

REMEMBERING C. PARAMALINGAM

CHARLIE'S SMILE

THIS scene is still so vivid in my mind. A smile creases across the face of C. Paramalingam when he sees me.

I squeeze myself on the bench next to Param and R. Yogeswaran, the coach of the 1982 Mumbai World Cup team (Param was his assistant).

A cacophony of the thwack, clack and chime sounds punctuate the air from the pinball machine Arcade next door.

Many of my evenings in the months leading to the Mumbai tournament was spent hanging out with them doing small talk and tolerating the “din.”

Winner Hotel, is a budget hotel with no foyer. So we sat in front of the hotel entrance on the sidewalk and bantered.

Occasionally some of the players would lounge around for a while before disappearing into the hotel.

They would join in the conversation and move off.

It was here on the sidewalk I became pally with Param whose “smile” was infectious.

Here I got to know the man, not the brilliant player of the 60s. This was the real Param off the pitch. A gentleman, unassuming, respectful, modest and with a quiet disposition. Not one who imposes his views on you. Very likeable.

I had watched “the Param” as a player of the 60s too. On the pitch, he spoke “aloud” with the stick.

You could call him a wizard, a craftsman of a

kind. Was he brilliant? An extraordinary goal-poacher. Those who have seen his talent would vouch that he was the best ever centre-forward to grace the Malaysian hockey scene.

You just did not know what his next move would be. A tap here, a swerve, a feint and he’s left you in an awkward straddle.

His creativity, offensive vision, ball possession, natural scoring ability was dynamic. He also had that electrifying burst of speed, something like our Mokhtar Dahari of football fame. Certainly an exciting player to watch.

When he’s on the move, watch him hawk-eyed. If you take your eyeballs off him, you would have missed all the excitement.

Yet for all his qualities and the impact he had on the game playing for the nation, not once did I hear him brag about his exploits.

In the 2018 “SPORTS FLAME” book of Stories Never Told Before, he mentioned that Freddy Vias, an Olympian himself, was the player who helped his hockey career flourish.

“As a youngster, I thought I knew enough about hockey until Freddy showed me a whole new world of how to play in an attacking position”, Param wrote.

Likewise when he took up coaching, Param imparted unselfishly all his knowledge to his charges.

It was just not at the senior level he gave his unwavering services. Klang where he lived his life out, he poured all his effort into promoting grassroots hockey.

Here is where he left his legacy. Hundreds of youngsters had the opportunity of learning from a legend. Right up to 85, he would spend his weekends with these enthusiastic youngsters. He was the architect of hockey development in Klang, and everyone respected this “Undecorated” player.

More than hockey, these young ‘uns loved his fatherly concerns about their studies, diet and he kept them “off the streets.”

Charlie, Param’s nickname, had that infectious smile that made these youngsters comfortable being around him.

We will miss Charlie’s smile and his hockey skills that captivated all of us.

Norman Siebel, the Sports Editor of the Straits Times during the 50s and 60s had watched Param and his exploits.

Siebel saw an exciting player who mesmerised opponents. He would write: “Param and his magic wand.”

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