

Omer Rafiq Scales the 5000 Runs Peak

By Rajesh Idate & Team FCCC

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Congratulations to Omer Rafiq (FCCC) on reaching the 5000 runs milestone in CCL cricket!

I met Omer for the first time at the beginning of the 2001 CCL season and I hated him throughout that season! This was Omer's second year in CCL and what a year he had. 743 runs in 12 innings, average of 68, with 3 centuries. The bowling attacks he scored centuries against included Swadeep Pagadala (CSCC) with highest CCL wickets for a spinner, and Garth Wilby (RMFCC) with a 3-step run-up but speed exceeding any of today's CCL bowlers. It was therefore a joke that the best batsman award for that year went to a player, no offence to him, whose average was higher than Omer's, courtesy 4 not-outs out of the 5 innings he played. And average was the only criterion for this award in those days, which was then thankfully changed the year after. We still tease Omer about that shortcoming, not that he cares about any awards. It was the first year in CCL for me and Ravi Sajjan, and here was Omer, opening the batting and thrashing the bowlers all over the place, while I and Ravi would warm up the benches, not knowing if we will get any chance to bat our way out of the low spot we would occupy anywhere between number 8 to 11. That is why I "hated" Omer that year and seriously considered changing teams to get any batting!

Fast forward to year 2018, T-20 Semi-Final against FRCC-A, when Omer scored his 5000th CCL run in style with a boundary to his favorite cow-corner, while in the middle of playing a lone hand against the rampaging FRCC attack, 48 runs out of a team total of 122. Not being a big fan of statistics, Omer did not realize this achievement at the moment and neither did his teammates. Omer thus became only the third CCL batsman to cross the 5000 runs mark, behind Kervyn Dimney (CSCC) and Gopal Susarla (FCCC). Guess who could be the other four current batsmen that are in hot pursuit of this landmark, surely to reach it in the 2019 season? With 8 centuries so far, Omer is right behind Dhiren Patel's 10. It is fair to assume that Omer's runs tally today could have been much higher had he not taken a long sabbatical from CCL between 2002 and 2007, and played his cricket in Pakistan, including rubbing shoulders with the likes of Abdul Razzaq in various double-wicket tournaments involving prize money of a few lakh rupees.

Since coming back to FCCC colors in 2008, Omer has helped FCCC win the T-20 championships not so much in 2010, but most definitely in 2015 and 2017. Any bar-room conversations between FCCC players on that super-thriller tied-super-over 2017 T-20 championship final game against FRCC-A would not be complete without this hilarious story. Mind you, with Omer, such bar visits happen very often. He presides over them, being the undisputed king of drinking the most number of beers within our team. He is our official organizer of what he affectionately calls as the “second practice” at the bar, immediately after the first cricket practice session on Wednesday evenings. But I digress. Coming back to that hilarious thing, this happened just before the last ball of the FCCC super-over was bowled, Omer facing Subhashish after struggling to get any big hit in till the last ball. Guess who said these words, caught on this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-ByGmHfYRc>), now part of the FCCC folklore: “Ab umar ho gayi hai Omer Bhai ki”. Your choice is narrowed to a handful senior players from LCC and CCB who were watching the game from just behind the video camera. And then this is what happened on that last ball! A six that proved to be the T20-championship-winning difference in that tied super-over game.



Omer, the batsman, has scored all these runs trusting one simple philosophy: Never let the bowler on top for too long. His style is attacking, but the method is a calculated risk-taking and not a mindless throwing of the bat at everything. Most FCCC players take perverse pleasure in dissecting others’ dismissals in post-game bar-room blame-fests, to the point that the players at the receiving end not only admit their errors but also start doubting their own strengths. Such is Omer’s unwavering faith in his own uncomplicated approach that I have not seen him admit even once that he did anything wrong when he got out!

If we were to de-construct a typically successful Omer innings, it would go like this. The start would be cautious, the feet are not yet moving much, the big cat is on the lookout for the first opportunity to pounce on! Soon comes the first boundary or six, typically a vicious ramp over the slips/point region to the fastest and/or best bowler in the opposition. This is when the show starts.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w0vmUI8xX8>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1x68hDMJQU>

With that first shot out of the way, the feet starts moving economically, Sehwag-style, and then the whole repertoire of shots comes on display. Omer favors the cow-corner hit for the chunk of his scoring. The visceral violence within that shot is something to behold for everyone, except the bowler.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS5adfDtk6U>

This one is from the 2015 T-20 championship game against LCC where Omer, the captain, anchored the successful low-scoring chase by taking the attack to the LCC bowlers right from the beginning.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzqEmhneWl8>

But the cow-corner hit is not the only shot he can play. There are powerful pulls.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mUbh0pSzFU>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NkXeJeHlyM>

There are across-the-line sweeps to spinners as well as medium-pacers.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWl1f9dQ7DA>



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAoR_TFFySk

And just to prove that he can also play in the V, there are hits over the bowler.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oi4fcTwF4BM>

And look at that off-side drive with a straight, raised elbow!



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_58jf6GwRw

In between comes the furious running between the wickets. Omer is the fastest runner in FCCC. The defining skill for me though is how fast he turns between the wickets after that full burst down the pitch. He is the fastest in that respect amongst all I have played with and against through these years. Another outstanding aspect of his running between the wickets is his trusting his partner and his expectation of the same from his partner. It is fun to watch Gopal respond immediately to Omer's scream of "YES" every time when they are batting together. And then you wonder what you yourself need to do for Gopal to respond the same way when you are batting with him!

So "Three Cheers" to you, Omer. We know you couldn't care any less for stats, so you would not be so keen to celebrate this particular achievement of yours. So let us instead celebrate your fierce but never-ugly competitiveness on the field; your mischievous and jovial persona; and your generous spirit, both on and off the field. Let us celebrate Cricket, the Omer-way.

-Rajesh.