



Island Slang – Making the Cut

After completing a whirlwind year where he excelled in the T&DCA's elite division and made his debut for Canada, Shaheed Keshvani headed to Sri Lanka to start training ahead of Canada's busy 2011 Calendar year. Shaheed blogs from Colombo where he and other national team members are playing in Sri Lanka's domestic cricket season and training with some of the countries best coaches.

Shaheed is on the cusp of making Tamil Union's 15 man top squad as they compete in the domestic 3 day and 1 day competitions. His blog can be read weekly on www.canadiancricket.org

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So it starts.....the experience of a lifetime. As I boarded the emirates airbus, I looked around to find my teammate Henry but he was nowhere to be found. I started staring at the front of the aircraft and watched as people starting flowing in to this hotel with wings. The airbus in case you didn't know has two floors and is absolutely enormous. I knew that Henry had the seat beside me so as I started to think about what sort of prank I could play on him....bang! I started to laugh as I saw Henry rubbing the top of his head. He smacked it off the top of the entrance to the aircraft but it didn't seem to stop his grin, it was ear to ear and I knew then that he was just as excited as me to be leaving.

We had a 13 hour flight ahead of us not to mention the 9 hour wait in Dubai airport and eventually the 4 hour flight to our destination.....Colombo. We shared stories and really got to know one another over the 2 days we spent travelling. I am not sure if I remember too much because our cokes were apparently spiked with rum. Nevertheless, I felt like I got to understand my teammate a lot more and we became even better friends, which is what cricket is all about. I asked a lot of questions because Henry had been in Colombo with the Canadian team in February. He informed me that boot camp style training awaited us in the form of a gentleman named Chandrashan, who in fact played a huge role in getting our boys, fit enough to qualify for the world cup in 2011. I was really keen to get going at that point because I know how much it helped our boys get to the next level. I looked outside and noticed that the sun was coming out and we were just 2 hours away from the airport in Colombo. As we walked off the plane towards immigration, I asked Henry if he knew who was supposed to be picking us up. He said, "hakuna matata" which means no worries in Swahili so I said, "no further questions".

As we picked up our bags and walked outside we stopped at the exchange bureau and picked up some "loose change". I felt the heat hit me like a beamer in the box, it was all in my throat and we were sweating bullets. We looked left and looked right and as the porters tried desperately to grab our bags I noticed a guy with a sign that said Mr. H and Mr. Zaheem. I knew right away that was our man, it was just a hunch because I am used to having my name pronounced wrong....ahhhh Zahid, Shareed, Rasheed whatever. My nickname in the cricket scene nowadays is "Shady", and for those that know me, know it has nothing to do with my character.....haha. Anyways, we stepped in to the car and our man took us on the rollercoaster ride of a lifetime. I was in the back clinging to dear life as trucks, bikes, cars and pedestrians were centimetres away from actually being in our car. It was the scariest ride of my life. The island looked beautiful and thought about how lucky I was to become a part of a new culture. We drove through stop checks and eventually entered the gates of the Cinnamon Grand Hotel.

As soon as we stepped out of the car we were greeted with a fresh juice and as many genuine smiles that one could imagine. We went straight to our room with our bags behind us and as I entered the room I saw the pool and beautiful pond full of fish. I was in a dream land until I heard the voice of another teammate

of mine, Harvir Baidwan. For those that know Harvir, know he has the highest pitch laugh of all time. Anyways, I was particularly happy to greet him and congratulate him on his success in the first class circuit with Colts Cricket Club. I always enjoy the success of my teammates; he plays for the Toronto Cricket Club as well as the national team with me.

So it is now Thursday and I just got back from a morning session at my new club, Tamil Union. Yesterday was my first day of training and it just so happened to be during the game between Tamil Union Cricket Club and Nondescripts Cricket Club. So as Henry and I walked in to the oval it was about 11am and we immediately ran in to the assistant coach of Tamil Union, Trishan Nonis. He introduced us to the trainer; unfortunately his name is too long for me to write so let's just call him "mali" which of course means friend or brother. Mali said "you change fast and we do fitness session". I was really keen so I put my shoes on and ran out there with a point to prove. Ten minutes later I was drenched in sweat and chugging my bottle of Gatorade. I knew then that these guys meant business so off I went sprints, jumps, ladder drills, abs, and stretches. After that the trainer said, "Feeling warm?" I looked at Henry who looked like an NBA player; you know how they are always dripping with sweat. Anyways his body language gave me no encouragement so I kept going and just when I felt like puking... I saw in the dressing room a legend, I mean the legend of all legends, and it was Murali! He was playing for Tamil Union who was batting at the time, I nodded as if I wasn't too impressed but inside I was like oh my god he just acknowledged me. That gave me another boost of energy and I finished off the fitness session well. After that we went to the pool and cooled down with some stretches as we watched the game.

Tamils scored 259 which was a decent score but Nondescripts had a star of their own, Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakarra. I headed to the nets to get my first hit out of the way but it was really hard to concentrate because the 2nd innings started with the fall of three early wickets and it seemed as though the game was in the bag, obviously because Murali was still to bowl. The problem was the Sri Lankan captain was still at the crease. I batted for about an hour, I hit the machine first and then I batted as Henry and the Tamil Union bowlers charged in at me with good pace and bounce. When I was done Sangakarra and his partner had put on about 110 runs, they were cruising along well so it was game on. Sangakarra smashed Murali to all parts, he read him like a book. Murali had gone for about seven runs an over and the feeling in the ground was now miserable. So with seven overs left, five runs per over required and five wickets in hand, the Tamil captain had to bring Murali back. The left hander Sangakarra was set on 102 and instead of giving him the single, the skipper decided to bring in the sweeper cover. I was sitting with the boys in the camp and I thought to myself why not give him one and let Murali bowl to the other guy. First ball of the over Sangakarra tried an extremely unnecessary reverse sweep and took a top edge.....out! With the momentum now the Tamils went to their main pace bowler, Lakmal. He bowled quickly, the ball was reversing and he took two wickets in one over. The clouds became dark and the lightning struck, Mr. Duckworth and Mr. Lewis decided to take the game in their hands and Tamil Union won.

The happiest person in the ground was little Murali, I mean Murali's son. He is five years old and as soon as the game was done Murali walked straight to him and grabbed the mini stumps and bat. Little Murali was fully padded up already with his helmet on and bat in hand. He shouted, "Apa, APa, bowl to me!" Murali with that bright smile of his couldn't be bothered with media, fans, even his teammates, respectfully. I thought it was the cutest thing I have ever seen and I really wish I had my camera. So as he hit the ball, little Murali was convinced he was Indian captain Mahindra Singh Dhoni. I guess he can pick Murali as well because he smashed that tennis ball to all parts with his elbows up, it was just magical. It reminded me of the days when my Father used to bowl at me as a kid only I wasn't dealing with doosra's. Well this pretty much sums up week 1 and if this is just the beginning.....

Photos : My Club – Tamil Union. Pavilion, Nets and Pool

