**The man who made sports in Pakistan**



[**Major General Syed Ali Hamid**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/major-general-syed-ali-hamid)

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In the year 2000, an intriguing group of medals appeared for auction on the webpage of Christie, the auctioneers. The group included a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE), an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) as well as Hilal-e-Quaid-i-Azam. It also had impressive gallantry awards including the Distinguished Service Order with a bar and a Military Cross. The set was auctioned for £5000, a fairly high price for a set because CBEs rarely come up for auction, but a paltry amount when weighed against a distinguished career of over 40 years in the service of both the British India Army and the Pakistan Army.

These medals were awarded to Brigadier Cuthbert Harold Boyd Rodham, affectionately known as ‘Roddy’, to whom Pakistan and its army owe a great debt of gratitude for his immense contribution in promoting and organising sports during the 1950s and 1960s. As a child accompanying my father around Rawalpindi, I remember a gentle giant of a man, weighing 260 pounds and over six feet tall who was forever at the sports grounds. I also remember his limp, which was a result of the three injuries to his thigh.

[Belgium slightly relaxes coronavirus measures](https://nation.com.pk/02-Oct-2021/belgium-slightly-relaxes-coronavirus-measures)

He was commissioned into the 2/39th Royal Garhwal Rifles in 1919, saw action in the Third Afghan War, in punitive operations against the tribes, and won his Military Cross at Takkizam at the tender age of twenty-one and was injured in his thigh. During the Second World War, he commanded the 6/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles on the North West Frontier and in April 1944, he received his first real active service posting as second-in-command of the 1st Indian Infantry Brigade at Imphal. The evidence of his finest hour on the battlefield was in the citations for his ‘double DSOs’ that he earned when he consecutively commanded two infantry brigades which witnessed hard fighting during the counter-offensive launched by Gen Slim in Burma. In the assault crossing of the Irrawaddy: “Brigadier Rodham conducted the battle with consummate skill and coolness, and refused to allow the enemy to deter him from his main objective, which was to establish a Bridgehead on the South Bank of the Irrawaddy River. Throughout, Brigadier Rodham has shown the qualities of a fine Commander and his Brigade has been excellently handled”. During the Sibong operation he earned a bar to his D.S.O. “Throughout the whole period Brigadier Rodham showed untiring energy, courage and devotion to duty. His Brigade was tired but operated for six weeks in the monsoon without change of clothes or cover. In spite of this it fought magnificently. That it did so was largely due to his personal example.” At Independence, he opted to serve in the Pakistan Army. He was commanding the 114 Brigade at Lahore under the charismatic commander of 10 Division, Major General Iftikhar, where he led the memorial ceremony on the death of the Quaid in 1948.

[TTP militants desiring to shun militancy be given chance to join mainstream: Fawad](https://nation.com.pk/02-Oct-2021/ttp-militants-desiring-to-shun-militancy-be-given-chance-to-join-mainstream-fawad)

Right from his days at school, Roddy was a keen sportsman and an all-rounder who played football, rugby and hockey, and was also captain of the athletics team. During his tenure in Lahore he pursued his passion for sports by training the athletic team of the division and some of the athletes whom he mentored subsequently rose to national and international fame. From 1951 to 1957, he served as the Director of Infantry and finally Deputy Chief of General Staff, Pakistan Army between 1957 and 1963. Recognising his enthusiasm for sports, during his years at GHQ, Rodham was also appointed as President of the Army Sports Control Board.

Recruitment of soldiers was generally done at Recruiting Melas (fairs) and Rodham was a regular visitor, looking for boys who in his practiced eyes had the making of sportsmen and athletes. In an article, the famous sports editor Zakir Hussain Syed says: “In those days they had boys’ companies with young recruits and once their talent became known, they were groomed and became great and famous sportsmen especially from Chakwal area. However, their climb to eminence owed much to a blue blooded Englishman by the name of Brig Rodham who masterminded a fabulous sports programme for Army athletes including training by best foreign coaches and regular frequent competitive exposure. He understood the basic requirements of the system and dedicated himself to achieve unbelievable results. As a young kid, I used to frequently see him watch the training of athletes day in and day out at the Army Stadium Rawalpindi”. He was also the driving force behind organising athletics meets and all the Army’s best players and athletes were first discovered and later attained their high standard in these meets. Brig Rodham’s coaching strategy was way ahead of his times. “Imagine in 1954, he used to get a cameraman from ISPR to shoot the training and coaching session. Later in the evening; the athletes used to get together with the coach and Brig Rodham. A white bed sheet was used as a screen for what we call video analysis today. No wonder we had top class athletes and with his caring attitude, there was never a problem of the athletes with the administration.” When he retired, Brigadier Rodham was the last British officer serving in the Pakistan Army.

[Daniel Sturridge to continue his football career in Australia's Perth Glory](https://nation.com.pk/02-Oct-2021/daniel-sturridge-to-continue-his-football-career-in-australia-s-perth-glory)

So what did Pakistan achieve in field and track events under the stewardship of Rodham? Sharif Butt and Mirza Khan won gold in the 200m and 400m hurdles in 1954 in the Asian Games at Manila. Pakistan’s famous sprinter, Subedar Abdul Khaliq, was twice declared the ‘Fastest Man in Asia’, winning the gold at the Asian Games at Manila in 1954 and Tokyo in 1958. Honorary Captain Nawaz won back-to-back gold medals in the javelin throw in 1954 and 1958 games. Subedar Muhammad Iqbal and Jemadar Jalal Khan set a record in the British Commonwealth Games for the hammer-throw and javelin-throw respectively. 50,000 spectators at the White City Stadium in London stood up and applauded the stylish and handsome Muhammad Iqbal for three minutes for his record-breaking throw in a friendly competition in 1958. Honorary Captain Nawaz broke the British Commonwealth record for the javelin-throw in July 1960 at the same stadium during the British Athletic Associations Championship. Honorary Captain Ghulam Raziq picked up two golds in 110m hurdles at the 1958 and 1966 Asian Games and Mubarak Shah excelled in long distance, claiming two successive golds in 3,000m steeplechase in 1958 and 1962 and one in 5,000m in 1962. Of the twelve athletes selected to take part in the Olympic Games in 1960, eleven belonged to the Army, all coached by Rodham.

[Keeping women safe – Swvl introduces 'women only' rides from Lahore to Islamabad and vice versa](https://nation.com.pk/01-Oct-2021/keeping-women-safe-swvl-introduces-women-only-rides-from-lahore-to-islamabad-and-vice-versa)

Rodham’s contributions towards placing Pakistan in the top league of international hockey could fill a volume. Brigadier Shahid Jan vividly recalls his association with Roddy in Pindi when he played hockey for the army and Rodham, being an avid sports enthusiast (and administrator) used to show up at the hockey ground on his bicycle in uniform, having ridden straight from his office in the GHQ. The hockey team would respectfully line up to receive him and would customarily step forward to hold his bicycle, help the bulky gentleman dismount and hand him his cane which Roddy needed to walk. Roddy’s deep concern for the players made all the difference. Prior to the 1958 Asian Games, Bashir, who was one of the star hockey players, did not want to go to Tokyo because his father was to be operated on for hernia surgery. However, Rodham persuaded Bashir to go with the promise that he would personally look after his father. He kept his promise and requested General Shaukat, the Surgeon General to perform the surgery. When Bashir reached Tokyo by ship, a telegram from Rodham was awaiting informing him that the operation was successful and his father was in good health. He also ensured that his players did not miss Pakistani food while abroad. In 1956, he commissioned the services of Daffadar Cook Sher Khan from the 6th Lancers, who accompanied an Army Athletic Team to Germany and subsequently proceeded with the National Athletics Team to the Melbourne Olympics.

[35,000 subsidized apartments to be built in Lahore: Punjab CM](https://nation.com.pk/01-Oct-2021/35-000-subsidized-apartments-to-be-built-in-lahore-punjab-cm)

After retirement, the Government of Pakistan did not allow Rodham to pass into oblivion. For ten long years from 1963 till his death in 1973, he was the Director of Sports in the Government of Pakistan. Concurrently he was chairman of the Pakistan Boxing Federation and a member of the executive committee of the Pakistan Olympic Association. Rodham was a confirmed bachelor and was given a room in Flashman’s Hotel at Rawalpindi in perpetuity. The room was never refurbished while he lived there and remained shabby and without air conditioning. However, Rodham continued to enjoy a tremendous reputation amongst the upper echelons of the Pakistani Army, and was equally beloved by many former servicemen. Through friends in the British High Commission, he was kept supplied with liquor and spares for his motor car. The brigadier died in 1973 and left his worldly goods to Muhammad, his bearer and friend, These worldly goods also probably contained his medals which were initially sold for £3,600 at an auction held by Nix, Noonan & Webb in 1997 and again auctioned by Christies in 2000. I wonder where they are now and deserve to be in the Pakistan Army Museum. Unfortunately, the army and the nation never had a second Brigadier Rodham.