

A little cricket never hurt

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AMRITSAR had been the nursery of cricket in the fifties and sixties, Gandhi Ground being the hub of the sport. Pandit Pran Nath, the tall and hefty headmaster of PBN School, was the controller of this ground, being the towering man in the Amritsar Games Association. The wall around the ground was constructed solely by his tireless efforts, utilising the services of students and teachers in the year 1962. In those days, the ground vibrated with sports activity all through the year. Vijay Mehra, the proud product of this ground, had already created a world record of being the youngest cricket Test player. Sardar Surjit Singh Majithia, a three-time MP from Amritsar, Deputy Defence Minister and president of BCCL, was a frequent visitor. He came as an ordinary

person, leaving behind the symbols of pomp and authority, and padded up to play with promising cricketers. Madan Lal of PBN School and Bishan Singh Bedi of Hindu College were big names even in those days. Pandit Pran Nath was a jovial person. Once, Majithia hit the ball with full force but it did not travel beyond a few yards. Pran Nath commented on the mike, '*Laoji, Majithia saheb ne dhai gajji hit maari je, Majithiaji kuchh khaya pia karo.*'

Pran Nath had earned the nickname of *Haathi* because of his huge size. Majithia hit back, '*Chup kar oye Haathiya, sara kujh tan tun kalla kha janda aen.*' And so this cricketing love continued.

In 1967, I stayed with my relatives at Civil Lines, Jalandhar, for a few days. We would go to Old Baradari in the evening to play cricket. The small ground was situated in front of the DC's residence. On the very first day, I saw a tall and hand-

some, clean-shaven man emerging from the house and heading towards us. He asked the bowler to allow him to bowl. He also batted and fielded for some time. He was the DC himself, Manohar Singh Gill. Incidentally, I joined the state civil services and in 1980, I was asked by the DC, Bathinda, to hand over some files to the Principal Secretary to the CM, at Chandigarh. I sat in the room as the private secretary to the Principal Secretary listened to the cricket commentary on a small transistor. After every 10 minutes, he would apprise his boss of the latest score. Suddenly, the door of the room opened and a tall *Sardarji* said he was going for the Cabinet meeting. He looked at me and was told about the purpose of my visit. '*Sandhu saheb tusi failan chhad jao, mein DC saheb nal gall kar lawanga.*' He then left. He was the same MS Gill with whom I had played cricket at Jalandhar.

Years later, the CM was holding a meeting on the SYL issue with representatives of all parties after the decision of the Supreme Court against the state. One person would come to the Principal Secretary (Irrigation and Power) and whisper something in his ears. I was sitting next to him. An international cricket match was being played at Delhi and I knew that the person was being apprised about the score. For over 15 minutes when the match informer did not turn up, the officer told me that he was going to check on the score. He went inside Punjab Bhawan, turned on the TV, and returned happy, 'Sachin has scored a century!' I had heard a saying, 'An idle man does not have any time and a busy man has all the time'. These two officers remained a great asset to the organisations they served, and to society, despite their craze for cricket amid the most serious situations.