



Karachi United is extremely pleased to announce that it has struck up a collaboration with Dr. Zafar Iqbal (Head of Medicine at Crystal Palace and formerly Liverpool and Tottenham FC).

Dr. Zafar will serve as an advisor to Karachi United as the organization looks to further strengthen and grow. We would like to welcome Dr. Zafar Iqbal to the Karachi United family and look forward to his guidance and counsel.

To kick start our relationship, we felt that a short interview with the Dr. Zafar would serve as a great introduction and also allow Pakistan football fans the world over to benefit from his views.

If there are any specific questions that you wish answering then please direct them to Karachi United and also can follow Zafar's twitter handle on Sportsdrzaf where he frequently provides links to information helpful for athletes and footballers.

Enjoy!

Dr. Zafar, thank you once again for taking the time out to interview with Karachi United. Let's get started....

1. Where were you born, and what is your connection with Pakistan?

Dr. Zafar: I was born in Pakistan, Sahiwal near Faislabad but then came to the UK aged 2 months old and have lived in England ever since. I only returned to Pakistan in 2005 and 2007 to help in a volunteer medical camp in the Earthquake affected areas of Pakistan, following the 2005 Earthquake. So being of Pakistani origin and being brought up in a predominantly Pakistani environment in Rochdale, England, I have still kept some connection with my Pakistani roots.

2. What influenced your decision to enter the field of Sports Medicine?

Dr. Zafar: I always wanted to be a doctor from the age of 10, after seeing my sister suffer with an incurable brain cancer. Once I'd achieved my dream of being a Dr, I wasn't too certain which area to specialize in. However my path in Sports Medicine was determined following my own knee injury I suffered playing football. The medical care I received was from ideal and I was told that I'd have to wait 18 months for an MRI scan. The rehabilitation was also basic and so I decided to study further and completed an MSc in Sports Medicine. I wanted to improve the care received for those people who didn't have private health care but still wanted to return to playing sports after injury. After that I started setting up Sports Medicine clinics and lecturing and one thing led to another.

3. Which football team do you support and who is your favorite player?

Dr. Zafar: Its no secret that I've always supported Liverpool FC. If I had to choose only one player then it would have to be Mr Liverpool himself – Steven Gerrard. Not only was he a great player but a fantastic person as well and respected by all.



4. Being one of the most prominent sports doctors in world football and having achieved so much already, if you could narrow it down, what would be the highlight of your career so far?

Dr. Zafar: To be fair the prominent aspect is really to do with me having worked at Liverpool FC which of course one of the biggest and best supported clubs in the world. I'm honestly having difficulty picking a single highlight as I've been lucky enough to be have worked with some great players and teams and competitions. Probably the best time was being involved in the 2013-14 season where Liverpool Fc almost won the Premier League title... Also one of my saddest moments....

5. You have worked with some of the top footballers in the world like Steven Gerrard, Luis Suarez and Gareth Bale. Undoubtedly they all have phenomenal ability on the pitch but did they have any common characteristics or traits that distinguished them from other professional footballers.

Dr. Zafar: Their work ethic was phenomenal. Their skill was worked on relentlessly on the training ground. The ability they had when things were not going right to single handedly drag the rest of the team mates up was awesome to witness.





6. Tottenham's renowned Academy produced players such as Ledley King, Glen Hoddle and Harry Kane. Based on your experience of working at Tottenham's Academy, what do you think are the factors that have enabled them to be such a successful Academy?

Dr. Zafar: Actually there are many premier league clubs that have developed players to the first team. This is dependent on numerous factors including have good structure, coaches, medical staff and of course good young players who are willing to learn. You need some luck as well.

7. Crystal Palace is a new and different challenge, how have you found it there?

Dr. Zafar: I'm loving it at Crystal Palace. After leaving Liverpool FC to return to my family in London I was going to start working in Sports Medicine Clinics. However an opportunity came up at Crystal Palace to head up the Sports Medicine department. After the interview process and speaking to Alan Pardew the manager I was excited by the prospect of developing the Medical setup. The added bonus is that it's near my family and so I get to see my wife and kids almost every day.

8. Karachi United is one of the clubs in Pakistan trying to develop football at the grassroots level. What are the key areas of focus while trying to develop a professional footballer?

Dr. Zafar: Key is having a vision for all the age groups so that the kids know what to expect as they progress. There needs to be good organization and discipline off the field as this will reflect on the kids with regards to how they prepare, behave and train. Being professional is huge and you need to make sure the kids follow the rules and listen to the coaching and medical staff who are advising them. Football is team game requiring everyone to work together and if you lose that with indiscipline and lack of professionalism then the team has no chance.

9. The physical demands on a professional footballer seem to be increasing each year. Do you come across challenges while trying to help players match those physical demands? If yes, what are some of the ways you overcome them?

Dr. Zafar: The biggest challenge is preparing players for games and helping them recover in time for the next game. This isn't so much of a problem when playing one game a week but is more difficult when you have to play in more than one game a week ie Cup competitions or during Christmas period where there are lots of games close together. We know soft tissue injuries increase if there has been a sudden spike in training / game load in a single week compared with the average load in the previous 3-4 weeks. So trying to balance this load is the hardest part especially when the manager wants the team working more one particular week due to tactical reasons.

10. How important is the conditioning and nutrition/diet of the players? And could you share some advice on what are the vital foods to eat and avoid as a player?

Dr. Zafar: For a modern day footballer conditioning and nutrition are vital for several reasons. They help best prepare the player for training, competition and reducing injuries. A post training or game recovery protocol is really important to refuel correctly and get yourself ready quickly for the next training session or game.

11. Having worked at some of the top clubs in world football, what advice would you give to a young aspiring footballer in Pakistan with a dream of one day playing at the top level?

Dr. Zafar: Simple – work very hard. As I already mentioned to be amongst the best you have to give the best of yourself. Don't look for excuses and commit on working on every aspect of your training and conditioning and behavior. There are no shortcuts. The most successful players I worked with were also the hardest working and professional.



12. What do you think are the changes that football in Pakistan has to implement in order to be competitive in the long-run?

Dr. Zafar: I don't know enough about Football in Pakistan to say for certain. But if its like other sports in Pakistan then it needs clear organization, investment in staff and a long term vision to try and improve all aspects from grass roots football upwards. By making football accessible at a young age, the hope is that there will be a larger pool to select from and who can then develop onto the next stage.

13. On a lighter note, as we sign-off, can you give us insight as to who is the funniest footballer you have met?

Dr. Zafar: There have been many to be fair. On most days its like being back at school but now its me trying to instill some discipline and asking the 'kids' to behave. This just encourages them. Glen Johnson at Liverpool was always one of the funniest around. Even during games when he's had an injury and we've gone to assess him he'd make us laugh. I remember during a big televised game when he'd clashed heads and I asked how he was he replied that his head felt like a bowling ball. Then when I was assessing his vision he replied that he might have a problem as my nose looked massive (those that have seen me know that I have a slightly large nose). Of course on live TV I had to keep a straight face, which he had no problem doing. I walked back to the bench biting on my tongue trying not to laugh as we were losing at the time...