**Cricket in Rawalpindi circa 1947 1970**

[**Rohail Salman**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/rohail-salman)

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At independence, Rawalpindi City had only one main ground that could be used to play cricket—Company Bagh. Like in most other major cities in British India before the arrival of the Crown, the East India Company established a park for recreation and sporting activities in Rawalpindi. After 1947, this park was used by the few cricket teams that existed within the city. The cantonment, on the other hand, had a disproportionately higher number of cricket grounds. There was the Pindi Club/Army Cricket Ground, the 501 Workshop Ground, the Central Ordnance Depot Ground, and the General Headquarters (GHQ) Ground. This meant that room for club cricket in the city itself was very limited at this time in history, and if cricket were to evolve in the city it had to come from elsewhere.

This is where another type of British influence intervened to assist cricket in the city. In 1949, a British missionary from Mill Hill, Father Thysen, moved from Kashmir to Rawalpindi and established the Saint Mary’s School on Murree Road. The school was housed in the as yet under construction Holy Family Hospital, and the students were housed in the 5 completed rooms of the building. The first group of students in the school contained an illustrious few individuals. These included Asif Nawaz Janjua, a future Army Chief of Pakistan, Akhtar Ayub, the son of Pakistan’s first military ruler Ayub Khan, Ijaz Butt, a future international cricketer and PCB Chairman, and Javed Burki, a future Pakistan test captain. The students’ interest in cricket was honed and organised under the guidance of their mathematics teacher, Mr Qureshi, who multiple people described as a “cricket fanatic”. Mr Qureshi, like other Pindiites who wished to play cricket, was frustrated at the lack of facilities to play organised cricket, even within the school itself. But as luck and privilege would have it, most of these aforementioned students were friends, and children of Army officers, and high-ranking ones at that. Javed Burki and his brother Jamshed, along with Asif Nawaz, used to run around the Signals Parade Ground behind the army’s School of Signals, which was headed by Asif Nawaz’s uncle, Brigadier Zaman. They formed a cricket club at this ground, aptly named the Officers’ Children Cricket Club (OCCC), and Mr Qureshi finally had a group of enthusiastic and resourceful students for the Saint Mary’s School to start its own cricket team.

[Global COVID deaths up 60% in last 6 weeks: WHO chief](https://nation.com.pk/12-Dec-2020/global-covid-deaths-up-60-percent-in-last-6-weeks-who-chief)

From then on, Pindi finally had a functioning schools’ cricket tournament. The first year it was played, the Saint Mary’s team included the two Burki brothers, Asif Nawaz as an off spinner, Ijaz Butt as a wicket-keeper batsman, and Akhtar Ayub as the standout fielder in the team, as described by Javed Burki himself. These school matches were played all over, including at the Company Bagh, at times at the Army Sports Ground, and some matches at a smaller ground that was hosted by Islamia School.

As the years went on, Saint Mary’s continued to play in the school circuit, winning many more tournaments. Due to a lack of proper record, it is hard to determine the exact number of tournaments won by the school, but going by evidence given by various cricket playing alumni, it is clear that Saint Mary’s remained an integral part of the school cricket circuit. As Javed Burki and the school’s first cricket team bowed out in the early 50s, another group of players took over, this time led by future ICC President, and PCB Chairman, Ehsan Mani and future Pindi cricket regular Saleem Asghar Mian. Whereas the group of students before them had their math teacher Mr Qureshi influencing their early interest in the sport, Mani claims that it was the Oval test victory in 1954 by the Pakistan team that really changed the outlook for cricket in Pindi, and in Pakistan. The school tournaments in Pindi continued into the 60s, and this is when Saint Mary’s shifted from its small campus on Murree Road to a purpose built 53-hectare campus in Lalazar, providing more space for the cricket-hungry schoolchildren in Pindi.

[Pakistan reports 2,729 new coronavirus cases in one day](https://nation.com.pk/12-Dec-2020/coronavirus-kills-71-pakistanis-infects-2-729-in-one-day)

While school cricket continued to produce players, at least for the time being, a lack of university circuit like Lahore, and a weak and everchanging first-class structure meant that the majority of players had to earn their place in a limited club circuit. Once again, the majority of clubs in the city were from the cantonment, given that they had their own grounds to play and practice in. These clubs included the 501 and 502 workshop teams, the Central Ordnance Depot (COD) team, and the Combined Military Transport and Sports Depot (CMTSD). The biggest club however, was Pindi Club—another gift of British rule—that was a gymkhana based on the same model of other such establishments in major cities, and made mostly to cater to British civil servants and army officers. The city had one major club, very simply named Pindi Sports led by the influential Babu Fazal Elhai, making their home in the Company Bagh, along with a couple of smaller but important clubs in MAO Club, and Friends Club. The tumult of the initial independence years would also come to affect cricket in the city. As fate would have it, Liaquat Ali Khan had been addressing a crowd in the Company Bagh when he was shot by his assassin. In the years following that, the Company Bagh would be renamed Liaquat Bagh after the fallen Prime Minister. The only cricket ground within the city limits was turned into a memorial site for Liaquat Ali Khan, taking away the limited opportunity the residents of the area had to play cricket. Both Javed Burki and Ehsan Mani, when asked why there was such little cricket in the city in the early years pointed to the fact that the city was small, and mostly a garrison town.

[US confirms strike on Taliban in Afghanistan's Zhari](https://nation.com.pk/12-Dec-2020/us-confirms-strike-on-taliban-in-afghanistan-s-zhari)

The spine of club cricket in Pindi was the Pataudi League, a club tournament featuring numerous, sometimes changing clubs, named after the former Indian captain Iftikhar Ali Khan Pataudi. This league was played in the summer every year alongside a knockout tournament called the Hot Weather Cup. Though first-class cricket eventually arrived in Pindi towards the end of the 1950s, the vast majority of cricketing talent was honed and developed by these clubs. Many of these clubs were directly or indirectly under different departments of the armed forces, such as the 501 and 502 Workshop teams, the COD team, the CMTSD team, and even the GHQ team. Two of the bigger clubs that were not part of the services were Pindi Club, and Pindi Sports. Whereas Pindi Sports was spearheaded by Babu Fazal Elahi, and was driven by his inclusion and grooming of youngsters from the city, the Pindi Club team under the stewardship of Sallahudin Khan contained many players who would go on to find first-class and even international success. Maqsood Ahmed was one of these international cricketers who played many games in Pindi, and many for Pindi Club. Both Javed Burki and Ehsan Mani remember Ahmed being a consistent presence at the club as they were growing up, with his mentorship and support allowing them to become better cricketers. The Pataudi League had no shortage of cricketing star power, however. Future internationals and first-class stalwarts Javed Akhtar, Ijaz Butt, Miran Bux and Munir Malik amongst others featured regularly in the league.

[US top court rejects effort to overturn polls for Trump](https://nation.com.pk/12-Dec-2020/us-top-court-rejects-effort-to-overturn-polls-for-trump)

Even here, however, the dominance of the military was evident, albeit in a more positive manner. Since Company Bagh has been re-established as a memorial site, many players from the city found themselves without adequate facilities to further their own game. These military clubs hired talented players from the school circuit on a payroll, and ensured that talent leakage in the city was kept to a minimum. One of these clubs that perhaps did the most for the youth in the city, was the CMTSD. Founded by Doctor Affaf, who Burki refers to as a genius.

As the politics of the country got more heated, local cricket in Pindi seemed to start taking a back seat. Many schools were nationalised under Bhutto, with their resources being cut down. This led to a lack of investment in sporting activities in schools, a consequence of which is still felt by many of the institutions. Club cricket also dwindled, with many grounds giving way to construction projects, or falling into disrepair, further limiting the grounds available for these clubs to play, and for the players to grow in. The lack of facilities obviously meant a declining output of players from the city, but the camaraderie that is so evident in the club circuit from the 50s to the 70s, also rapidly disappeared, leaving less room for the grooming of the youngsters coming into the sport.

[Enemy state working as 'a mafia': SAPM Moeed Yusuf](https://nation.com.pk/11-Dec-2020/enemy-state-working-as-a-mafia-sapm-moeed-yusuf)

One of the casualties of such problems, and a legend this article would be incomplete without mentioning is Mohammad Sabir. Sabir is an interesting case, because he links two eras of cricket in the city, if not temporally, then definitely thematically. A product of the 1960s and 1970s cricket culture in Pindi, Sabir was described by many of his captains including Maqsood Ahmed, as the finest leg-spinner of his generation, on par, if not better than Richie Benaud.