



## **CEYLON'S STANLEY JAYASINGHE - THE PATHFINDER**

### **BY AUSTIN DANIEL**

I last met Stanley Jayasinghe right here on the turf of my adopted country in 1998. He and his wife Erika were on a sort of world tour, taking in Canada where two of his sisters live. Spending a few days in the capital city of Alberta, he was invited by Greenfield Cricket Club at the height of Edmonton's summer to give the lads a few tips right in the middle of the local cricket season. Jayasinghe's nephew Chris is a founder member of the club which has more Sri Lankan expatriates in its membership than other clubs.

I was transported back to the mid-60s when Stanley Jayasinghe returned to the country of his birth to travel to India and Pakistan for three 'unofficial' Test matches. Those who had followed his career closely in England since the mid-50s where he snatched the sporting headlines back home with monotonous regularity, were keen that their hero would come up trumps at the highest level.

For the cynics, those tours of the sub-continent were to be the acid test for the all-rounder who first played for his country while still at school. And he was only 18. This was in 1949 against a visiting Commonwealth XI, and one year later, he was picked to visit Pakistan with the national side for a short tour, playing against combined selections.

His penchant for plundering runs off the fast bowlers shone in all its splendour as he tore into the pace attack of Fazal Mahmood and Khan Mohammed. When he returned to the pavilion with 80 sparkling runs to his credit, the youngster was accorded a standing ovation.

The cricket correspondent of Pakistan's leading newspaper, Dawn, had this to say of his innings: "Ceylon's schoolboy batting sensation Stanley Jayasinghe set the stands alight with a masterly knock of 80 runs, most of the boundaries coming at the expense of Pakistan's world-class pacemen who were treated with absolute disdain. This boy has a great future as an unorthodox batsman."

When Jayasinghe returned to Ceylon in 1964, there were quite a number of his faithful followers, not to mention hero-worshippers, at Katunayake Airport which was administered by the Royal Ceylon Air Force which owned the entire complex at the time. I had just finished a stint with the men in Royal Blue and was on hand to see the man himself back in the country of his birth, having left the shores for England in 1956. He was 35 years old and was in the prime of his illustrious cricketing career.

After a couple of weeks acclimati-zation, he was on the plane to India where two 'Tests' were played. Captained by Michael Tissera, the visitors rose to the challenge with an excellent team effort. The First Test at Hyderabad ended in a draw, with the spoils tilting the way of the islanders from across the Palk Strait. Jayasinghe knocked up his career-best score of 135 and also got amongst the wickets with a match bag of 9-52 – his best haul in first-class cricket. This fine showing by a man who had not played in Ceylon since 1956 was his moment of truth and he finished the tour by topping both the batting averages

(318 runs) and bowling averages (19 wickets). The stamp of class bore him out as the country's best exponent with bat and ball of all time.

The Second Test at Ahmedabad was won by Ceylon in dramatic style and again it was Jayasinghe's bowling that paved the way for the four-wicket victory. It was then on to Pakistan in 1966 and Jayasinghe's rich streak continued when he slammed 118 against Pakistan in a solitary 'Test' played in Lahore. Pakistan's fanatic cricket supporters were reminiscing about Jayasinghe's first visit there, as in 1950 he also cracked an unblemished 125 against Pakistan Universities.

Since that debut tour, he was chosen to represent All Ceylon against a Commonwealth XI, as well as Australian and England touring teams that stepped ashore in Colombo on their journey to Ashes' battles.

Stanley Jayasinghe, who turned 74 on 19 January, was born in Badjulla, with his father Arthur, the postmaster of the town which is capital of Uva province. Nestling in a valley and encircled by tea-covered hills, plus a nine-peaked mountain range, the post office quarters were in close proximity to the Uva Gymkhana club, dominated by British tea planters, who – in the halcyon days of the British Raj – raced their ponies on Wednesday afternoons, and played rugby and cricket at the weekends.

Jayasinghe's father was transferred to Colombo when Stanley was four. The boy was then subsequently sent to Nalanda College, one of two leading Buddhist institutions in the country. Even at the tender age of seven, his teachers noted the curly-haired, ever-smiling boy, showing rare talent on the cricket field. As he graduated into his teens, Jayasinghe was boasting an appetite for runs at inter-house level, and living up to the translation of his surname – 'Victorious Lion'.

Soon he came under the watchful eye of T.Kandaswamy, the Prefect of Games, D.S.Lawris, the College Principal, and Gerry Gooneratne, the college's cricket coach. Jayasinghe has always maintained that these three individuals put him on the road to success, and confirmation of this came between 1947 and 1954, as he scored a string of centuries against rival school and senior clubs, who raved about his prodigious run-making and rare aptitude for a boy of his age. Clubs were eagerly wanting him to join their ranks, but only when he completed his schooling did Jayasinghe turn out for Nondescripts CC – the arch-rival of the Sinhalese Sports Club which all the elite players joined.

Between 1953 and 1956, Jayasinghe plundered 1,543 runs and bagged 144 wickets in club matches, so he was an automatic choice to play for his country against an Indian University team that included C.K.Nayadu, Mushtaq Ali and Gaekwad. He effortlessly made 54 and 72, and impressed everyone who saw his strokeplay.

In the early 1950s, cricket in Ceylon was given a boost with visits to the island by two famous knights of the game – Sir Learie Constantine and Sir Leonard Hutton. Both came as coaches under the aegis of the British Council, who had brought them to the island at the request of Ceylon's Board of Control, and both were immediately impressed with Jayasinghe's prowess, as he scored a plucky 28 against Frank Tyson and Brian Statham on a fast green-top during a game against the MCC in a 'whistle-stop' match at The Colombo Oval

Both were very supportive as the youngster began contemplating playing the game on English soil, and Constantine helped to secure an offer from Werneth CC in the Central Lancashire League in 1956. However, the terms weren't acceptable and he moved south to play in the Cornwall League for Penzance. Jayasinghe subsequently helped the club win their League, and on the recommendation of Peter Philpott, the Australian Test player, he moved back north to join Colne CC, and in the club's 80th year, Colne won the Worsley Cup and League title for the first time.

Jayasinghe played outstandingly in league matches and relished matching wits against some of the best professionals in world cricket. A measure of his success was that he beat Everton Weekes of the West Indies to 1,000 runs for the season. The following year, Jayasinghe knocked off 1,051 runs and bagged 43 wickets, and the Ceylonese star subsequently accepted an offer to join Leicestershire CCC, whom had also secured the services of Clive Inman – the left-hander who A.A. Thomson described as “the steel-wristed batsman who is arguably the best player to come out of Ceylon”.

The 1960s were not great years for the Leicester club, and for most of the decade they languished in the bottom half of the Championship table, but the club drew good crowds through the turnstiles, largely as a result of the batting of ‘The Leicestershire Twins’ – Jayasinghe and Inman, whose attractive batsmanship thrilled the crowds, and drew lavish praise from the Press. Norman Preston, the Editor of Wisden described Jayasinghe as “the Denis Compton of Ceylon,” whilst John Arlott went on to say “Jayasinghe could be orthodox, but he preferred the charm of unorthodoxy and took so many liberties that bowlers often despaired.”

Jayasinghe never forgot some of the top notch players he had left behind in sunny Ceylon, and he repeatedly suggested to Michael Tissera, Chandrasiri Weerasinghe and Malcolm Francke that they should also take the plunge and play in England. Only Francke, an aggressive batsman and leg-spinner, heeded his advice, and duly turned out to be a ‘find’ in the Lancashire League. He subsequently went to Queensland, and walked into the State side.

Jayasinghe enjoyed five years of county cricket with Leicestershire, and topped 1,000 runs in each year. He won his county cap during the match against the 1963 West Indians, and in almost Caribbean style, his broad blade punished the tourist’s attack of Sobers, King, Valentine and Gibbs, before being dismissed for 61. In his third season with Leicestershire, he duly recorded his maiden Championship century – reaching 100 against Northamptonshire at Northampton, striking one six and 16 boundaries to the delight of the crowd.

Perhaps his finest two performances in Leicestershire’s colours came in 1965 – his final summer with the county. He played a match-winning 102 against Hampshire on a turning pitch at Bournemouth, whilst at Leicester he was instrumental in setting up a six-wicket victory over Nottinghamshire, sharing a stand of 118 in just 75 minutes with Peter Marner, with the Ceylonese cracking 21 fours in a glittering display of strokeplay.

No surprise then that Jayasinghe won an enthusiastic following, especially at Leicester when for many years, the autographed portraits of himself and Inman hung on the walls of Old George’s pub across the road from the cricket ground.

Jayasinghe was a pathfinder for other Ceylonese players, and the likes Laddie Outschoorn, Dan Piachaud, Aravinda de Silva, Muttiah Muralitharan and Gehan Mendis have played with distinction in English cricket – with Mendis even sacrificing a Ceylonese (or Sri Lankan) cap in an attempt to try and open the batting for England.

On his return to his homeland, Jayasinghe became a Senior Executive at British-owned tea broker Forbes and Walker. He also conducted a coaching school, before concentrating on his two hobbies of farming in the outstation, and spending time amongst the wildlife of his country. After 20 years in the cricketing world, Jayasinghe had come home to roost!