

# *Sport in Pakistan is more than Cricket*

By: Atle Hetland

Pakistan is one of the world's leading cricket countries, with famous men such as Imran Khan, Muzaffar Nawaz and Shaheed Afridi. Top cricket players become as famous as Hollywood and Bollywood movie stars. And once they retire, they become officials in sports clubs. Some establish their own training academies or organizations. Others, venture into politics or humanitarian work. The sportsmen and women are role models for the young, and in Pakistan, two-thirds of the close to two hundred million inhabitants are children and young people, so the top sportsmen get a great following indeed, and some women, too. The Pakistan women cricket team has recently also done well

Samina Baig is not a cricket player; she climbs mountains. She was the first Pakistani woman ever to reach the top of Mount Everest in the Himalayas, the peak of Chashkin Sar, later renamed Samina Peak, which is more than 6,000 meters high. This happened on 13 May 2013.

This summer, she aimed at concluding her efforts of having reached the seven summits of the world's five continents, including Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa, Mt. Aconcagua in Argentina, Mt. Vinson in Antarctica, Puncak Jaya, the peak of Mt. Carstensz in Indonesia, Mt. McKinley in Alaska, and Mt. Elbrus in Russia, which is Europe's highest mountain.

Not bad for a young woman of twenty four, coached and accompanied by her elder brother Mirza Ali, from humble background in a village on the 'roof of the world' in Gilgit Baltistan. There is no electricity there and no Internet, of course. "But there are good and determined people", says a European, who has fallen in love with the people and landscape in the Northern Areas of Pakistan.

"Mountain people are like island people in many ways", says Dr. Ali Nawaz, the leader of the Snow Leopard Foundation, with offices in Islamabad and Gilgit.

"People have to rely on themselves and each other to make it in harsh surroundings. They have to protect themselves from the wildlife and take advantage of it, too, for livelihood. To preserve the unique fauna and flora depend of the people who live there. Human beings must lead, but we are not the only creation in God's garden. That is the key lesson we must learn in order to sustain the environment and avoid global warming and climate change."

"The Himalayas are essential to the whole subcontinent and the world", the professor stresses. He grew up in Multan, on the warm plains of Punjab. Some years ago, he received his doctorate from the Norwegian University of Environment and Biological Sciences on a dissertation about the brown bear in those cold hills and mountains in Scandinavia. Now, he is supervising a snow leopard conservation project apart from his academic work at the university. "The survival of the snow leopard is the best indicator of integration of the ecosystems in the mountains areas, thus ensuring prosperity for the current and future generations", Dr. Ali Nawaz says.

“I am glad that we have begun talking about other sports than just cricket, although that sport may be the most important to Pakistan for many years”, says Aamir Bilal in ‘Sports Development Foundation’, an NGO. He is also the national chair of the Pakistan Basketball Federation.

“There are dozens of sports that children and youth are already involved in”, he says. “After the FIFA World Cup in Brazil this year, football is gaining more attention, especially among boys. Badminton, volleyball and basketball are also popular, and they can be played by both boys and girls. Typical sports for young men are bodybuilding, weightlifting, wrestling, boxing and so on.”

“Pakistan has plenty of talent for all kinds of sports. But we need more qualified coaches and leaders. We also need to improve our sports facilities, and we need secure financing of sports. Yet, the most important is to encourage sports in schools and local communities”, Aamir Bilal says.

Sameena Nazir in PODA, Pothwar Organization for Development Advocacy, an NGO focusing on women’s social and livelihoods issues, agrees. But she adds that it is important that our attitudes to sports for girls and women change.

“We must not ‘forget’ the girls when plans are made, facilities built, coaches hired, and so on. And, cricket and football grounds, for example, should be shared by all youth in a community. Boys and girls can have different timings, or they can have different sections of a ground.”

“It is also important that sports clubs have caretakers and guards so that parents can feel safe about their girls as well as boys”, Sameena says, and in her activist style, she adds: “I hope the businessmen in Sialkot, who made a lot of money selling footballs to the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, also shoulder their corporate responsibility at home and invest in football and other sports clubs in the city of Sialkot, where the factories are.”

“We are already doing what Sameena asks for”, says a representative of Forward Sports in Sialkot. “We had huge contracts, making over 42 million balls in connection with the World Cup. As a Pakistani company we are very proud of what we did. We are also proud of what we do for sports locally, mainly through Pakistan Football Federation”, he says, but adds that more can always be done.

Fahad Habib, 16, from the Lyari, was among the finalists in the FIFA ‘Street Football World Cup’ in April. And in July, he had the opportunity to go back to Brazil to watch the real matches in the World Cup. “We were three boys and three girls who went from Pakistan, along with our leaders. First we spend three days in Doha since the travel was organized by ‘Generation Amazing’, Qatar, in cooperation with ‘Right to Play’ (RTP) in Pakistan”, which is an international humanitarian organization using sports and games to promote teamwork, peace and cooperation.

“Right to Play was founded by a Norwegian sports legend, Johann Olav Koss, who won four gold medals in skating in the Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer in 1994. He invested some of the prize money in RTP’s predecessor organization, and now it has a network of corporate donors in over twenty wealthy countries, and projects in as many poor countries or countries affected by disasters. In Pakistan, the projects are mostly for refugees and internally displaced persons. We give training and have activities for fifty thousand participants in Pakistan”, says country manager Iqbal Jatui.

Akbar Abbas Bangash, who works for a German aid organization, GIZ, has together with some friends established an organization called ‘Fitrobics’. “We use the slogan ‘healthy youth - healthy nation’, noting that 2/3 of Pakistan’s close to 200 million people are children and young people. We promote sports in schools, colleges, and local communities. We emphasize that sports should be fun and a social activity, not only an elite activity for top athletes”, Aktar says.

“But we need top sportsmen and women, also, in cricket and in other fields. They become role models and idols for young boys and girls. Take, for example the great mountaineer Samina Baig; she is an inspiration for all of us, especially for young girls and youth in rural areas”, says Dr. Iftikhar Nisa Hassan, who recently retired from her post as professor at Fatima Jinnah Women University in Rawalpindi. In 1969, she was member of the first woman team in Rock Climbing, as it was called, spending three weeks preparing for a two-few week climbing adventure in one of the K2 peaks. “We didn’t reach any peak. But it was great fun and I keep fond memories from that summer”, Professor Hassan says.

She says that 100 years ago, the explorers and adventurers were the role models. “For example, the brave men who went to the South Pole and those who attempted to reach the North Pole. At 11:30 a.m. on 29 May, 1953, it was indeed world news when the New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Nepalese Norgay Tenzing reached

the summit of Mount Everest. The climbers became heroes. Later, Hillary also reached the South Pole and the North Pole, and was the first man to have reached both poles and the summit of the world's highest mountain."

"The importance attached to the climbing event in 1953 can be realized from the fact that the news somehow only reached London on the morning of Queen Elisabeth II's coronation."

"Later, in the 1960s, when the Sputnik and Apollo space race between the Soviet Union and the United States of America was on we were all glued to or radio or TV sets. We remember that when Neil Armstrong, in 1969, as the first moon set to foot on the moon, he said: *That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind*. And one of his fellow astronauts described the view as *magnificent desolation*", professor Hassan explains.

"Such events create optimism and positive focus. No, we cannot all reach the moon, of course, but sports at top level and in everyday life should be used to create positive attitudes and friendship, and good health, social skills and all that is positive. Today, it can in many ways be used as a counterweight to all the negative issues we experience and talk about, such as terrorism, wars and conflicts."

"We all become better human beings if our thoughts are positive and our deeds are good", the psychology professor says.

## **PHOTOS \_\_ Choose some to illustrate the article**

### **A. Photo captions for photos of Pakistani youth in Brazil at the FIFA World Cup.**

#### **Photos attached**

1. Fahad Habib, 16, from Lyari, holding the 'Generation Amazing' banner at the FIFA World Cup in Brazil last summer. He was among the finalists in the FIFA 'Street Football World Cup' in Brazil in April.
2. Three smiling Pakistani boys Ijlal, Fahad and Arham, at the FIFA World Cup in Brazil last summer.
3. Three youth from Pakistan, Fahad, Uzma and Ijlal, with other friends at one of the football events in Brazil last summer.
4. "We are so glad that we have good cameras in our mobile phones so that we can show our friends at home all we have experienced at the FIFA Football World Cup in Brazil. We will cherish our memories forever", say Uzma and Faiza at a football match in Brazil last summer.
5. Pakistani boys and girls in Sao Paulo, Brazil during the FIFA World Cup last summer.

### **B. Photo caption for photo of Samina Baig**

#### **Photo sent separately**

1. Samina Baig, the first Pakistani woman to climb Mount Everest.
2. Alternatively: Another photo of Mount Everest, e.g. Samina Peak (to be downloaded from Internet). (The attached photo of Samina could be inserted in a corner.)

### **C. Photo of Snow Leopards**

#### **Photo to be sent**

1. The snow leopard in its natural habitat in the mountains above the Hunza Valley in Pakistan's Northern Areas.