

## Arun Vittala

This tall, lanky, ever courteous and mild-mannered man off the field turns into a formidable opponent when on it. Most NTCA members have had a taste of his wily left arm spinners and more so, his mental disintegration techniques that have contributed to many a win for his native DCC, are well known! Who else could one be talking about besides Arun Vittala.

Arun is a household name as far as cricket in the Metroplex and dare I say it, in the USA goes. If you want to find him on the weekend, a safe bet would be to go to Plano's Russell Creek Park and he is bound to be there. Either assuming the role of a strict disciplinarian on Saturdays, teaching Under 12 year old aspirants on the importance of punctuality, discipline and hard work or on Sunday as a supremely fit player who is the cornerstone of any side he is part of.

Besides these two roles, he also is at the core of every effort within NTCA to promote the game in schools among young people, to bring national tournaments to the area, to work with the city and other authorities to build the infrastructure needed to put Dallas on the world cricket map and so many more things that need to get done to enable the expansion of the game beyond its current state.



His association with cricket began when he was 12 years old when he was given the job of being the "mat boy" for Marepalli Cricket Club in Hyderabad, India. "Shortie" as he was ironically called then due to his small frame would carry water, score, fold and unfold the club mat and do everything else but play!

Finally in 1970 at the age of 15, Arun was afforded the opportunity to play for the club that he had served so conscientiously all this while. And that was the beginning of a career that took him far and wide. He immediately began to get noticed for his naggingly accurate left arm spin and his steady batting. Arun would practice for hours with a friend long after most of his club-mates were gone, bowling to one stump and batting with that one stump in hand, watching the ball hit the stump as his coach had told him.

He was rewarded with his first out of town tour which was to the Sheesh Mahal Trophy in Lucknow. His exposure there to Bishen Singh Bedi was something that left a lasting impression on this 15 year old lad.

From Marepalli cricket club, this left arm spinner and top order went on to play for Badruka College and then Osmania University where he rubbed shoulders with the likes of Shivalal Yadav, Shahid Akbar et al. Arun Vittala played a key role in helping his University win the Rohington Baria Trophy in 1977 in Dharwad. In a thriller, Osmania beat a star studded Delhi University side with the likes of Arun Lal and Kirti Azad in their midst. But it was Arun, the batsman who helped them achieve that scoring big in both innings. Arun went on to become the MVP in the final and that earned him a berth in the Hyderabad Ranji Trophy Probables list.

Besides being the place that turned his cricketing fortunes, Dharwad also was the place Arun met Champa, his would be wife, for the first time. Their romance blossomed as his cricketing career did and they eventually tied the nuptial knot after a four year long distance relationship.

In this time, Arun was in the Hyderabad Ranji Team in the 14 along with Meher Baba, Shahid Akbar, Narasimha Rao, Arshad Ayub et al. He was also selected for the Hyderabad Blues which toured Sri Lanka in 1979-80 where again he distinguished himself with the ball and earned the Man of the series award against Ceylon Tobacco featuring the likes of Ranjit Fernando.

During his stint with the Ranji side he came into contact with the Hyderabad stalwart, M L Jaisimha and Arun credits "Jai" as being the single biggest influence on his life. Jai was known for his astute captaincy, mentally toughness and the knack of knowing what it takes to win a cricket game. The two hit it off real well and were great friends with the one sour point being when Jai discovered that Arun and Champa had married without him being in the know.

On the academic front, Arun finished his BCom, MCom and LLB. He worked and played for Syndicate bank between 1979-81. Finding it hard to make it into the Hyderabad XI, Arun decided to move to the USA to do an MBA in 1982, making a clean break from cricket. Or so he thought!

After graduating with his MBA from UT in Midland, he joined Lowe's Anatole in Dallas as a Credit Manager in 1984. He happened to be browsing the newspaper

on a Sunday morning and much to his shock, came across the word cricket in it! The paper carried fixture details of a game between DCC and a visiting team. And the paper also contained Suhas Naik as a contact person. That is where Arun's association with DCC and cricket in the US started.

In the 20 years since then, Arun went on to play for Central Zone twice, led an invitational XI against the Indian Test side in 1986 in Dallas and was selected to play for the US national team in 1987 and 1988. Since the early 90's Arun concentrated on moulding a winning unit for DCC along with Suhas and how! His playing days with DCC have seen him become one of the foremost exponents of left arm spin in the US.

Perhaps more than all his achievements on the field, it is his energy and devotion to the game off it that is all the more remarkable. In 1996 he became the founding President of NTCA. In 2001-02 he was the Regional Director of the United States of America Cricket Association (USACA) for the Central West Region. He has since handed over the position to the young and energetic Syed Shahanawaz but continues to be a prime driving force for cricket in these arid parts along with Mike Ghouse, Suhas Naik and many others.

Arun recalls with a lot of pride that it was he, with the support of Suhas Naik, who was singularly responsible for getting the City of Plano and Ed Voss to ultimately agree to lay no fewer than FIVE new concrete wickets in the North West Corner of Russell Creek Park, thus transforming the park into the premier cricket playing arena in the whole of USA. Cricket in Plano has taken off in a huge way since and the staging of the Eastern and Western Conference Championships of USACA on the weekend of June 18 through 20, 2004 in Plano was ample testimony to that.

His dream is to bring International Cricket to our doorstep and laying a turf wicket in Plano is one of the first things he wants done to get us there. He articulates his ideas of how this game needs to become a spectator sport from a player sport that it today is in order to stand a chance of gaining traction among the American masses. "We need to change the game to suit the American context", says Vittala and goes on to lay out his vision of how to go about doing that. If his life thus far is anything to go by, one would have to assume that he is unlikely to rest until his dream is achieved.

He winds up on a philosophical note : "This game has given me everything - my wife, my career, my sense of discipline, all my friends. I want to give back to it some of what I have learnt and benefited from in my 40 years of association with the game".

Like is the case with all strong personalities, one might not agree with him always, one may think he is opinionated, one may hate him when he plays

against you but one thing you cannot help doing is to admire and respect this man for all that he does and has done for cricket.

He is happily married to Champa Vittala and their 14 year old son Kartik aspires to follow his father's lead in matters cricketing.

Arun Vittala is a life member of NTCA since 1996.

***//NTCA Media Relations***