

The remarkable cricketing career of Amir Yusuf that stretches from the pitches of Mnazimoja in Zanzibar, marches on incessantly, to the grounds of Daressalaam without calling for a halt.

Amir is great. His vast amount of cricket has generated a lot of physical and mental exertion from him. It is extraordinary how besides his form he has maintained his zest for the game and his dedication to his team. It is when viewed in this context that Amir assumes greatness.

As is often the case with prominent players Yusuf has had his ups and downs during this long passage of time that bridges a generation gap. After rising to the dazzling height of playing against Freddie Brown xi in Zanzibar in the late fifties, excelling for Tanzania in the late sixties and seventies, acquiring the award of East Africa's best all-rounder in 1972 amidst players of the caliber of Zulfiqar Ali, Vasant Tapu, Upendra Patel and Sam Valusumbi, heading the 1972 quadrangular tourney's batting averages with 79.00, captaining the National Side and scoring a century in the league matches Amir got toppled to the level of Union's tail ender from whom even a score of double figure was a rarity.

One of the most pleasant notes of the current season therefore has been the return to form of Amir, alike the good old Amir, amassing almost 500 runs. One of the reasons for Union's success in this season has been the consistency of Amir in laying solid foundation by promoting himself to open Union's innings.

Born 44 years ago in March 1940 in Zanzibar, Amir was a versatile athlete who not only represented Zanzibar in cricket but also volleyball and football-fantastic!

Cricket had been Amir's childhood obsession and he received inspiration from the likes of Ahmed Iddi, then Zanzibar's veteran cricketer, Juma Alley, then Zanzibar's skipper and Gulamhusain Ismail(Golo), Zanzibar's legendry fast bowler. He started playing for his school 'Sir Euan Smith Madressa' in 1954 and later Agakhan School before representing 'Ithnashri Gymkhana A' in 1958 and Zanzibar xi in 1959.

Amir was then famous for his fielding. The ball would ease into his composed and relaxed hands. The fascinating aspect of his fielding was the accuracy of his throw that could rattle stumps from odd angles.

Amir vividly reminisces his encounter in Zanzibar with the then Tanganyika represented by Bresler, Carvar, Chambers, Mamda Kassam, Alban Fernandes and others. Cricket in Zanzibar was competitive and played with seriousness.

Once in 1960 there was a thrilling game against Goans at Mnazimoja. Ithnashris were reduced to 0 for 3 against the fierce attack of one Titus. Then Amir played a sparkling innings of 88 in a fourth wicket partnership of 150 runs and saved Ithnashris from disgrace.

While on the mainland Amir placed himself with Union in 1968 and represented Cooper Motor Corporation in the Saturday commercial league. He expresses his gratitude to Mohamed Pirbhai and Albert Fernandes for guiding and promoting his career.

Amir of today reveals a different outlook. While at the wicket he looks lean and seems unable to hit the ball far. His physique suggests certain vulnerability. He tends to poke and prod, nibble, and nudge and to an onlooker this may not appeal at all. Thus, he goes on, apparently so placid and imperturbable.

The public might have disapproved Amir's recent knock of 26 in almost 150 minutes against Dar Cricketers but the purpose behind it was to give away as few wickets as possible. Similarly, his record ninth wicket partnership of 145 runs against Kenya of which he contributed only 25 was to enable his partner, Suresh Raval, dominate the strike.

This is in no way undermining Amir's ability to strike a ball. In his batting orthodoxy and beauty are perfectly harmonized. He is a fine chopper of the ball. Any ball well up to him is beautifully hit through the covers or going up on his toes he leisurely squares cuts a delivery. One of his best shots is over square leg where he effortlessly lifts a ball.

I can very well recall Amir modestly raising his bat in acknowledgement of the rapturous applause as he climbed up the pavilion stairs at the Gymkhana ground. That was a hero's welcome way back in 1971 when he had registered an invaluable 97 in even time against the powerful Kenyans. Unfortunately, when he was just 3 short of a century a loss of concentration due to stoppage from rain deprived him of a deserved century.

Amir's superb form continued when the Quadrangular was held in Zambia in 1973. Against the powerful attack of Zambia led by Terry Hope Amir scored 51 in the first innings followed by 54 in the second innings. He also bowled a continuous spell of 30 overs and took 5 wickets-a classic example of his all-round ability.

During the 1974 Saba-Saba festival at Tanga, Amir produced a superb bowling performance against the visiting Ghana side and took 7 wickets for 36 runs.

Amir is outspoken and thorough disciplinarian. Under his firm, authentic and shrewd leadership Union wins this year's Sunday league championship for the ninth time in the past 11 years. Incidentally, it was under Amir's captaincy that Union regained the title in 1973 after a lapse of 19 years. Of the nine it has been won four times under the dominant leadership of Amir. As fans wait for the next season Amir also looks forward to continuing his marathon. **S forward to continue his marathon.**