



**Australian High Commission, Trinidad and Tobago
Transcript of interviews with Australians in the Trinbago Knightriders
Simon Katich, Coach
Fawad Ahmed, Player**

**Interview conducted by Acting Deputy High Commissioner, William Blomfield
Thursday 13 September 2018**

(This transcript has been lightly edited)

You've both played cricket in different parts of the world - what makes playing and coaching cricket in the Caribbean unique?

Simon Katich: It's unique because it is probably the biggest party in sport. That's how it's marketed and seeing it for the first time last year, it really does live up to its reputation. So Caribbean cricket, from my earliest memories – I grew up watching the greats of the West Indies on the TV, my idol was Sir Viv Richards – has always been about flamboyant and attacking, aggressive play and that's exactly what the Caribbean Premier League is all about, so from a coaching point of view, it's great to see the players go out and express their talent and show what they can do.

Fawad Ahmed: I think especially the crowd is pretty unique. Cricket for them is unreal and I know Australia is a real sports-loving country and I'm originally from Pakistan, born there, so people there love cricket more than a sport but here it is very, very passionate. The way the guys play cricket here as well is kind of different – they are more having fun, that's why they call it the biggest party in sport and people love it here. So that makes it quite different from other countries – I haven't been to India, I hear its crazy over there as well but it's definitely different here from Australia.

20/20 cricket has taken the world by storm and is particularly popular in the Caribbean. I was fortunate to attend the two games at Queens Park Oval last week – the atmosphere is electric. What is it like as a player and coach to experience this atmosphere? Is it challenging to focus?

Simon Katich: From a coaching point of view, you have to try and stay as calm and relaxed as possible, because the players are the ones who win games, so we try and prepare them as best we can and then we take a backseat on game day and allow them to take their own decisions and let them play. We feed them information but ultimately for them to get better they have to go out there and make the right decisions more often than not because 20/20 is all about skills but often it comes down to decision-making so it is still a very strategic game. Also more so now, because its being played all around the world and there are a lot more patterns to the play emerging, so the players are certainly evolving as they are exposed to it a lot more.

Fawad Ahmed: It's great. Once you're inside the rope, it's a different story, you concentrate on playing cricket. For the youngsters in early stages of playing cricket, they do get affected by the cameras and the crowd and the friends – everyone's watching. Like when I was playing in Australia

the first time, I was really nervous – I thought everyone was watching and if I didn't do well then everyone will be talking. But with time you realise it's ok – you concentrate, everything will take care of itself. But in the start it's definitely hard. Standing and performing in front of people is pretty hard. The thing is, it's not showbiz – you don't have any control over the performance, so you could be a Ricky Ponting or Don Bradman and on the day you can get out for a duck with all the preparation and hard work but you never know what's going to happen on game day – maybe some guy will come and smash you for 20 runs in one over and you're gone.

What have you enjoyed the most about living here in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago?

Simon Katich: We're based here at the Hyatt Hotel so we get very well looked after, the staff are friendly and the playing group have been really hospitable. A lot of our players are local boys so we've had a couple of team dinners at their houses, probably more so last year than this year with the way the schedule has been. In that respect, most of our time off has been such that when we have been in Trinidad this year we've been busy with training and playing so that's how the tournament pans out. We had a nice dinner last night at one of the local restaurants. I love the food, obviously we have a connection in India – Trinbago Knight Riders is linked with the Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League, so a lot of the staff have both roles so we spend a lot of time in India as well so I'm used to spicy food. I've taken a big liking to the hot pepper sauce – I'm addicted to it now – I love the Trinnie food!

Fawad Ahmed: The whole Caribbean has been a good experience - I've been here before with the Australian Test team in 2015 but I only went to Antigua, Dominica and Jamaica and we missed out on Trinidad and Tobago, so I'm happy to have the opportunity to explore other islands. Barbados was really beautiful and the beaches were really nice but I have done my Masters in Political Science and International Relations so I look at everything from a different perspective so I'm thinking this [Port of Spain] is one of the best cities in the Caribbean where you can live, where there are opportunities, the lifestyle is good, the roads are nice, the markets are nicer, there is business – you can't just live on the beach, you have to earn money and start business.

The cricket is so good here – I think they have the strongest team, some of the Trinidad and Tobago cricketers are playing for the other CPL teams. In the next tournament – the Super 50 – I think they will be playing all together. I think that is the best thing and they produce more cricketers. It does make a difference where you live and I think it is pretty nice – the lifestyle as well.

Touring with a sporting team is a special experience – I was lucky enough to play in the first post-apartheid schoolboy cricket tour of South Africa in 1995. What have you enjoyed the most about travelling and playing cricket throughout the Caribbean?

Simon Katich: The laidback nature to it all. Obviously the Caribbean is a picturesque place and a lot of the islands have beautiful beaches and resorts and we get to stay in nice hotels while we are here so for us, we do get some downtime when we're not training, so we do get that balance. When we're not training, it's nice to be able to relax. At times you have to pinch yourself and realise you're not on holiday because we are actually here to work.

(For Simon Katich), you've visited the West Indies before on tours with the Australian team. You must have good memories because your best Test batting score of 157 was made against the Windies in Bridgetown Barbados in 2008. How is the experience different as a player then to now being a coach?

Simon Katich: It is a lot different. When you come as a player you've always got that bit of uncertainty about performances and there's always that bit of nervousness around wanting to perform well, whereas as a coach, there's only so much you can do – so you do your job and prepare the players as best you can and the players soak all that up. So I find I'm pretty relaxed watching a game right now – I trust all the players, I feel that's one of my strengths as a coach – I feel I can trust them and let them go about their business because ultimately there's only so much you can do. The players win games so I've probably been a lot more relaxed. When I did come as a player, I certainly really enjoyed that and for me it was really special, because as I said my idol was Sir Viv Richards and I got a hundred in his ground in Antigua so that made my tour really.

(For Fawaz Ahmed), You were born and raised in Pakistan, you worked on womens' rights in Pakistan and then moved to Australia as a refugee, and became an Australian in 2013. Tell us how this informs your perspective on life.

Fawad Ahmed: I've been to other less well-off parts of the world. This makes you realise when you go back home where you live what with your lifestyle and how lucky we are to be in Australia. I live in Melbourne and the last eight years, Melbourne is the most liveable city in the whole world, then you feel lucky. When I go to schools and talk, I say when you grow up and want to travel, travel to the third world because when you come back you will realise how lucky you are with the facilities back home and the lifestyle.

It's a life experience as well. It is good for my cricket here, I'm happy I've contributed nicely to my team and that's what I am here for – that's my job actually. But it's not just a job – I'm an Ambassador for the country, that's what I believe. Even though I'm born in Pakistan, I'm an Australian so I'm known as a Pakistani-Australian so I'm an Ambassador for two countries – for Australia and also for Pakistan. I have to perform well, be nice to the people – they are very nice people from this country.

Can you tell us about your experience settling into Australia?

Fawad Ahmed: It was tough. Thanks to cricket, it made it a little bit easier – when you are a sportsman, you become part of the family, so they welcomed me and accepted me. Just like here in Trinidad and Tobago. Chris Lynn was here [Australian cricketer playing for Trinbago Knight Riders], the guys from New Zealand, South Africa, USA and Canada. You just become family.

But still language was a massive barrier. The culture shock as well, the systems are different. I remember getting my first ticket on the tram in Melbourne because I got the wrong ticket. Anyway, it happens, you learn. It was tough, really tough but I'm a pretty hard-worker, and I especially go hard on myself. I didn't ask anyone to help me and I was young, physically strong, working hard in jobs and then luckily God helped me and I survived nicely.

I still live a hard-working life, physically and mentally, it's not the easiest. What people see on the camera is one thing, but behind the cameras you have to do a lot of hard work – we travel, we train,

we play, we have to manage yourself, the captain, coach, management and you have to work hard. It's nice when you earn something after you've done the hard yards and become successful and achieve your goals. There's no limits for your goals – if you want to play for your country or win a World Cup or play that many test matches – it never ends but once you are there you feel a little bit happier and satisfied that you've done something.

With all these opportunities, I can take it as an experience to share and coach the young kids so I can give something back to your country – that's my plan and hope to encourage someone to play Test cricket for Australia as a leg spinner. I know the shorter 20/20 games – there's more money, it's easier on the body, and I'm not saying it's easy in the field – when you have five supermen fielding on the boundary, it helps. Test cricket is completely different – patience. That's why it's called Test cricket – it tests you as a cricketer. So hopefully I'll help someone be ready to play Test cricket for Australia. I have seen some really promising kids and I have spoken to Cricket Australia to coach them in the future. I still want to play for a few more years – I'm not stopping. I'm looking forward to the next phase as well. I'm thoroughly enjoying the cricket here – I'm not playing for my country but I'm still here representing my country.

We all remember the West Indies as a powerful force in world cricket, particularly in the 70s, 80s and 90s. While the Windies are the T20 World Champions, this past decade or so has been difficult for the Test side. You have had the chance to play with some of the up-and-coming West Indies players – how do you feel the prospects are looking for a resurgence in West Indian Test cricket?

Simon Katich: The big issue has been more so in Test cricket – the last fifteen or twenty years they've struggled in Test cricket whereas the shorter formats they've been really strong. A lot of the local players are well-suited to the shorter format because they've got speed, they've got power. It's a different game here – T20 in the Caribbean is a totally different game to the Big Bash League (BBL) in Australia or the Indian Premier League (IPL) just because of the style of players. So you can bowl a lot of dot balls in the Caribbean but the power of the players – all of a sudden guys can come out and first ball start hitting you into the stands and keep doing it.

So in terms of the natural talent around, there's huge amounts – being able to harness that for Test cricket is hard because a lot of the players are naturally drawn to this [T20] form of the game because the rewards are there financially. For me the biggest issue in world cricket, not just in West Indian cricket, is the issue of pay disparity around different countries and that's the reason a lot of the top West Indian players are freelance T20 players, because ultimately these players need security – it's a job like any else and T20 provides that now. Test cricket in certain countries doesn't [provide that kind of security] and West Indies is one of them. So that's probably one of the concerns but then also the appetite from wanting to be great Test players – that's the balance of the lure of the T20, getting good contracts around the world compared to wanting to play for your country and play Test cricket, so that's probably been an issue for them.

The West Indies Test team have had a good run of late against Sri Lanka and Bangladesh so the short-term has been positive but they've got to do that against some of the top-ranking teams, with England coming to the Caribbean next in early 2019. Stuart Law, a Queensland and Australian player, has got the job [as West Indies coach] so a great challenge for him and he'll be loving that challenge but that's the nature of world cricket, you want to be dominating all formats and at the moment the West Indies have got to do a lot more work to get up there in Test cricket.

The Trinbago Knightriders have had a strong season topping the standings and while the loss against the Guyana Amazon Warriors on Wednesday was tough, how confident are you feeling that the Aussies in the team can help the Knight Riders take out the Caribbean Premier League this year?

Simon Katich: Fawad Ahmed has been the leading wicket-taker in the tournament. He's been fantastic. He came in place of Shadab Khan who we had from Pakistan last year who couldn't come for availability reasons so Fawad has come in and more than filled Shadab's big shoes. He's been absolutely brilliant – it's a great opportunity for him. He's at the stage of his career now where he wasn't given a contract at home in Australia, which is a bit of a shock, because he's had a couple of really good seasons there so hopefully this is something that will make the selectors take note back home in terms of his performances in the shorter format and get him back on the radar at home. Whilst he's 36 years old, he's still got a lot of cricket left in him. Great attitude, works hard, he's been magnificent around this group – he thoroughly deserves to be on top of the wicket-takers. Leg-spinners play a huge role here – all the teams try to have one and we've been fortunate to have him.

Congratulations on your strong season so far as the leading wicket-taker in the CPL. How confident are you feeling that the Knight Riders can take out the Caribbean Premier League this year?

Fawad Ahmed: You know we fought really hard in our game [on Wednesday against the Guyana Amazon Warriors]. It was really positive – defending 122 is not easy, especially in a T20 game, but we didn't give in easily. St. Kitts and Nevis are not going to give in easily – the last two years we have won continuously against them so hopefully it will continue tomorrow with a good performance. Hopefully we will continue with a good team effort and win a game for Trinidad and make the grand final on Sunday.

And then I will go back home happy for my home summer – there's a massive summer of cricket. The World Cup is coming so we've got three countries visiting us – India, Sri Lanka, South Africa and our own Big Bash tournament. I play for West Sydney Thunder – it's my fourth year there so we are based in Homebush – that's where we play. It's too busy, I wouldn't live there - Melbourne is my home but it's a good experience to be based there for 2 months. We have done well for the last few years.

Best of luck for your game tomorrow and we'll hopefully see you in the final on Sunday.