

MUSINGS ON THE MATCH

By Manohar Singh Gill

AMRITSAR, Dec 1 — The cancellation of play on the first day was a big disappointment. A huge crowd had gathered and a large number of tickets were sold at the gate, even though there was little chance of play. But Amritsar has a long tradition of cricket and the large knowledgeable crowd dispersed peacefully, accepting the decision of the umpires.

Yesterday was a delightful day of cricket. The sun shone and the air was crisp after the light rain of the previous day. Though Imran did not play, the grace and fluidity of movement of the tall, slim Sikandar Bakht was like the flow of a clear mountain stream. Arun Lal, who opened, was so sure of himself and so crisp in his strokes that at times one mistook him for "the little master" himself. Indian cricket is bound to see more of him. The North Zone innings kept a good scoring rate with some lusty hitting at the end by Shukla and Madan Lal.

Bedi sensed the mood of the match correctly and declared at tea. A two-day match could hardly produce a worthwhile result. The real interest, therefore, lay in the display of the talent of both teams. I personally wanted to see Yog Raj and Valson bowl at the Pakistanis. They did not disappoint.

Yog Raj has the build and strength of a Thomson and, if he develops, should give India a truly fast bowler. One could not grudge him his war dance when he broke the stump in taking his first wicket but Majid Khan showed how much he has to learn yet. When a short one was bowled on the legs stump Majid swung it to the leg boundary with ease. Yog Raj tried again. The second ball too was hooked with contemptuous ease and Majid dared him to try yet again. Majid has the languid grace of a truly great artist. Seeing him I could only think of Sir Frank Worrell. Valson bowled with superb control and speed. The Pakistanis were all praise for him.

BEDI'S ROLE

Seeing Bedi on his home

ground I thought of his magnificent services to Indian cricket. It will be a long time before a bowler is born who can challenge his record. But what touched me was his affection and respect for the veteran Gian Parkash who trained and brought him up, like a son, in Amritsar. Another point that strikes me is that Bedi has done a special service to Sikh youngsters interested in cricket. In playing hockey and football, Sikhs take off the turban and use a handkerchief on the top knot but in cricket somehow the tradition of the Maharaja of Patiala prevailed. Colourful turbans were always the order of the day. While they looked very nice on the ground it was difficult for Sikh boys to do things like fast bowling. As one to try it myself, I should know. Even the tightest turban threatens to fall apart after each delivery. By introducing the graceful Patka, Bedi, in my opinion, has given Sikh boys a new opportunity in this game. Watching Punjab's young fast bowling hope, Rajinder Singh Ghai, I thought, he could never do it in a turban.

The Pakistani players were charming. Imran and Zahir Abbas, pestered by thousands of teeny boppers, never lost their cool. Hundreds of young girls crowded the fence separating the pavilion from the stands, and shouting all the time: "Imranji zara aao." He never lost his patience and spent half the day at the fence signing autographs.

GRACE AND CHARM

A large crowd of Pakistani visitors sat in a special stand. They spent the day gorging themselves on "harichal" banana and paan, luxuries which the Amritsar citizens had thoughtfully provided. The Chief Minister went around the stand greeting them for a while. As he was leaving for a party meeting, he remarked humorously to those around him: "Well, we now have to go and play our match."

Reposted someone "Sir, in that case, you too will have to choose a man of the match after the game."