

Star Profiles

When one thinks Texas, the first thing that comes to mind is the dry heat, wide green pastures and the sheer enormity of the size of this state. Although these conditions may not appeal to many, the land, weather and terrain makes this state a perfect place to play plenty of cricket all year round with the cricket season spanning over 9 months of the year.

Yes, we sure have quantity in terms of cricket teams, players and number of games in the Lone star state but often people have questioned if this quantity is matched with talent and quality in terms of cricketing standard and class of play. These critics, nonbelievers and doubters have been silenced by the selection of five rising stars into the US National squad.

These five hardworking and dedicated cricketers did the region proud in the National tournaments that were held over the last few months which forced the selectors to take a closer look at the region. Who are these five individuals who have achieved something that most of the cricketing community only dreams about? Some dreams do become a reality – let's take a closer look and find out how Arjun Rajagopalan, Amir Nanjee, Rahul Kukreti, Rafey Kazi and Usman Shuja have become larger than life personalities for all those aspiring cricketers and lovers of the game in Texas and let's follow their fortunes as team USA begins their quest for a spot in World Cup 2007?

3rdUmpire.com caught up with some of these busy cricketers and these are the things they had to say about their life and cricket.



Arjun Rajagopalan

I have been playing competitive cricket since the age of 15. He represented Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and South Zone for junior level cricket U-15 thru' U-25 in India. The competitive spirit has always been in me in whichever walk of life I pursued. Like all young cricketers, I aspired to play for Ranji Trophy and India but studies and professional aspirations took me in a different direction, a bit away from cricket. Working in Dallas since 1995, I started playing for Plano Cubs since 1998 and began enjoying my cricket again. The league has grown tremendously here from 10 teams then to 27 teams today. While I have been doing reasonably well with both ball and bat in the league, the break into competitive cricket was

timing, luck and some consistent performances. I lead the successful NTCA XI in the 2003 Texas Cup, led Central West in a successful Western Conference outing in 2003 and played in the rain marred National Conference in 2003, putting up good performances all along. I intend on keeping this level of performance in the US National Cricket matches as well.

I owe a lot of what I am today to my brother and parents who have encouraged me thru' thick and thin.

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| Date of Birth | 11-06-1971 |
| Place of Birth | Madras, India |
| Family Members | Wife: Sukshma Dad: Mr. Rajagopalan Mom: Mrs. Padmini Rajagopalan Brother: Ganesh Sister-in-law: Sowmya Dogs: Rowdy and Peanut |
| Profession/student | Software Engineer |
| Motto | Live and Let Live |
| Reaction when told about US selection | pleasantly surprised. After playing for TamilNadu, Karnataka and South Zone more than 10 years ago, a good performance at the USACA level tournament perked up my interest to play competitive cricket again. |
| Best performance | 7-84 against Hyderabad in India in Junior Cricket |
| Most embarrassing moment | None yet. Never found myself in a situation which I needed to be embarrassed about. |
| Favorite quote | "Accept that some days you're the pigeon, and some days your the statue." -Roger C. Anderson |
| Favorite Movie | Papillon |
| Favorite Restaurant | P.F.Changs |
| Favorite hobby | Golf |
| Favorite cricketer | Sachin Tendulkar |
| Tip for young aspiring Cricketers | Teamwork first, individual glory later. |

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Usman Shuja

My passion for the game and enthusiasm to perform on the field goes back to my childhood. Years of experimentation surfaced my specialty as a pace bowler on the school tour to Sri Lanka. Emulating players like Imran Khan, Waqar Younis, Wasim Akram and borrowing attitude from Steve Waugh, Roger Clemens and Kobe Bryant - I began to mature as a fast bowler during college. I set my eyes to make it to the American national team this year in May and played through Texas Cup, Western Conference and the Super League during the summer.

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| Date of Birth | 11 - 29 - 78 |
| Place of Birth | Karachi, Pakistan |
| Family Members | Parents: Ifthikar and Khawaja Shuja Siblings: Imran, Rizwan and Fauzia |
| Profession/student | Engineer |
| Motto | I want to make a difference |
| Reaction when told About US selection | Humbled and relieved |
| Best performance | 5/7 |
| Most embarrassing moment | Went in to bat without gloves once. |
| Favorite quote | "Difference between reading and practicing is that between knowledge and skill." |
| Favorite Movie | Dumb and Dumber |
| Favorite Restaurant | Macaroni Grill |
| Favorite hobby | Try different sports and learn about Human Psychology |
| Favorite cricketer | Wasim Akram |
| Tip for young aspiring Cricketers | Passion is the strongest tool, if it overflows. |





Rahul Kukreti

I started playing cricket at the age of 10 and played competitive cricket in India for 8 years. During my short cricketing career in India I played U-16 and U-19 for Haryana. At the age 18 I had to make one of the toughest decisions that I'm sure a lot of us have had to make, pursue cricket as my cricketing career or concentrate on studies. At that point I chose to pursue with studies and left playing competitive cricket back home.

I came to the USA in 1997 and joined Dallas County Cricket Club. Dipak Patel, Suhas Naik and Arun Vittala encouraged and helped me to improve my game. They gave me cricketing equipment to play and helped me hone my cricketing skills. Playing at NTCA level, I have been a consistent batsman and a decent wicketkeeper.

Success did not come easy for me. Knowing my limitations motivated me to work harder on my batting/Keeping skills. Working out at the gym on a regular basis helped me to stay fit and avoid injuries. Today I am in the US team not because I am naturally talented like other guys in the league, but because of sheer hard work.

I am very grateful to my family and girl friend, who have always been very supportive when it came to my cricket.

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| Date of Birth | 08 - 02 - 76 |
| Place of Birth | Jamnagar, India |
| Family Members | Parents: Dinesh and Sarita Kukreti Sister: Payal |
| Profession/student | Engineer |
| Motto | Be the best |
| Reaction when told About US selection | Happy, but a long way to go. |

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| Best performance | 116 Not out and 5 dismissals in an NTCA match |
| Most embarrassing moment | 44 runs in 20 over with 8 wicket in hand .. could not make it to win a game with very talented guys to follow!. |
| Favorite quote | "Success is sweetest to those who never succeed" |
| Favorite Movie | Air Force 1 |
| Favorite Restaurant | Olive Garden |
| Favorite hobby | Watch Movies |
| Favorite cricketer | Sachin Tendulkar |
| Tip for young aspiring Cricketers. | Work hard to be where you want to! |

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Courtesy: 3rd Umpire.com