



WORLD CUP WINNER



Profile of Madan Lal by Robert Hardie

Barely a year had passed after the highly successful Dilip Doshi had left Mean Lane for pastures new that Meltham Cricket Club once again looked to the Subcontinent for inspiration.

Born in the Punjab town of Amritsar on the 20th March 1951, Madan Lal Udhurma Sharma took to the field for Meltham for the whole of the 1975 season. Much like his countryman before him, the signing of the deal was somewhat unorthodox in its completion. This was due to the fact that he signed his contract on the roof of a car while at Headingley after England played India in a one-day match. Club officials Gordon Holroyd, Dennis Schofield and Colin Booth drew up a contract and eventually got their man after signing the contract on the roof of Tony Greig's car - Greig was the England captain on this occasion.

Madan Lal was the club's preferred signing after the then Indian captain, Ajit Wadekar, offered the services of Lal and teammate Brijesh Patel after meeting with club officials in the Bridgford Hotel in Nottingham. This was after the Indian touring side had taken on Notts in a tour game. Patel chose to sign for Elland after Lal was taken on by Meltham.

The signing was something of a coup as Madan Lal was already a full international player. After making his name and producing excellent displays for Indian sides Delhi and Punjab, he earned a call-up for the Indian team for the 1974 tour of England. Not only was he playing for his country, he also won the title of 'Indian Cricketer of the Year' in 1974 - the same year in which he made his Test debut for India v England at Old Trafford.

Like Doshi before him, the talented batsman would claim a prestigious league prize during his first season of cricket in Huddersfield. In the 1975 season he would collect the league's batting honour and by doing so became only the third man in the history of the club to do so and the first for 12 years after Roy Kilner picked up his second award in 1963. Since then, only Nirmal Nanan has been awarded this honour.

At domestic level Lal was a regular wicket-taker and prolific scorer of runs. With his right-arm medium-pace bowling and middle-order hitting, he became known for his versatility. It was his consistency that saw him become a key member of the Indian Test side in the 1970s. However, his international career was not without controversy. While at the peak of his powers in the 1978 season, he was excluded from the national side for no apparent reason until the 1981 tour of England, when he proved all the selectors wrong by performing extremely well on his return.

However, he would be dropped again in 1985 by the selectors. At the age of 34 he was replaced by younger medium pacers coming through to Test level, but again he was brought back for the tour of England in 1986, where he would make his last Test appearance for India. Again he performed commendably, taking three wickets at a rate of 1.61 and notching up 20 runs before falling to the bowling of Graham Gooch.



Madan Lal taking the wicket of Dennis Amiss at Lord's

After his initial period of exile in the late 70s/early 80s, Madan Lal would come back to great effect and was an integral part of India's successful World Cup campaign in 1983. India qualified from the preliminary group stage along with the mighty West Indian side to set up a semi-final clash with England in which the Indian side knocked out the host country by 6 wickets.

Many saw India as huge underdogs in the final against the West Indies. But this was Madan Lal's moment. He stepped up to take the vital wicket of Viv Richards and then two more in quick succession, to take 3-31 overall. Lal played the conditions perfectly and helped reduce the era's most successful batting line-up to a mere 140 runs. With the help of Lal, India had pulled off one of the biggest sporting upsets in history.



The victorious 1983 India World Cup squad (Madan Lal, back row, 2nd left)

Since putting away his bat and pads at the age of 40 in 1991, Lal has tried his hand at coaching. He coached the United Arab Emirates team with limited success before coaching the Indian national team between 1996-98, after which he became a national team selector for Indian cricket in 2000 and 2001.