



From a Ball Picker to a Star

By

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From a ball picker in a Test at the Gaddafi Stadium Lahore against South Africa in 2007 to reaching the ranks of Pakistan Test team and then taking charge of his country's team as a captain is a giant leap indeed.

Such incredible rise to stardom is rare and only those get to achieve this fairytale status who not only work hard for it but also remain focused to the goal they wish to reach. Lahore born Babar Azam happens to be the subject of such monumental rise which undoubtedly has put his cousins, Kamran Akmal, Adnan Akmal and Umar Akmal's performances in the game on a backburner.

Over the years, I had the privilege of watching great men of the game as a journalist and as an international commentator which obviously allows me to compare one great from the other.

People come and go, grace the game and leave indelible marks, be it as batsmen or bowler, wicket keeper or as fielder, but the ones who leave everlasting memories and their marks on the game are those who have something unique in them.

The run up of a great fast bowler, their fluid approach to the wicket, delivering the ball and follow through and the skills to go with it is always a source of delight.

Wesley Hall, Michael Holding of West Indies, Freddie Trueman and Brian Statham of England, Ray Lindwall, Dennis Lillee of Australia and of course Waqar Younis, Wasim Akram and Imran Khan delighted me with their approach to the wicket and the results they left for us to cherish and remember.

Their quality, grace and elegance was what endeared them to their followers.

The style and elegance of stroke play of men like Zaheer Abbas, Majid Khan, Sir Viv Richards, Sir Garfield Sobers, Brian Lara, Gordon Greenidge, Niel Harvey, Greg Chappell, Tom Graveney, Mohammad Azharuddin, Hashim Amla remains etched in my mind.

Babar Azam looks to me to have come from that kind school where elegance and style matters.

He is balanced at the crease, focused and in choice of execution of strokes he is not only careful but also guides his shots where he intends to pierce the gap.

Playing back or on front foot he positions himself to perfection to drive in front of the wicket or square of it, which indeed are the qualities for his consistency and success with the bat.

No wonder then, that even greats like Virat Kohli, the Indian captain who himself is a fine batsman and Australian bowlers also sing in his praise.

Babar Azam is on the road to immortality if he continues in the same vein and consistently performs to the best of his ability.

Given the responsibility to lead his country at international level, Babar has a long way to go and destined to end, when he does amongst those who had greatness as their hallmark.

