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## Beyond the boundary: How AI is reshaping the IPL 2026 experience from the dugout to the stands



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### Article Content:

**Primarily, OpenAI and Google are buying trust layered over awareness. AI needs legitimacy and reassurance before driving usage, and IPL's credibility helps de-risk consumer perception.**

The Indian Premier League 2026 is not just witnessing a surge in AI-led advertising, it is marking a deeper shift where franchises are beginning to integrate artificial intelligence into core operations, fan engagement, and on-field decision-making. What was once limited to sponsorship visibility is now evolving into full-stack adoption across teams.

"When OpenAI, the relationship began well before the sponsorship contract was signed... it reflected the franchise's genuine interest in understanding where AI was heading and how it could be integrated into what we do," said Alok Chitre, Chief Operating Officer at Rajasthan Royals.

That integration is now visible across the franchise's ecosystem. From the ChatGPT Match IQ Award that decodes key on-field decisions to the #FullFanMode campaign enabling personalised fan content, the team is embedding AI directly into high-engagement match moments. Off the field, AI is powering player analytics, injury risk flagging, contract automation, and even creative workflows like AI-assisted photoshoots and jersey design.

For IPL teams, this is no longer about logo placements. It is about turning AI into a lived product experience.

### AI moves from B2B to the IPL spotlight

The deeper integration by franchises comes alongside a surge in visibility from global AI players like OpenAI and Google, both of which have ramped up their presence during Indian Premier League 2026.

According to Devroop Dhar, Co-Founder and India CEO at Primus Partners, this signals a structural shift in how AI is being positioned in India.

“AI firms choosing a mass platform like IPL signals two things. First, their belief that AI usage has moved beyond B2B to B2C, and second, the synergy between their target audience and the IPL audience,” Dhar said.

He added that the scale of investment reflects both user acquisition ambitions and a parallel need to shape public perception. “India is one of the fastest-growing markets for GenAI. These spends demonstrate seriousness to tap into this segment.”

More importantly, Dhar does not see this as a fleeting surge. “Unlike edtech or crypto, there is no ambiguity around the need and importance of AI. This is likely to become a sustained advertiser category,” he said.

### **Awareness is not enough. AI is buying trust**

Industry observers say the IPL is serving a dual role for AI companies: compressing awareness cycles while building credibility at scale.

“AI firms are at an inflection point where product readiness has outpaced mass adoption,” said Vikas Nowal, CEO at Interspace Communications. “IPL offers unmatched scale and frequency to accelerate category education in a single burst window.”

But unlike transactional categories, the immediate goal is not conversions.

“Primarily, they are buying trust layered over awareness. AI needs legitimacy and reassurance before driving usage, and IPL’s credibility helps de-risk consumer perception,” Nowal said.

That distinction is critical. While fintech and edtech solved visible problems, AI remains abstract for many users. The messaging, therefore, is shifting toward embedding AI into everyday contexts rather than pushing direct adoption.

### **From ads to product demonstrations**

Data suggests that AI brands are already becoming a meaningful, if still emerging, advertiser category.

According to Pramod Pawar, Vice President at Hansa Research Group, AI firms are leveraging IPL’s scale to move beyond visibility into usage-led storytelling.

“Given that AI is still nascent, the focus is on building awareness and trust. But brands are going beyond traditional advertising by integrating into the experience through AI-powered match insights and conversational features,” Pawar said.

He estimates that AI contributes less than 10 percent of total IPL ad spends in 2026, but its impact is disproportionate due to the category’s growth trajectory.

The audience fit is also strategic. With Gen Z forming the core of IPL’s digital viewership and actively engaging across second screens, AI platforms are aligning with a user base that prefers interactive, real-time experiences.

### **A new playbook for sports sponsorships**

What is emerging is a new sponsorship model where technology is not just advertised but demonstrated.

From AI-powered fan campaigns and real-time match analytics to backend automation and creative workflows, IPL teams are increasingly becoming testbeds for applied AI. The Rajasthan Royals’ use of OpenAI APIs across performance, commercial, and fan engagement functions offers a glimpse into how deeply these integrations can go.

For AI companies, this is less about short-term media bursts and more about normalising usage at scale.

And for the IPL, it signals the arrival of a new advertiser class. One that is not just buying eyeballs, but actively reshaping how the game is experienced