

A Sri Lankan's life in love with cricket

It all started with a fully cassoed priest playing cricket in the church green. Then, with a plastic bat in hand, a kid got going on a dusty driveway. Having been privy to quite some water flowing under bridges of cricket, Ranjan Mellawa traversed across exotic lands in eleven countries, pursuing his love of the game. Believe it or not, he had been present at virtually all epic moments in Sri Lanka cricket, including six World Cup finals.

Winds Behind The Willows is a fascinating, informative story; a ringside seat portraying the years of Sri Lanka's march to prominence in the context of the world game. As a fan and as a student of the game, Mellawa's passion for cricket shines through every page of the book.

Its interesting off-field anecdotes and mini-dramas, some involving famous cricketers, take you beyond the live cricket score on the card. The story seamlessly flows from the island nation's pre-Test cricket days and spills over into his spell as the secretary of Ragama CC, a first-class cricket club in Sri Lanka, enabling him to relate some hitherto unpublished, *firsthand* accounts of Sri Lanka's chaotic latter-day cricket administration.

Amid the struggles for a balanced work-life, Mellawa recalls the opportunities he created for talented young cricketers, to take the next step and reach the top. The book also shares the rich life skills he developed and lessons learnt from the game's many alluring features.

The book also encompasses the evolution of Ranjan Mellawa's wife into that of a cricket widow, in supporting his life-long obsession, purely because of the joy it gave him as an avid fan.

Although it is the worldwide fan following, the life-blood of the game, that passionately nourishes and sustains it, rarely do you come across a cricket book written by a fan. While dedicating the 464-page book to others of his ilk, Mellawa offers some useful suggestions from a fan's perspective, on adding value to the game and treating the fans with greater respect and dignity.

In his Foreword, former Sri Lanka player and ICC Match Referee, Roshan Mahanama describes the book as "a reader's delight, which will have pride of place in my cricket library" and says that he "wouldn't be surprised if it does become a bestseller." Together with an impressive array of endorsements from legends of the game around the world, *Winds Behind The Willows* stumps the readers with gripping stories, emphasising that cricket is a greater story than told by any scorecard.