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Wrist-spinner travels to Seenigama to open re-built homes

Murali helps out tsunami victims once more

Charlie Austin

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Muttiah Muralitharan has been helping in the post-tsunami reconstruction effort again. Last weekend, he opened the first of many homes that are to be rebuilt over the coming months by his tsunami charity, The Foundation of Goodness.

On Sunday, Murali travelled to Seenigama, a small fishing village on the west coast that was pulverized by the tsunami waves, to officially open Nandavathi Kumara's new home. Nandavathi's husband tragically died weeks before the tsunami, which then swept away her home and with it all hope for the future.

But fortunately for Nandavathi and her fellow villagers - many of whom crowded around Murali lighting firecrackers and playing drums as he opened the home - Murali and his manager Kushil Gunasekera have been running a community-based charity called the Gunasekera-Muralitharan-Vaas Foundation during the past two years.

Both Gunasekera and Murali had narrow escapes on Boxing Day: Gunasekera sprinted from the waves and sought refuge in Seenigama's temple while his bungalow was washed out, while a roadside policeman warned Murali to flee in his car while travelling down to Seenigama for a charity function.

Since the tragedy, Gunasekera has been coordinating emergency relief and now the reconstruction efforts in the village, helped by Murali who has helped raise funds and organised the supply of much-needed relief, not just in Seenigama but all around the island.

"In our village about 150 houses were totally destroyed," Gunasekera told the BBC. "We can build about 30-40 houses a month, so given that time frame to improve the infrastructure and what not, I guess I'm looking at a period of one year to put the village back on track."

Nandavathi was delighted with her new home: "I love this home and little by little I will improve it," she said. "My one hope now is that the water will never come back and I can live here with my family in peace."

Murali, who will travel to Chennai this weekend for his wedding, started to focus more on charity work after his shoulder injury last August. Since then he has also become deeply involved with the World Food Programme and has also helped out the cricket board's Cricket-Aid program for tsunami victims.

He took the opportunity to thank the international community for its generous contributions in the aftermath of the tsunami but hoped that all the money pledged would eventually be sent because with the monsoon season fast approaching there remains much work to be done.

"The international community and non-governmental organisations are doing a great job," he said, "but the thing is a lot of countries have pledged [money] and I want to see whether the funds are going to come."

<http://content-si.cricinfo.com/ci/content/story/146165.html>



Murali surveys the damage ©
Getty Images

Murali joins Ronaldinho to feed hungry kids

England cricket team will use its significant public profile to help the 400 million chronically hungry children around the world.

The Ashes champions have formed an awareness-raising partnership with the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), joining Brazilian football superstar Ronaldinho, Sri Lankan cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan, and Kenyan marathon runner Paul Tergat as athlete affiliates of the organisation.

Under the "Cricket Against Hunger" program launched in Canberra this morning, when the England team is on tour, WFP will organise meetings between the cricketers and young children who depend on food aid.

While the England team was competing in the International Cricket Council Champions Trophy tournament in India last month, four internationals visited a group of children who receive food aid from WFP as part of a school feeding program, which is run jointly with the Indian Government.

Ashley Giles, Rikki Clarke, Ed Joyce and Jon Lewis spent almost two hours with the children, listening to the hardships they face as members of the Sahariya tribe, one of India's poorest and most marginalised groups.

The players then played a game of cricket with the children before touring a factory in Jaipur that produces Indiamix, a nutritious food blend that is distributed to vulnerable groups in India.

"This was a real eye-opener for me and the other players," said Giles, who is now in Australia preparing with his teammates for the Ashes defence.

"Sometimes it's easy to miss the poverty and hunger of the population at large when you're caught up in the whirlwind of a busy tour schedule. This meeting arranged by the World Food Program was a reality check and served as a sharp reminder that one child dies every five seconds from hunger around



Murali - will join Ronaldinho and other sports stars for the worthy cause

the world."

John Powell, WFP deputy executive director responsible for global fund-raising, said: "This is a splendid example of how sport can shine a light on a problem that takes the lives of tens of thousands of children in some of the world's poorest countries. Despite all the technological and medical progress we have made in the world, hunger takes more lives each day than AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined."

When the leaders of 185 countries met at the World Food Summit in 1996, they pledged to halve the number of people suffering from hunger by 2015, to a maximum of 412 million.

— (Sydney Morning Herald)

Spirit of cricket pervades the Tsunami-affected

With the politicians still at loggerheads on rebuilding the nation after the December 26 tsunami disaster, the Sri Lankan cricketers have set an example as to how to go about helping the victims of the worst natural disaster the country has even known by taking initiatives to help the underprivileged. Two of Sri Lanka's well known cricket faces Muttiah Muralitharan and Chaminda Vaas have been dedicating their free time in the village of Seenigama and appealing for donor aid. In certain cases, the two cricketers have been magnanimous in donating funds themselves to put up houses.

The two bowlers work through the Foundation of Goodness, a charity that helps people in the Seenigama area, in the southern coast just metres away from the Peraliya Railway Station. Murali and Vaas are well known for their magnanimity and work hand in hand with Kushil Gunasekara, a former secre-



Vaas is seen posing with the inmates of the house he himself donated. Kushil Gunasekera is fourth from right.

tary of the cricket board, known for his humanitarian deeds.

Already the charity has delivered 106 houses to the region and a further 100 are under construction. Murali handed over the first model home in the month of March, barely three months after the disaster.

Worldwide donations have been pouring into the charity

which publicises its work through the website www.unconditionalcompassion.com and also details a list of activities done by the charity.

World record holder Shane Warne visited the village some months ago after the disaster and spent time with the villagers distributing gift items to kids and empathising with them.

Facing Muralitharan is 'ultimate challenge', confesses Steve Waugh

Channaka de Silva reporting from Australia

Former Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh who has played more tests than anyone in history, has rated Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralitharan highest among all bowlers he has faced, saying "batting against Murali is the ultimate challenge" and has described Murali as the "David Copperfield of cricket", comparing him with the world's greatest magician.

Writing in detail about the controversy that surrounded Murali during the 1995-96 Australia tour in his autobiography "Out of my comfort zone" that was released last week here in Sydney, Waugh however confesses that he was unsure whether Murali's action was legitimate or illegitimate.

"I was a fence-sitter, at times thinking, "This guy is dodgy," and at other times thinking, "This Guy's a freak" writes Waugh about Murali.

Waugh goes on to describe that the opinion about it was divided even among his teammates. "It was a farcical situation that split opinion, even among the members of the Australian team, some of whom have privately questioned the validity of Murali's action. The trouble was that no one could prove their suspicions, because his method of delivery was unique and so unusual that even to debate it was provocative".

But Waugh, who had been ranked the number one batsman of the world for a very long period in the late nineties and early this decade, goes on to pay a tribute to the merits of Murali's bowling without any reservations.

"He is the David Copperfield of cricket, blurring illusion with reality, delivering with a rubber wrist and bent elbow that allows prodigious turn and lets him impart widely varying rotations on the ball. Batting against Murali is the ultimate challenge, with the ball reaching you a split second later than you envisaged, as if he's bowled two balls and you needed to focus on the second one. He controls the ball as if it is attached to a string, enticing then withdrawing, probing before striking, each delivery a mini-battle for the batsman to overcome." Waugh writes.

Elaborating further on facing Murali, Waugh adds; "Murali possesses a very even temperament and a cool clinical demeanour that belies the infectious smile and grotesque facial contortions he unknowingly manufactures at the point of delivery. He is also focused and driven, always looking to extend his repertoire – which eventually included his own invention, the "Doosra", a ball that defies convention and turns from leg to off even though out of the hand it looks like a conventional off-break."

"In the end you can only marvel at his unsurpassed record, his ability to adapt and his pride in playing for his country, which almost single-handedly keeps them a competitive unit. He is great for world cricket. And a better human being you would struggle to find" Waugh sums up Murali.

What it is to manage a sports celebrity

Murali is the first and only Sri Lankan cricketer to have a manager

By Sa'adi Thaufeeq

Why do sports stars have managers? Is a manager essential for a sportsman/woman?

Kushil Gunasekera has been managing Sri Lanka's most celebrated cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan for the past five years and he believes that a good manager can enhance the value of a player. It is a role he has performed to near perfection. For anyone who knows Muralitharan well, you can see a remarkable change in the cricketer's attitude.

For most media personnel Muralitharan was a difficult customer to interview let alone get him to speak a few words. To some he was arrogant, to others rude and uncooperative. All this negative publicity about him changed over a period of time after Gunasekera took over as his manager.

The partnership between Murali and Gunasekera did not happen just by chance.

"We knew each other and were very close since the time I was secretary of the Cricket Board's interim committee in 2000. He once came to my village in Seenigama to see the charity work I was doing and asked me whether we could do it together. It gave me immense pleasure to have someone of his calibre," recalled Gunasekera.

"Whilst doing the charity work he probably tested me in the process and one day he asked me whether I could be his manager. I said I would like to. That was about 4-5 years ago. Since that day we've become very close to each other not only as his manager but also as his partner in charity where we have come a long way. The intensity of the tsunami tragedy brought us even closer. Luckily, with him I've got lots of areas very compatible. For example he is generous, but he also pushes you to the limit," he said.

Gunasekera said for a player of Murali's calibre it was important to have someone to take a huge work load off him.

"The managing of Murali entails a lot of work. People might think why should a cricketer have a manager? When I took over that role I couldn't envision what was being trusted upon me, nor could Murali tell me other than say to coordinate some of his work. But over a period of time I've realized it is a huge load. I can imagine the reason why so many cricketers in the world have someone to manage them," said Gunasekera.

"The manager's role is an important one. How

Little known facts about Murali

1 "When he doesn't get a wicket he is like a fish out of water. He is so used to getting wickets. He takes wickets in every game. The public reacts to it and says 'Murali didn't get a wicket'. My friends ask me 'What is happening to Murali?' It has come to that stage. Then I know how to call him and then have a chat in a round about way because he is a celebrity. Celebrities are difficult to manage."

2 "I met a lot of players and they say no one player has been discussed ever in a dressing room or a team meeting by any team than Murali. He gets that kind of accolade as well. Half the time they play Sri Lanka they talk about how to battle Murali. Probably the only other cricketer might have been Don Bradman."

3 "One outstanding quality he has is gratitude. He always talks about Arjuna Ranatunga (the former captain) having protected him from the chucking issue which otherwise would have ended his career."

4 "Someone wrote that no one has ever been tested like Murali other than NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). Each time he was tested he's passed the test. He even brought upon a new dimension to changing the degrees in terms of extension of the bowling arm."

5 "He is going to play county cricket for Lancashire next year. At 34 he is going to play county, ODIs and Tests. He is hungry for cricket and like many celebrities of cricket as long as the passion is there you can play. You give up once you lose it."

Expressed by Kushil Gunasekera

6 "He is a very adorable father. From the time his son Narain was born he is hands on. Just like his cricket. He is changing the nappies, bathing him and carrying him to functions. He is very close to the child. He is the kind of guy who cannot wait without getting involved. There is a big change in him after his son was born. He is spending a lot of time with him. His wife Mathi loves every minute of it because very few cricketers can spend that kind of time."

7 "Initially he was contemplating to step down from one-day cricket after the World Cup to prolong his Test career. But the problem with him is that he wants to play and be in the thick of it. That's his character. Cricket for him is in his blood. He can't wait without getting involved with the game. After being so heavily involved in the game to play only Test cricket is a hard decision."

8 "He is having his biography written. It was started two years ago and was originally due to be launched during the 2007 World Cup but we couldn't coordinate very closely with his schedule. It will be a great book that people would love to read when it is launched."

9 "What makes Murali such a great bowler is that he's got some great attributes? He is an achiever. He doesn't want to give up. The trouble that he had to face has made him even greater. He is very much focused in his game and very professional. Having a manager takes away his other responsibilities apart from cricket."

10 "He is a cricketer who is very humble especially with newcomers to the team. He gets the best out of them and gives them the motivation. He is a fighter and he never gives up. He will strategize and will bring in new kind of deliveries."

Graphic by Lathan Malaka

The good thing about Murali is he is a straight shooter. He tells you what he means coming straight from the heart.

does one communicate with a cricketer when he is not there? When he is playing cricket or touring? It covers a vast range from commercial endorsements, going through sponsorship agreements, coordinating sponsors to scheduling public relations and publicity campaigns on day-to-day events and one-off appearances. The manager puts everything into perspective," he said.

Gunasekera further explained: "Murali's had a lot of issues with the media. I always think he is a man whereas adversity breaks some men, others break records. He falls into that latter group. Each time he's had this issue of throwing, the manager gets into the picture to protect him and enhances his value and gives the kind of advice that is best. A good cricketer needs a good manager if he wants to go beyond playing cricket."

"I am in a unique situation because I handle traumatized people whose expectations are very difficult to manage. On the other hand you have a celebrity who is the biggest legend for bowling and he's got fixed views sometimes. You can't blame

him because he's achieved so much success. The manager must tactfully and diplomatically know how to put the point across," continued Gunasekera.

"When you do that he may not listen the first time. There has been many times where he and I have had great debates at length but they are all in good spirit. In partnership you cannot have only highs; you've got to have lows as well. The good thing about Murali is he is a straight shooter. He tells you what he means coming straight from the heart. You may not like to hear it but that's the way he is. You've got to accept him. Sometimes people often misunderstand because he talks the way he thinks without being cautious," he said.

Gunasekera said that in the last five years Murali has got more responsibilities adding on than before. "The number of sponsorships he is getting and the number of contracts is far greater. The tsunami charity has grown because of his wide contacts with the cricketing



Kushil Gunasekera
(Pic by Nissanka Wijerathne)

kind of star who could still have gone without a manager. "But playing cricket and taking wickets is not the only thing. Sometimes you bring a different dimension to the quality of life, like your attitudes. It's all about adding value. You become a bigger all-rounder not necessarily in the game. The game ends at some point in time. How do you sustain yourself as the model everybody expects you to be for the rest of your life?"

"As you keep getting bigger and growing in stature, you need someone else to come in and take on those responsibilities, someone who is very good at management skills. The most important thing is the trust and honesty. Between the two partners that has to be established, not so much the qualifications," Gunasekera said.

The peace talks in Geneva could take a leaf out of the Murali-Gunasekera partnership where a Tamil and a Sinhala Buddhist has hit it off together so