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# Noor Alam

## The man who Pakistan hockey epoch-making



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By Dr Ijaz Ahmed

### hockey

Certain moments in a nation's history are epoch making. Sports play a vital role in a country's life. Sporting success helps create a country's image internationally. That is why it is often said that sportsmen are a nation's best ambassadors. Apart from this, victory in the sports arena instil a certain self confidence in a nation's soul.

People may differ while selecting their own favourite greatest sporting moments in Pakistan's history. But in this scribe's humble opinion, arguably Pakistan's greatest moment of sporting glory was winning the first ever Olympic gold medal, in hockey of course, at Rome in 1960. Many arguments can be put to augment the above.

The Olympic gold holds a unique importance. When a country wins an Olympic gold, it not only becomes number one among all the countries who participate in that particular discipline in that particular Olympics event, and not only among those who had tried to qualify in the Olympics for that specific event, but it wins against all the countries who are present at that very championship. Yes, this is a fact.

When the Olympics medals table is flashed on a screen or printed in a newspaper, the table gives the nations' standings according to the number of medals won (without specifying the particular events). I vividly remember that when Pakistan last won an Olympic gold, in 1984 at the Los Angeles event, they finished 25th in the medals table - by virtue of that solitary gold - out of 150 odd countries. Such is the importance of an Olympic gold.

While in the case of Pakistan, that first gold medal has to be seen through many other perspectives. It was indeed a dream come true for the whole nation, for which it had to wait for as many as 12 long years. Before Pakistan's birth in 1947, the united British India had won three consecutive Olympic gold medals, before the Hitler war. And the Muslim players constituted a significant proportion of all these teams.

So it was natural that the new nation of Pakistan expected an Indo-Pak final in the first post-Partition Olympics in 1948. But what to say about hoping for either gold or silver, the Pakistan side failed to land even a bronze medal, finishing fourth in fact, and four years later in the 1952 Olympics, Pakistan again ended fourth.

Needless to say there was immense disappointment throughout the country.

An inquiry committee headed by Mian Riazuddin, now deceased, was formed to probe into the reasons of the double failure and then to give its recommendations. As a result of the committee's suggestions, a complete restructuring of Pakistan's hockey was carried out. More domestic tournaments

were organised, the selection committee was restructured (comprising only former stalwarts rather than a quota representation of each province) and the captain's role was enhanced in matters of team selection, playing strategy, etc.

All these efforts bore immediate results. Pakistan reached the final of the 1956 Olympics where it lost to India by a controversial goal. Still the

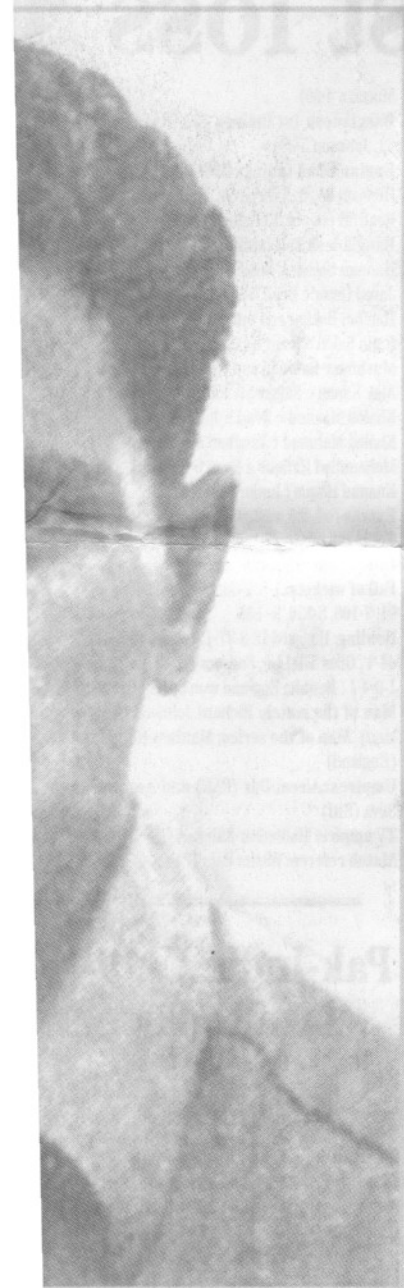
silver medal won there was the first ever Olympic medal of any colour obtained by Pakistan in any sporting discipline.

However, the nation was rightly craving for the ultimate prize, an Olympic gold medal. Pakistan earned the much needed morale booster by winning the Asian Games gold in 1958 relegating India to the second position. And they entered the 1960 Olympic final.

the aspects.

As anticipated again between Pakistan and India. The date was September. Pakistan's initial advantage was minutes scored in the first ever against its rivals. That is British hockey Holland described "Pakistan stake

# Alam: who created hockey's winning moment



after 13 minutes scored a classic goal. The opening move was made by inside-right Hameedi, who drew the defence beautifully and slipped away his winger Noor Alam with a clear run. Noor Alam's centre aimed at the back of the circle, found inside-left Naseer. The ball stopped dead on his stick and was flicked like a flash into the far side of India's goal. It turned out to be the winning goal, as indeed it deserved to be."

Yes, it was an historic moment as Pakistan went on to win the final by that solitary goal. Thus the green shirts ended India's 32 years old unbeaten record at the Olympics and a nation's joy knew no limits.

Naseer Bunda, scorer of that epic goal, left this world about a decade back. A few months back, hockey lovers of Pakistan heard the tragic news of the demise of Noor Alam - the man whose cross on that memorable day made it all possible.

Right-out Noor Alam was a vital member of that great side which brought those first hockey glories to the long waiting nation. In fact his international career spanned the years from 1956 to 1962, the period which brought Pakistan one success after another: silver in the 1956 Olympics, gold in the 1958 Asiad, gold in the 1960 Olympics and gold again in the 1962 Asian Games.

A man of humble origin, Noor Alam was born in Sheikhpura and had his early education in the town's Government School. Noor Alam's domestic hockey career initially started in Sheikhpura and he also represented Police in the National Championships.

In those days Rawalpindi was not only a big centre and nursery of hockey but it also attracted players from other regions. There were Army workshops and other such ancillary civil departments allied to the Army in Rawalpindi which offered employment to hockey players.

Remember, this was a period before the advent of hockey teams of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and the nationalised banks, etc. Noor Alam also shifted to Rawalpindi and joined one such department,

the ITD, i.e. the Inspection and Training Department. From then onwards till his death, he remained a Pindiite.

The civil departments of the Army (ITD, 501 Workshop, 502 Workshop, etc.) participated in local tournaments as separate entities but for major all Pakistan tournaments they were entered as a combined team titled MGO - Master General Ordnance.

For the annual National Championships all Army personnel came under the fold of the Pakistan Army team. For some years, in fact, there were two Army teams in the Nationals: one comprising only uniformed personnel while the other titled "Army Whites" consisted of civilians employees of the Army. Noor Alam also has the distinction of leading the Army Whites team.

And in one of these Nationals in the early 1960s both the Army teams contested the final of the National Championships. And the Army Whites team led by Noor Alam narrowly lost that final. Such was the domination of the Army hockey teams in those days. Even after his international career was over (in 1962), Noor Alam continued to represent the Army in the Nationals for quite a few years.

As said earlier, Noor Alam originally came from Sheikhpura, a town which itself has had a great hockey tradition. Two of his brothers also played hockey, one of whom Haji Pervez was good enough to attend the national camp. Likewise his three sons represented Rawalpindi in the National Championships.

So much so for his biography. As a player Noor Alam's strength were his "crossing" and "stoppage". As we know, in our traditional sub-continental style of hockey the main attacking thrust is via the right trio: right-half, right-in and right-out. Noor Alam was a vital cog in the wheel on the right with Dr Ghulam Rasool Chaudhry at right-half, skipper Hameedi at right-in and Noor Alam himself at right-out.

Hameedi always employed a hit to pass the ball and never "pushed" the ball. Then his stick was heavier than even that of the full-back but Noor Alam had the amazing ability to dead stop the "bullets" from Hameedi's stick and that too on the not so smooth grassy surfaces of those days unlike the "billiard table" like true artificial surfaces of today. His other notable attribute was his accurate "crossing".

Noor Alam was very aggressive and bold by nature and never hesitated to send a cross whenever the opportunity arose and even through the smallest of gaps. And his cross almost always reached the fellow forward, usually the centre-forward or the left-in.

All this made him a very effective right-winger though he did not possess great speed or crafty stick work. Apart from right-half and right-out, Noor Alam had also developed great

understanding with his centre-half, the great Anwaar Ahmed Khan. Whenever there was a gap, Anwaar's eagle eyes never missed it and he sent through balls in the direction of the ever ready Noor Alam.

Team man to the core, Noor Alam was a very hard working, disciplined and dedicated person. He was a simple man and good spirited soul. Because of his rugged built and and rural background he was affectionately called "Jat" by his teammates.

It deems interesting to mention here that the gold medal-winning eleven of 1960 had as many as four men from Rawalpindi in its ranks. Apart from goal scorer Naseer Bunda and goal provider Noor Alam there was custodian "Chacha" Rasheed and full-back Bashir. Another vindication of Pindi's domination of national hockey those days. Unfortunately all four of them are not in this world any more.

On the demise of Noor Alam, there was a small news item of about three lines in our newspapers. It was certainly not befitting a national hero of Noor Alam's stature - the man who made possible Pakistan's greatest sporting moment. Many hockey stalwarts rightly gave vent to their feelings against this apathy.

Former skipper and Noor Alam's teammate, Anwaar Ahmed Khan, in particular condemned the print media's biased attitude towards heroes of our national game saying "when a foreign cricket star like Bradman or Cronje dies, our press goes berserk and publishes news items comprising a number of columns but when a national hockey hero passes away the same newspeople simply ignore it."

On this I just have to remark this: "Respected Anwaar Sahib, actually most of the sports journalists of today are not prepared to work hard. They simply rely on news agencies and internet to gather information. They are not prepared to toil and explore. But if they get a smell of a foreign tour to cover some sporting event then they will run from pillar to post to grab the golden opportunity. Unfortunately, today we do not have people like the late Muslehuddin and Farooq Mazhar."

Without blowing my own trumpet, I must say that I contacted around 10 former hockey stalwarts in all parts of the country to compile this small tribute to our late hockey great. A national hero like Noor Alam certainly deserved better treatment from the nation, not only from the print media but also from the electronic media - at least a TV programme after his death.

Someone very rightly said "History never forgives those who forget their heroes." Unfortunately we are becoming a nation of such people.

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the aspects.  
As anticipated, the final was again between Pakistan and India. The date was the 9th of September. Pakistan gained the initial advantage and after 13 minutes scored the historic goal - the first ever against their arch rivals. That is how the famed British hockey journalist R L Holland described that goal:  
"Pakistan staked everything on instantaneous all-out attack and