

Ali Ahsan

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 FPDC Member since 2003

One of the most influential members of the FPDC force, the mild-mannered low-key Multan-born lad was never the kind of person who looked interested in sports from an early age. In fact, Ali Ahsan, was hardly the kind who took part in sporting or social activities throughout his childhood which took him places across Pakistan due to his family's army background. From Bahawalpur, to Lahore; Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir to Taxila; yes Ali Ahsan was always moving about the damn country with his now-retired father, mother and siblings. Like most Pakistanis, cricket had been on his mind a lot in his childhood and teens. From watching live matches on TV, to using a calculator for understanding cricket stats much better, yes he was living the cricket-obsession that has the Pakistan awam so preoccupied for the past many generations.

Football wasn't exactly Ali's thing. Sure he did find it interesting seeing that the mid 1990s era Manchester United teams that had Eric Cantona, was sponsored by the same company he used to watch his cartoons and fighter plane documentaries on back him; Sharp. That didn't exactly left Ali with a passion for football, just that he found Manchester United a team whose name he couldn't miss on his lips. That was until heightened interests around the world during the FIFA World Cups made even the least ardent football followers at least watch this tournament keenly. Be it Roberto Baggio's penalty miss against Brazil in the final of USA'94, or Zidane's two goals coupled with Ronaldo's zombie-like display in the France'98 final, or the news that United had won the Treble in 1999 – something which a young Ali Ahsan merely said ‘cool’ upon reading it in the newspapers – Ali remembered it all and he tended to ‘respect’ the global appeal of this game without really taking it seriously.

It all changed during the summers that sandwiched the 2002/03 season. As was the case back in the day, the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Korea/Japan was something Ali was looking forward to, and like all occasional football followers, cheering for Brazil was pretty much the obvious as he witnessed all the shocks, stunners, and glory of that tournament. However this time his interest in football managed to linger on, with the help of an excitable footy-follower named Ghazan Shah, Ali found his love for football rekindle as he gradually ended up following Manchester United's chase for the Premier League as well as scouring the internet for football news across Europe and the world that ended up making him a football maniac within a few months, much to the surprise of his own friends and family. Serie A, La Liga, Bundesliga; he was following leagues he had never dreamt of thinking about, and the embarrassment of Pakistan's exit in the 2003 ICC Cricket World Cup scarred Ali for the rest of his life. He ended up resenting cricket as time progressed, mainly due to the mockery the Pakistan cricket team made of the term ‘consistency’; which to many, was the unpredictability of Pakistan, but to Ali Ahsan it was merely the team not knowing the basics of the game and despite their near-religious following back home, lacked the professionalism and focus teams like Australia were demonstrating.

Football was something that had soothed those nerves, especially with Man United winning back the Premier League a month or so later after chasing Arsenal the entire season, Ali Ahsan was hooked on the ‘beautiful game’ with no looking back. It was during that time that the SAFF Cup 2003 created some waves, with Pakistan's rather stunning performances in that tournament against favourites and regional strongmen India in the group stages thanks to some blinding goals by a certain Sarfraz Rasool made Pakistan finish 4th overall in the tournament that was won by hosts Bangladesh. Now it may not have been the glory many would have thought of, but it certainly was enough for Ali to learn more about his national team. He vaguely recalled Pakistan getting hammered by Kazakhstan and Iraq many years back in the Asian qualifying rounds of the World Cup, as well as news that once a Pakistani team that had gone on tour in Afghanistan had their heads shaven as punishment for wearing shorts which was considered an offence by the ridiculous Taliban regime. Then again, that was a time Ali Ahsan didn't really care about this sport, but now he was curious as to what was going on in Pakistani football and what could be done about such a game.

That was where the internet led him to FootballPakistan.Com (FPDC), which was in a nascent state; just starting to make itself look more credible and organised as well as more interactive with interested members via a discussion forum. Overnight, from what was merely a fan site for an inactive football team, became a favoured destination for Ali Ahsan. He knew some aspects about the lazy mentality previous Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) regimes had that bogged down the progress and development of football in the country where the likes of cricket, and hockey tended to flourish over the years. FPDC offered him a more in-depth outlook of what was really going on.

That was where Ali Ahsan met Malik Riaz Hai Naveed of Germany, the brains and balls behind the whole FPDC phenomena. Discussion of views and suggestion soon led to an initially restrained online relationship between the two,

mainly because of Ali Ahsan's own initial reluctance in dealing with new found internet pals he barely knew about. But the coming weeks and months, the relationship between the two blossomed to a greater, more interactive level. Malik Riaz shared an obsession with football, although he barely discussed club football with Ali, who on the other hand had become obsessed with Manchester United and was closely following other European leagues as well. He wanted to achieve something that would make football in Pakistan more noticeable and appreciated not just amongst the mis-informed public but across Asia and the world as well. Malik Riaz's dealings with various PFF officials during that period, certainly impressed Ali immensely and he offered his help as times went by. Bad times and good times came and went, with hack attacks, unpaid online web subscriptions, and bad servers meant many times FPDC was virtually off the internet for weeks and months at a stretch.

But that didn't stop Ali Ahsan and Malik Riaz's interaction online, and as the website was finally restored to their relief, soon enough Ali Ahsan had become a moderator at the online forum directing and monitoring posts made by a growing number of curious and eager members to make things more ordered. Also that was where when Ali Ahsan ended up meeting the proactive and ambitious youthful Chelsea fan Mohammad Shahnawaz of Leeds. He was the kind of energy any growing entity would want to have in its grasp to further propel and expand its sphere of power and influence. Whilst the quiet and laid-back Ali Ahsan became the literary mastermind behind the further growth of FPDC as an online organisation, Malik and Shahnawaz were the explorers and adventurers who wanted to do whatever they could for football.

The Holy Trinity of FPDC had been established.

All things were discussed and laid upon amongst the three, with each a volunteer striving for football in Pakistan. Shahnawaz soon became FPDC's chief scout and sometimes main field operative in bad times when Malik Riaz was unavailable or needed time away for personal commitments. It was a total team effort where each member, in their own way, did what they thought was necessary. Pakistan-origin players in Europe, Great Britain, and other parts of the world were told of our national team, and many showed great enthusiasm at the prospect of representing Pakistan at the international level, given that most of the players were playing in lower leagues in their country of residence and at the moment stood no chance in making an impact to be called up in their home national teams. Some ambitious people inside the PFF has helped further the agenda as they have shown equal desire in helping football in Pakistan as a whole.

Now currently doing his MPhil in Textiles from the University of Manchester after successfully being receiving his BSc with Honours in Textile Technology & Management from the same University in 2007, Ali Ahsan is certainly a vital cog in the running and growth of FPDC and the future looks bright for Pakistan and Pakistani football, and he, like the rest of the proud and active FPDC staff and members, wants to be part of this revolution that has the tendency of enveloping the entire country and making football a symbol of national pride as the football cult grows back home.

Together we can make a difference. It's football, for the win.

What better way to make it clear than to quote a few lines of Allama Iqbal from his famed Urdu poetic works 'Bal-i-Jibril' for this determined task:

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