



# KYPROS CRICKET

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*The Cyprus Team in Finland (photo ICC)*

## Cyprus fights to the Finnish!

In July 2022, the Cyprus Team visited Finland for the T20i World Cup Qualifiers - heady times! - team coach, **Richard Cox**, gives an insider's view.

If someone had said before the trip to Finland, "you'll go into the last day fighting for 3rd spot" I'd have snapped their hand off!

The team arrived in Helsinki full of hope and after a strong training day at the Kerava ground everyone returned to the tournament hotel in good spirits having got the cobwebs out of their system after the long flight via Germany.

Our first game against old foes the Isle of Man proved a rude awakening as Cyprus were bowled out for 120 with Shoab

Ahmed (25) Sadun (22) and Tiwari (18) the only batters showing any kind of form or adaptation to the new surroundings. A target of 121 proved easy for IoM to overhaul with George Burrows (69) being the pick of the batters.

A return to the hotel saw a players meeting with everyone giving feedback on the day's play and us setting up a "plan of how to play in Finland" so that we could go one better against Romania. We set out 3 simple key principles for all players to follow with the bat, the ball and in the field. Team dinner followed at the nearby Nepalese which was to become our second home.

Match two saw us arguably play our best cricket of the week against a Romanian side (now ICC ranked at 44) who came to the tournament with a recent record of played 22, lost 5. Batting first again we totted up 154-8 in a much-improved display albeit not quite to the "team batting plan" with Shoab

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(30) Austin (34) and Akila (34). We then squeezed Romania into submission with Guri (3-26) Lalli (2-29) and Shoaib (2-21). The latter picking up Player of the Match in the process. Sadly, we were later to find that opening batter Akila had 2 hairline fractures of the thumb which would hamper his progress in the week.

The following day saw us play a Turkey team who were undergoing a complete revamp in players and governance. A rampant Cyprus team clocked in with a vibrant 183-8 thanks to a quickfire 40 off 18 balls from Roman, Shoaib again with 27 as well as Lalli (22 off 9) and Guri (31 off 24). Turkey were then destroyed by the new ball attack but Cyprus saved the best until last with Sadun taking 4-1 including a first T20i hat trick for Cyprus. A worthy man of the match awaited Sadun as manager Muhammad Husain offered to translate for Sadun in the post-match interview only for Sadun to reply to the questioning in fluent English leaving the manager somewhat confused!

Two rest days then followed which is not what CCA wanted or needed. Whether the boys switched off a bit, became complacent or lacked application we will never know but the game against Serbia proved to be one that we lost as opposed to Serbia winning it. Despite our usual preparations as we returned to the Kerava Ground we adopted some old habits of losing wickets in clutches and only amassing 125. Again 3 batters scored 20s and didn't go on. This was a key factor in our downfall. We also chose to give opportunities to players who had not previously been featuring - a subject of much debate of course but one could argue this was also a contaminating factor in the loss.

Serbia batted sensibly at times, sent in their "accelerators" to whisk the game away from us and



*Iftekar Jaman Hits out against Finland*

duly cantered past our total 6 down. We finished second in the group on net run rate and looked forward to the Finland 3rd place play off.

Arriving to an immaculately prepared Kerava for the finals day the boys assembled for the Cyprus National Anthem in some anticipation of a return to success. Sadly, our bowlers radars were not set correctly and 12 wides plus some dropped catches allowed the hosts to scoot away to 159 all out with Guri 4-35 and Tiwari 3-14 being the only bowlers to maintain any form of consistency with the ball. However, a strong steady start where we looked to stay in the game was always possible and in Sadun (50\*) we finally found someone who was prepared to play the tough cricket in overs 7 to 15 and hold the innings together. With Guri's flurry of boundaries (27) we found ourselves behind the rate but in the game. With 2 overs to go and 30 needed some excellent power hitting from Jaman (22 in

10 balls) meant we needed 22 of the last over. Six and a four of the first two balls had the Fins panicking with multiple field changes. 12 off 4 was now possible. But the next ball Jaman 'toed' the ball to deep midwicket and whilst the batsman crossed Sadun could not see us home. And so, 4th was confirmed as our final finishing position together with an improved ICC ranking of 56th. Oh for those extra 12 runs against a 49th ranked Finland. The rankings caused much discussion through the 10 days with all the countries and whatever the algorithms behind them they are a marker of where we are. We now need to climb through the 50s and into the 40s as the next target.

Back in the hotel for the final presentation evening saw the Cyprus team complimented by all. Not only did we win hearts and minds we firmly put our name on the map as a country to be watched, a "dangerous team", a talented team, but also one that has the capacity to self-destruct.



*Shoaib Ahmad - POTM vs Romania (photo ICC)*

The performances has made countries interested in playing Cyprus in Cyprus; already a number of countries have been in touch regarding future series and, as we know, the only way you improve is by volume of opportunity. Sadly, some of the

current squad will possibly not wear the CCA shirt again due to their careers and family plans, but this give the opportunity to promote younger players. For those that remain, the opportunities are endless, the lessons of the trip are there to build on back in Cyprus and the hope for the future that we will go one better next time, remains a burning desire for us all.

For my part Its been an honour to once again lead the cricketing side for the trip and to see the players respond to the demands of a tournament where the regulations are strict, the media coverage is constant and the routines exacting. Finally an opportunity to thank the Board of CCA for their hard work, the selectors, the players and most of all the Chair Muhammad Husain for his fellowship, advice,



*Chamal Sadun - POTM vs Turkey (photo ICC)*

guidance, organisation and support.

On to the next series and hopefully more successes but for now its back to Cyprus for the finales of the domestic competitions and no doubt some inter-team rivalry as this team return to their clubs. Exciting times...



*Iftekar Jaman hits the sweet spot (photo ICC)*



# Cyprus Men's Cricket 2022



*Muhammad Bilal bowling for Moufflons vs Amdocs, 15 May 2022*

2022 was a busy year in Cyprus cricket, with four league competitions taking place. The number of teams competing was more than ever before, and the strength of local cricket was demonstrated by each tournament being won by a different team.

The first event - and probably the most important as it carried the prize of entry to the European Cricket League for the winner - was a Twenty20 league which ran from May to September. The 18 teams were split into three groups, with the top two from each advancing to a super-6 stage, after which the top two met in the final.

Two of the groups had clear winners - Cyprus Moufflons and Punjab Lions - and runners-up - Sri Lanka Lions and Napa Kings. But the third group, comfortably won by Black Caps, had a tie for second place after Markhor, a new team in the league, gained a surprise win over Riyaan. The two finished level on points so, under the

rules at that time, Markhor were placed above Riyaan because of that result.

Runs flowed from the bat, with 18 team scores above 200 in the 45 matches in the group stage. Life was hard for the bowlers, particularly at Ypsonas with its shortish boundaries and fast outfield.

In the super-6s Black Caps made a great start with two big wins before being narrowly beaten by Punjab Lions in another high-scoring match. The Lions won their other matches comfortably to finish top of the table, with Black Caps second.

The teams therefore met again in the final, but this time it was a



*DRS? Bail is dislodged while the bat is raised - excellent umpiring - this close call was given out*

one-sided affair, as the Lions rolled over the Caps for 88, with captain Gurpartap Singh taking 5-17 and Taranjit Singh 4-18. The Punjabi team took less than 9 overs to score the runs, with Zeeshan Mehmood unbeaten on 51.

All in all the competition was one for the batters, with 8 centuries scored. Top of the list was Gurpartap with 638 runs at an average of 70, with a strike rate of 240 and three centuries, leading his team to the title. Top bowler was Waqar Ali of Moufflons with 22 wickets at an average under 10 and an economy rate of under 6 runs per over - very impressive in such batter-friendly conditions. The best match performance by a bowler, however, was Sri Lankans' Buddika Ranasinghe's amazing figures of 7-9, completely baffling the Cyprus Super Kings batters with his left-arm swing bowling.

Twelve teams contested the T10 competition during the summer months. The top two from each of the four groups advanced to the knockout stages. Again the batters enjoyed themselves, with scores of over 100 in 10 overs being reached frequently.

Another new team, Kings XI Punjab, caused an upset by beating the established Sri Lankan CC from Nicosia. Riyaan won their group matches and quarter-final comfortably, so it was a surprise when they were heavily beaten in the semi-final by Limassol Zalmi.

In the other semi-final Rasedul Hasan hit 73 as Nicosia Tigers scored a massive 152-3, and followed it up with 3-12 to see off Limassol Qalandars. In the final, however, Tigers could only manage 89-7 in the face of the bowling of Babar Ayub and Faisal Khan, who took three wickets each. Zalmi's Noman Zeb and Umar Shah knocked off the runs without loss to secure the trophy.

Babar and Faisal were the competition's leading wicket-takers, while Rasedul was the top runscorer.

Starting in late summer on Saturdays, a 40-overs league was competed by 7 teams on a round robin basis, with the top two meeting in the final. This was a competitive tournament, as all teams had successes and failures, and there was a tied



*Chandana Prartana takes evasive*

match between Sri Lanka Lions and another new team, Royal CC.

Amdocs caused an early shock by scoring over 300 against Moufflons, with Preetaj Deol recording a century. Limassol Sri Lanka Lions beat their rivals Sri Lankan CC from Nicosia in a tight game, then Moufflons bounced back with a Cyprus record score of 451 against Cyprus Super Kings, with a century by Scott Austin and two other batsmen in



*The controversial Autumn T20 Final day - which was played in January 2023 - Gursewak Singh bowling against Sri Lanka Lions*

the nineties. The Super Kings recovered from this mauling to beat Amdocs in a topsy-turvy competition.

Eventually it was Sri Lanka Lions and Moufflons who qualified for the final, both teams boosted by their very strong batting lineups. Zeeshan Sarwar's 90 took Moufflons to a 5-wicket victory just before the autumn light faded, continuing a successful period for the club.

On an individual level Chamal Sadun of Sri Lanka Lions was easily the highest runscorer with 453 at an average of 64, while the same team's Suresh Janaka was the leading bowler with 20 wickets.

The Autumn T20 started in October and was completed in January 2023, with a record 19 teams participating. The top two in each of the four groups advanced to the knockout stage.

No team managed to win all its group matches, although Sri Lanka Lions might have done if they had not had one game abandoned due to violence on the pitch, which led to five of their players being suspended and taking no further part in the competition.

Markhor and Bazigar did well as relatively new teams to qualify for the quarter finals, but there was disappointment for Sri Lankan CC who missed out narrowly on net run rate after finishing level with Black Caps and Riyaan, who both



*Ouch! Roshan Lakmal of Sri Lankan Lions wears one for the team*

progressed.

Perhaps the most notable result in the group stage was Napa Kings' two-wicket win over the mighty Punjab Lions, thanks to Tanvir Taariq's 4-14.

All the group winners won their quarter final matches, although Moufflons had to rely on a narrow DLS verdict when their game with Bazigar was abandoned. Both semi finals were decided by surprisingly large winning margins - Moufflons beating Punjab Lions by 7 wickets, with a century for Mehran Khan, and Sri Lanka Lions beating Riyaan by 8 wickets with a full 5 overs to spare after Srinath Rajith took 4-19.

The final was a close and

controversial match. Chasing the Lions' 161-7, Moufflons struggled against Suresh Janaka (5-34) and started the last over on 160-8, needing two more runs with two wickets left.

After a wicket fell on the first ball, the last man was run out by a "Mankad", leaving Sri Lanka Lions the winners by a single run. Their players also took the individual accolades; Srinath Rajith was the competition's leading bowler with 12 wickets, while Chamal Sadun and Akila De Silva were the top runscorers with 369 and 342 runs respectively.

All in all a very full year of cricket with some outstanding individual and team performances. A personal choice for player of the year would be Chamal Sadun, who excelled with bat and ball and in

the field in the three competitions in which he played. As for team of the year - your guess is as good as mine!

2022 was also the farewell year in Cyprus cricket for two exceptional players who have contributed greatly over recent years - Punjab Lions all-rounder Gurpartap Singh, who has led his team and the national team from the front with his performances; and Mehran Khan of Moufflons who has been probably the best batsman in Cyprus and was a major factor in his team's successes. Thanks and best wishes to both of them.



# Triumph for Episkopi Boys & Girls

*Heritage School hosted an inter-school competition in May it was great fun and very hot!  
Organiser Richard Boxall and Andrew Pepper were there*



*Heritage School offers a grandstand view of the games*

The annual Junior Schools Cricket tournament hosted by Heritage School starts with a misleadingly cool and calm atmosphere when the organisers arrive early to set up ready for the games.

Once the coaches start arriving from the five visiting schools and the children pour out, it becomes much more frenetic. Luckily, the umpires are well drilled and the organisers have had plenty of experience with running the event and the games are soon underway - with 26 teams taking part; fourteen boys and 12 girls.

The teams were six a side with a fixed innings for each player so everyone had a go at batting and bowling. The tournament had group stages after which the successful teams advanced to the semi-final and then the finals.

The visiting schools' teachers spoke enthusiastically about cricket and how much the children enjoyed the day. Akrotiri School's Kevin Robinson said, "This is my first event here. We've got after school cricket clubs running, but the main thing is the children enjoying it and I've seen lots of smiles!"

Silverline's Costas Stylianoudis was also on his first visit to Heritage School for the tournament and he said that some of the students he'd brought had been before and they'd been looking forward to it all year and were excited to come back.

Having been to several of these tournaments, I was impressed by a lot of the players I saw - it definitely seemed a step up from previous years with well-drilled fielding in evidence - it was clear that some players had been receiving coaching.

I was also introduced to Heritage school's new cricket nets where older children can practise hard-ball cricket.

The tournament turned out to be a double success for Episkopi School, who won both the girls and boys events.

In the boys' event Episkopi beat Heritage in the final, while their girls team beat Foley's to win their final.

Trophies were provided by Cyprus Cricket Association and presented by Mr Gary Butcher of Heritage School, who expressed appreciation for the hard work of the volunteer umpires and photographer on a hot, sunny day. Over 150 children had enjoyed the competition, and perhaps the next Ben Stokes or Heather Knight might emerge from Cyprus!

# Women's cricket goes from strength to strength



*Women's cricket worldwide has seen an explosion in interest and Cyprus is no exception. Cyprus Cricket has been lucky enough to get Sri Lankan under-23 international player, Irisha Witharana, involved in Women's cricket as a player and coach. Andrew Pepper chatted with her.*

Irisha arrived in Cyprus from Sri Lanka in 2019 and became involved in Cyprus cricket soon afterwards.

One of the most striking things about watching Irisha, apart from her obvious talent for the game, is how much she enjoys playing. Every photograph I have of her playing has her smiling; her enthusiasm is catching - I wish I'd had a cricket coach like her!

***Irisha, how did you get into cricket; did you play at school or with your family?***

I started playing cricket during my school days and my father and two younger sisters also play cricket.

***Are you a batter or bowler or do you consider yourself an all-rounder?***

I'm an all-rounder, but my preferred role is batting.

***How did you find out about cricket in Cyprus?***

One of my friends told me Cyprus had started a women's training session. Then I looked into it, then I decided I have to take a stand on this!

***You're a level 1 coach; what gave you the interest in coaching?***

Yes, I am a level 1 coach. I finished my coaching course around two years before I came to Cyprus. My first coach, Mahesh Sandaruwan



*Irisha with her trademark smile*

de Silva, and other coaches, told me I could teach well, so I did the qualification.

***Do you support a particular team and/or player? Why?***

Yes, the team from the college where I played, G/ Devapathiraja national college

***Are you interested in becoming a qualified coach, scorer or umpire?***

The CCA runs regular courses on the island in association with the ICC, not only for coaching but also for scoring and umpiring. Remember, there are plenty of ways to enjoy the game other than playing and watching!

You can contact the CCA on their website for more information





*When I first watched Irisha batting, her enthusiasm was obvious alongside her ability*

Foundation of Goodness [editor's note, the team won the Sri Lankan national school sports festival in 2018].

My favourite players are my fiancé Sujith Thennakoon and my two younger sisters. My happiness is that all three play well.

***What is your most memorable cricket moment?***

The day our school won the championship for the first time under my leadership.

***What's your best moment on a cricket pitch?***

My first unbeaten 108 in the Sri Lanka district tournament.

***What's your proudest achievement in cricket?***

I was lucky enough to be selected for and play on the Sri Lanka under-23 tour of Thailand. I was picked for the journey amid many difficulties.

I see it as the result of about five years of very intense training and I was able to gain a lot of experience in my cricket career from that tour. I was also able to train with the Sri Lankan development squad for over five years.

***How did you find the transition to hard-ball cricket?***

I'd played soft-ball cricket at school for a whole year. After that, the head of sports for the school, Y.Nishantha Kumara, introduced me to hard-ball cricket. I got a lot of support from my parents and family members.

***What are your recommendations for Cyprus Cricket? How can Cyprus Cricket improve women cricket? And how can Cyprus Cricket attract more women cricketers?***

Firstly, to have an ideal program, there is a need for better communication. Secondly, there should be commitment from everyone, commitment is what leads to victory. In order to develop cricket in Cyprus, there should be regular training sessions and matches. Finally, adequate facilities should be made available.

And I would like to give my best support and share all my knowledge with Cyprus cricketers. I will give maximum support to bring Cyprus cricket to a higher level.

# I Was There!



*“Expect the unexpected” might be the most useless advice ever offered but if you want something surprising, going to a cricket match isn’t the worst idea. Andrew Pepper has been reading the tea-leaves.*

Alice Park must have been full of pride when her husband Roy strode out to bat for Australia in an Ashes Test. He took his guard, Alice dropped her eyes towards her knitting then she looked up again to see the stumps are at an unfortunate angle and Roy walking off the pitch; bowled first ball. Alice had not only missed his innings, it turned out she’d missed his entire international career. Dr Roy Park had been picked as a late replacement for the 1920 Melbourne Test and his international batting career lasted 1 ball.

There are two morals to this story; firstly, have a bigger squad if you don’t want to find yourself picking a local doctor to bat number 3 for Australia. Secondly, you never know when something amazing is going to happen in life, but amazing things do seem to happen more at cricket matches so look away at your peril.

Cricket isn’t like other sports; my father put it best – in football, you can tell who’s winning by looking at the score, in cricket you can’t. An example chosen completely at random; At Edgbaston in 1981, Australia were 87-3 chasing 151, Botham came on to bowl and took 5 wickets for 1 run. Australia lost by 30 runs in what was described as the biggest cricketing upset in a fortnight (Australia had lost at Headingly two weeks earlier after making England follow on).

The point of this story isn’t to make me relish England beating Australia (well, it isn’t entirely that) but to make the point that the extraordinary happens in cricket and, annoyingly, *without any warning*. Even when a game

seems to be drifting towards a draw, I’m compelled to watch. When I’m at a game, if I have somewhere else I have to get to, I feel a terrible dilemma - how long can I stay? Many times I’ve walked backwards out of a ground, trying to watch as many balls as possible. That’s what came to mind when I heard about the result of the final of the Autumn T20 competition, described in this very issue, I had left early and later asked CCA chairman Muhammad who’d won? “Sri Lanka by one run. There was a Mankad”

Now, a Mankad is a controversial and very rare form of dismissal; I’ve never seen one, let alone seen one in a final. If only there had been an omen prompting me to stay; an eagle dropping a scorecard on to my head, a siren voice telling me to stay or a piece of toast with a message on it. I’ve accepted that won’t happen, but I’ve also learnt to watch in the knowledge and hope that the remarkable might just happen the very next ball.

And sometimes it does; I was at a women’s tournament in Lakatamia. There were lots of teams taking part, with all the cricket going on. I couldn’t photograph every ball of every game, but I did at least try and



*This never happens - more’s the pity*

photograph every player and one did something I’d never seen before; it was a softball game, so she didn’t wear pads and, foolishly in retrospect, decided she didn’t need gloves. She swung the bat, I snapped a picture as the bat flew in a graceful arc towards the (terrified) wicketkeeper. Luckily, it missed and the only harm was to the batter’s self-esteem.

That’s not the only memorable moment I’ve witnessed in Cyprus; in a junior game, a fielder threw the ball back to the bowler and the non-striker whacked the ball for six. I was also at a game where the umpire was holding a jumper under one arm. The scorer was scratching his head as

the signal for a wide looked the same as that for a no-ball.

So, the real moral of the story is to say “I was there” don’t stop watching for a moment because games can turn on a sixpence<sup>1</sup>.

With all modesty, I provided a remarkable moment in one game. I (miraculously) bowled a straight ball for the first ball of my over, I suddenly thought “I’m Freddie Flintoff” and start to run in assuming I’m going to bowl rockets that clip the top of off-stump, what actually happened was I bowled a mixture of wides and no-balls with the odd straight(-ish) ball.

I have to admit I was a bit disappointed that the captain didn’t give me a second over, but on the other hand no-one, as far as I am aware, has ever beaten my record of a 17 ball over in Cyprus and I also argue that it was the most memorable over in the game and people might look back and say “I was there!”



*I was there!*

<sup>1</sup> For younger readers, a “sixpence” is a long obsolete, small, coin used in the UK as currency until 1980.



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