

# Kaluwitharana - sheet-anchor of the Sri Lankan team

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Kalu may be diminutive, but a spirited bundle of dynamite exploding with electrifying elegance when he is in the right frame of mind, pulverising the attack of the opposition with his powerful pulls, fantastic fours and sensational sixes which are a delight to watch.

When he is at the wicket, the spirit of the game is revived; spectators sit up in expectation to enjoy his belligerent batting; fielders become alert; bowlers change their tactics; the captain calculates setting traps and the commentator's voice is invigorated; it becomes loud and clear.

There is definitely excitement when he is around. He hooks, cuts, glances, drives, hammers in all directions with poise and power. Sometimes he overdoes it and can be imprudent but the swash-buckling thrills and spills he provides are a part of his inimitable style. In fact, Kalu becomes the cynosure of all eyes when he is geared up for the onslaught. With his orthodox and unorthodox batting he lambastes any type of bowling tearing it into shreds. However, very often, the spectators are disappointed because Kalu's out-bursts are short-lived.

His wizardry wicket-keeping has no parallel in the history of Sri Lankan cricket. He has the priceless record for the most number of stumpings in

One-Day Internationals and he is very proud of his brilliant achievement.

When he is behind the stumps, Kalu is almost like the captain; cheering, encouraging, appealing, yelling, challenging at times, thus incurring the displeasure and warnings of the umpires - but he means well; he wants his team to perform and win; that is his only goal. His astounding acrobatics, gymnastic gimmicks and classy catches are worth recording and preserving for posterity.

Kalu suddenly shot into prominence with his partner, our dashing Captain Sanath Jayasuriya, prior to the 1996 World Cup. The cricket loving Australians were highly enthused and enthralled by the innovative style of the Sri Lankan opening pair, Sanath and Kalu, in all their One Day Internationals. Their explosive and power-packed opening partnership made history and was the talk of the town. With his sterling qualities and also his idiosyncrasies he caught the vivid imagination of the famous cricket commentator Tony Greg, who propelled "Little Kalu" into the International cricket firmament.

He has had his share of woes and worries alright, when he was left out of the team on a couple of occasions because of his pathetic performance or through injury. Well, the implacable Kalu didn't mind. He knew he had capabilities but not the con-

sistency; he had style but not the synergy to do things effectively. Nonetheless he wanted to prove his mettle that he could be entrusted with responsibility. He made up his mind to give his best. Luckily the selectors pinned their faith and confidence on him. He convincingly measured up to their expectations, and has now become an integral part of the team.

Whenever the star-batsmen flop, Kalu is there to make up for them. He doesn't mind the critics; his sole intention is to play the game in style and provide the fireworks plus entertainment for the spectators. Whenever counted on he rises to the occasion, thrashing and smashing, often crashing at the crease and naturally "run-out" is the verdict. Several times he is out for a duck, but neither is he bothered nor discouraged. He knows that failures and frustrations are part of the essential ingredients for exciting cricket.

Kalu has the right temperament for cricket. He is agile and alert, famous for his quick-silver stumpings.

He is cheerful and smiles when things aren't rosy. He encourages the fielders and bowlers to show their colours when they are not up to the mark. He is the captain's pride; and indispensable choice for any match. To put Kalu in a nut-shell, he is the sheet-anchor of the Sri Lankan team.