



Johnson  
(left)  
with  
Rama

# STICK WITH US, RAMAKRISHNAN

● BY JOHNSON FERNANDEZ  
(SPORTSWRITER)

**WHEN** R. Ramakrishnan passed away, Malaysian hockey lost not just a two-time World Cup player and an Olympian — it lost one of its quiet custodians.

In the early 1980s, when I first met him, he was already established as one of the finest to have worn the national colours.

He had stood on the world stage twice at the World Cup and represented the country at the Olympics — achievements that, in any sporting nation, would have secured him permanent reverence.

Yet if you met him over tea in Brickfields, you would not have encountered a man defined by medals.

You would have met an affable soul.

There was a gentleness about Ramakrishnan. No bluster. No need to remind you who he was. His authority came not from volume, but from conviction.

When I approached him to write a weekly column during my days at The Star, his response revealed everything about the man. “On one condition,” he said. “I am not interested in policies or national or international hockey. I want to write on development.”

He was never enamoured by politics or power. His passion lay elsewhere — in the basics of the game, in nurturing young minds, in strengthening the grassroots.

The column that followed, later compiled into “Stick With Me”, was not about glamour tournaments or federation intrigue. It was about fundamentals: trapping, passing, positioning, discipline.

Every week, he would hand me his

handwritten notes. I hardly had to reshape them. His thoughts were precise and purposeful.

Teachers across the country would later tell me they used his writings as coaching manuals. That, I suspect, would have pleased him far more than any personal accolade.

For Ramakrishnan understood something many in sport forget: glory fades, but foundations endure.

Even after the column ended when I moved to The Malay Mail, our friendship did not. We would meet for lunch with other hockey friends, revisiting memories of tours, tournaments, triumphs and heartbreaks.

Through the years, he remained the same — warm, grounded, invested in the future of the game rather than trapped in its past.

Today, as tributes pour in, many will rightly speak of his World Cups and his Olympic appearance. They will recount his discipline, his skill, his contribution on the field.

But I will remember the evenings in Brickfields. The careful handwriting. The insistence on development. The belief that Malaysian hockey’s salvation lay in school fields rather than boardrooms.

Ramakrishnan served the game with distinction. More importantly, he served it with integrity.

The stadium lights dim today. But somewhere, on countless school pitches across the country, the lessons he shared probably still echo in the sound of stick meeting ball.

And that may well be his greatest legacy.  
Rest well, my friend.