

Singaporean making waves in English cricket

By V.K. SANTOSH KUMAR

FANS of this year's English cricket season have suddenly taken a fascination with the Singapore Sling.

Not the famous cocktail concoction, but a Singaporean youngster, Anish Param, who has earned the sobriquet "Singapore Sling" for his impressive all-round performances.

Since the 22-year-old began playing for the Derbyshire-based Glapwell Colliery Cricket Club on April 24, he has notched up an average of 68 with the bat and 7.75 with the ball in the Division One league, which is the third notch in England's cricket structure, below the County Championship and Premier League.

"I'm fortunate to play in the country where the game originated," said the Singapore Management University student, who has taken a five-month leave from his studies.

"The feeling is overwhelming. It has been everything that I have dreamt of since I was 13."

Param was able to realise his dream largely owing to the efforts of Singapore's captain Saad Khan Janjua, a former Pakistan A team player who turned out for English counties Essex and Middlesex as a professional from 1993 to 2005.

Saad called his former agent Muhammad Ishak in England, and Param was immediately offered a place as an amateur with Glapwell, who play in the Bassetlaw league on Saturdays and the Mansfield league on Sundays.

As an amateur, he is not paid for his services. But his airfare, accommodation, food and transport are provided by the club.

"When the agent asked me the name of the boy I was sending over, I said Singapore Sling," said Saad with a laugh. "The name has caught on as Anish has been performing well in the hotbed of English cricket."

Param has already totted up 272 runs, with two 50s, and taken 12 wickets, with a best of 4-15 in 10 overs, before last weekend's

round of matches. His club have won all the seven matches he has featured in.

English cricket can be quite daunting for a debutant with the cold, the soft pitch and wet conditions, but Param appears to have coped well.

"The standards are very high and everyone strives to be at their best," he said. "There are

heaps of talented players and the game is played with extreme passion.

"To succeed, you need to be flexible and willing to alter your style of play. Acclimatising to the weather by doing fitness training in the open contributes significantly to your performance as well."

His performances

have been so eye-catching that Lancashire's Horwich Cricket Club summoned him to replace their injured professional Raheel Majeed for a Bolton League match on May 5, the first Singaporean to take the field in the competition's 83 years.

Said M. Neethianathan, vice-president of the Singapore Cricket Association (SCA): "It is a great day for Singapore cricket to see such a talented cricketer play in the English league. Since I first saw him as a 12-year-old, I have been impressed by his dedication and commitment. He is a role model for any young budding local cricketer."

According to Param's father Sreerangam, 58, the youngster excelled in golf, hockey and cricket during his primary school days at St Andrew's, before deciding to focus more on cricket at age nine.

He immediately showed a natural affinity for the sport. In 2000, aged nine years and nine months, he became the youngest Singapore national cricketer when he played in the Under-13 side that took part in the Tunku Jaafar Cup in Hong Kong.

"Anish has done well in cricket because he is focused on what he wants to

achieve and doesn't give up easily," said his mother Sally Choo, 56, a part-time office administrator.

"He can always do better and now he has got the chance to play cricket in England. I'm sure he will achieve his goal of playing the sport at a higher level."

By the end of his English league stint in August, Param would have played around 35 matches, thereby considerably enhancing his skills level and confidence.

Said Australian coach Trevor Chappell, who guided Singapore to World Cricket League Division 6 and Division 5 success in 2009 and 2011 respectively: "A season in league cricket will most likely improve his game in many ways.

"The conditions will be totally foreign... (but) I expect that Anish, with his character and work ethic, will handle himself well and learn a lot from the experience."

To SCA president Imran Hamid, Anish represents Singapore cricket "at its best".

He said: "It'll be a litmus test and interesting to see how he performs and what such overseas stints will do to help improve our cricket."

Param can attempt to play county cricket when he joins Durham University in the north-east of England in September. The university has a top-rated cricket academy and team, which has contributed several players to the Durham county team.

Before that, he will be key for the national team when they feature in the Emerging Teams Cup, which will feature Asia's best Under-23 teams, which Singapore will host from Aug 15 to 26.

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Anish Param became the first Singaporean in the Bolton League's 83-year history to play in the competition. He turned out for Horwich Cricket Club. ST FILE PHOTO

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- Anish Param on his adventure in England

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