

Pitching it Straight

GURCHARAN SINGH
with MS Unnikrishnan

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Foreword

Coaches like Gurcharan Singh, Hemu Adhikari and Desh Prem Azad were rare breeds who preferred not to go after publicity. They did their work without hogging the limelight and bothering about the rewards. When we were growing up, we had heard about them. They were not marketing experts to promote themselves as some coaches do now. One would never see them in the television studios or commentary boxes. The old coaches never talked much about themselves or their work; they only talked about their talented trainees. Perhaps, they were not very media savvy. The 'I, me, we' attitude of the present coaches was unknown to the old generation of coaches like Gurcharan Singhji.

The old coaches ran their 'nets' with minimum equipment. That was perhaps the reason they gave a little more attention to the sons of ministers and high officials. We ordinary players resented this initially, but we later realised that our coaches needed to pamper the VVIP and VIP children for them to get enough balls and bats from the authorities to run their 'nets', to get the system going. Otherwise, the supply of cricket equipment from the NIS/SAI was very limited. It was a very, very difficult time for the coaches then, unlike now.

Coaches like Guchhi Paaji were very strict too. In my time, the distance between the coaches and their trainees was quite big. Now, the coaches are much more friendly with their trainees. The need of the time is perhaps different. I cannot judge.

Sir Gurcharan Singh remains the same even 40 years after I first met him, never bothering to be in the limelight, despite having the right credentials. That's good enough. That says a lot about his character. I am sure the book on him will be of great value to people who love cricket. There is much to learn from Sir's life journey. It will be very educative

KAPIL DEV

India's former Cricket Captain

Preface

Sometime in September 2016, when Gurcharan Singhji called me to say that he wanted to meet me urgently to seek my 'advice' on some matter, I was perplexed. Advice? Me?

For, Gurcharan Singhji has many friends, better qualified and better resourced than me, to give him sound advice on any issue. Still, we decided to meet the next day at his residence, but due to some urgent personal work, I could not keep that appointment.

Our scheduled meeting got postponed several times thereafter till we finally met, of all places, at the Lodhi Road crematorium where we had gone to attend the cremation of senior sports journalist, PVR Menon.

There, Gurcharan Singhji told me why he wanted to meet me – that he wants me to collaborate in writing a book on him. He said he had preserved bundles of press cuttings and other documents about his achievements, first as a cricketer and then as an eminent coach, administrator, umpire etc. He had served as the national coach of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), besides getting the coveted Dronacharya Award from the Indian Government, to add luster to his well-adorned crown.

I was not sure of committing myself to the task due to various reasons, but agreed eventually. A few days later, Gurcharanji handed over the bundles of files he had with him to me, but it remained unopened for several days till I finally made a perusal of the papers. However, he took back the files but returned them, this time properly catalogued and photocopied. The files kept shuttling back and forth between Gurcharanji and me a few more times before I could have a serious look at them, and start work on the book.

Though those documents were of immense help in gleaning a lot of information, it was inadequate to write a book on him. It took me several meetings with him to get a complete picture of the man... warts and all.

He's such an ocean of experience and achievements that it would have been a monumental task to picture him in all his myriad hues in a small book. Yet, I have done my best to capture the man in all his essence.

I have known Gurcharan Singhji since the late Seventies when he was a coach at the National Stadium Cricket Coaching Centre of the NIS₁ (later under the Sports Authority of India). In those days, coaches of almost all the sports disciplines posted at the National Stadium had to work under the 'same