coaching certificate from the Johan Cruyff Institute. A photograph of him with Cruyff hangs on the wall.

His son is only 10. In his lifetime, United have not won much. Khanna says, carefully, he is beginning to believe that might change soon. Right on cue, a notification pings on his phone from a United supporters' group chat. Michael Carrick, the message says, has

been backed to take on the managerial role permanently. Khanna reads it. The decision, it seems, has his full backing.

Soccer's World Cup final will be the most viewed sporting event of 2026, but Sunday's IPL final will challenge the Super Bowl for interest

One Unity Centre, a few minutes from Urmi Estate, is Viacom18's hub, absorbed into JioStar upon the completion of the merger two years ago.

If PK had sought to demonstrate how JioStar's engine is built, now Siddharth Sharma, head of content — sports, shows how it is used to engage its audience. The conversation on day two moves from the infrastructure to understanding what the infrastructure is attempting to create.

Before 2013, cricket commentary in India existed in one language; English. “Star Sports was the first network that did Hindi at scale,” Siddharth says. “And Hindi became a norm.”

Others followed. The latest additions, Bhojpuri and Haryanvi, are the fastest growing with viewership up three times year-on-year. Audio from every microphone from the venue brought back to Mumbai independently and remixed per language. Each feed does not just sound different. It hears the match differently.

Siddharth offers a hypothetical example. Say Chennai Super Kings have lost a flurry of wickets against RCB and MS Dhoni, their talismanic batter/wicketkeeper, has appeared in the dugout with his pads on. In that scenario, the Tamil feed would lock onto the feed from the camera fixed on Dhoni at every opportunity. The Kannada feed, catering to a Karnataka audience, would cut to Kohli on the fielding side. The Hindi feed might prefer to unpack the batting collapse. The English feed stays neutral.

Same match, same moment, four different stories.



JioStar

The introduction of a new language has its own process.

When it comes to commentators they hunt for authentic voices, not just ex-cricketers. Storytellers whose feel for a region and its culture — from quirks of the language to music — lies deep within. The feeds they build reflect that. The Haryanvi feed is earthy, almost confrontational in its directness. Bhojpuri is Bollywood-adjacent; melodrama, hyperbole, music, celebration bleeding into every sentence. Even the stadium audio reflects that with the crowd noise and music turned up, the atmosphere given more room.

Two Hindi-adjacent languages, two entirely different emotional registers and approaches to the broadcast.

The Athletic mentions the Punjabi commentary from a Punjab Kings versus Mumbai Indians match three years ago which accompanied India's left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh snapping the middle-stump with consecutive deliveries. Siddharth doesn't just remember that moment; he leans forward and narrates the soundbite offered up at the time by the larger-than-life original commentator, Sunil Taneja.

"Danda todta, danda todta, te sada tutta dil jodta!" The stumps are shattered, and our broken hearts are mended!"

He comes back to himself with a grin. "That delivery sums up the brief. You need to be an unabashed fan at that moment. You just celebrate."

The furthest extension of this is a feed without words entirely. Since 2023, JioStar has produced an award-winning live sign-language broadcast for the match itself. "All this, it's not about creating one experience for a million fans," Siddharth adds.

"It's about creating a million experiences for each fan."



Punjab Kings' Arshdeep Singh celebrates his second wicket in two balls in April 2023 Punit Paranjpe/AFP via Getty Images

The people who live that brief on screen are one floor below.

The former India bowler Irfan Pathan walks into the room to make his final pre-shoot preparations. The IPL show goes live in the next hour. He has been here since 3:30pm and will not leave until well beyond. This is what 64 days of the IPL look like from the inside.

Pathan's matchday begins with dockets, player packs for every squad involved, which are reviewed daily even for teams he covered three days previously.

When asked what production capabilities of this magnitude add, he uses an example from the previous evening. Mid-show, during Kolkata Knight Riders against RCB in

Raipur, the anchor asked him about Kartik Tyagi, a 25-year-old right-arm fast bowler, and his bowling action change. The director and producer had been unaware that this line of questioning might crop up but, within seconds, Pathan received a message in his earpiece to say graphics would appear on screen detailing Tyagi's action from 2021, 2022 and 2025.

“When the background teams give you graphics in a second, even for something you hadn't planned, that's when you know you can tell the whole story,” says Pathan. What followed was three years of a bowler's evolution, unpacked live because the infrastructure delivered in real time.

That kind of analysis cannot be produced by AI. It is enabled by better technology, and delivered by someone who once took 3-16 to bowl India to victory in the 2007 T20 World Cup final and still reads a bowling action the way only a bowler can.



Irfan Pathan in his playing days with India Indranil Mukherjee/AFP via Getty Images

Where Pathan is calm, his fellow commentator Aakash Chopra — another former India player — arrives with entirely different energy. He is animated, expressive, urgent. He is the ‘Sutradhar’, the narrator. The glue that holds the ensemble together.

When asked the same question, Chopra’s answer is Vaibhav Suryavanshi; the teenage genius who has lit up this season’s competition. With the aid of the analysis tools at his disposal, Chopra was able to explain to the audience what makes Suryavanshi’s style so remarkable. “It’s his bat movement — I have personally never seen that before. Ever,” he says.

The bottom of his bat faces extra-cover. Not a 500-gram bat, 1,200 grams, generating power that has no right to exist from that position. Against Gujarat Titans’ Kagiso Rabada, Suryavanshi shortened his backlift. His strategy was laid bare. Full balls: attack. Body balls: defend. Outside off: hit so hard that if he misses, it clears point.

A complete picture of a 15-year-old genius at work.



Rajasthan Royals' destructive Vaibhav SuryavanshiArun Sankar/AFP via Getty Images

CEO Ishan Chatterjee is a year into the role and describes himself as “like a kid in a candy shop”, a lifelong cricket fan who now oversees the broadcast of the game that defined his childhood.

Before taking the helm at JioStar in July 2025, Ishan spent 13 years at Google and as managing director of YouTube India, making him one of the few sports streaming leaders who understands the Western digital industry from the inside. He now leads the world's second-largest streaming platform behind only Netflix, with more than 300m paying users.

The perspective here is unusual, the vantage point entirely new.

Cricket, though, is only the entry point. After the merger, JioStar covers more than 350 days of live sport every year, spanning football, kabaddi, tennis and badminton. Last year the Premier League drew 100m viewers in India. Pro Kabaddi reached 300m. Wimbledon saw its fastest-ever digital growth in the country. “Cricket is the enabler,” Chatterjee says. “It’s the thing that attracts people to the platform. And that’s what we then use to expand viewership and growth into all the other sports.”



Production staff at One Unity Centre monitor the gameJioStar

That scale is exactly why the technology companies have arrived.

Ishan points to the investment data, noting that three of the top five Google searches in India last year were cricket-related. It frames why Google Search AI Mode is now the IPL's Premier Partner. "Live sports has emerged as one of the only mediums that can aggregate consumers at this scale," he says. For an AI company looking for mass adoption, there is no better playground.

The OpenAI integration is the clearest example: Chatterjee demonstrates it live, asking the platform a question about the match unfolding in the background, the AI answering with analytical detail in real time as the game continues to play. JioStar offers a single, hyper-centralised ecosystem that Western platforms simply cannot replicate, highlighted by the T20 World Cup final earlier this year between India and New Zealand that drew 72.5m concurrent streams.

That milestone set an all-time digital record. While the NFL, the Premier League and the Champions League command massive audiences, their viewership remains

fragmented across dozens of cable networks and regional streaming apps. JioStar unifies that massive audience under one digital roof.

And because the vast majority of those fans are watching on a phone, Ishan explains, JioStar has remade the game around vertical viewing and how people actually hold their devices. Regional feeds, those in neither English nor Hindi, now make up almost a quarter of all watch time, and are growing twice as fast as everything else.



The coverage includes a ‘watchalong’ element

Maxview, built specifically for the phone screen, zooms in, simplifies the scorecard and lets viewers swipe left for camera angles or swipe up for key moments. This vertical format already attracts up to 75 million users. For millions of watchers, he says, it has effectively “freed up one hand”.

The investment required to hold that audience is enormous, and Ishan is direct about what that means. The current cost of IPL rights, at roughly \$16.8m per game, he says, “is not currently sustainable”.

While rights holders are engaging with cricket boards to correct this financial model, a tension remains. The very media ecosystem that funds cricket's global growth is being priced out of it.

But what they are building in the meantime reaches beyond cricket. JioStar is working with Sky Germany on the Bundesliga, helping with AI translation out of Mumbai. The mothership is no longer only producing India's cricket. It is beginning to work on other people's sport, in other people's languages.

Chatterjee is asked, what the global sports broadcasting industry has not yet realised about what is happening in Mumbai. "India has always been seen as a market of the future," he says. "Eventually it's going to be huge. But when it comes to sports and broadcasting, I would argue that future is already here.

"The future of sports broadcasting has been written in India already."