

Cricket player came 6000 kilometers on foot

The refugee Nawroz Jabarkheel plays in the Swiss U19 cricket team. One of the trainers comes from Weisslingen. The team has a big dream.

By Christian Felix 09.02.2018



Cricketer Nawroz Jabarkheel in Pfäffikon. Bild: Marc Dahinden

At the age of fifteen, Nawroz Jabarkheel came to Switzerland as a refugee. "For two years I had been looking for a cricket team here, but in vain," says the 18-year-old Afghan. At that time, he was already living in the cooperative Lindenbaum in Pfäffikon, a place of residence and job training for young people.

It was only by chance that his supervisor realized that Nawroz wanted to play cricket. She introduced him to Patrick Henderson in Weisslingen, one of the U19 cricket team coaches. On the first Saturday after he phoned the coach in Weisslingen, Nawroz went to practice.

Cricket becomes Swiss

Cricket is currently experiencing an upswing in Central Europe. Yesterday and the day before yesterday the world's cricket elite met in St. Moritz for a tournament. The stadium was the frozen St. Moritz Lake. The tournament in the Upper Engadin will further promote cricket in Switzerland. In fact, cricket became a Swiss Olympic-approved sport at the beginning of January 2018.

Due to the British influence on their country, many Afghans play cricket enthusiastically. In Germany, the number of cricket players has more than doubled due to the refugees from Afghanistan," says Henderson. Three Afghans are playing in the Swiss U19s. One of them is Nawroz, an important player in the team.

Last November, Nawroz sprained his foot during a gym session. The accident came at the worst possible time, as Nawroz tells us. He wanted to participate in the Kyburg Run as a sponsored runner. The U19s need money for their dream.

Cricket ticket to the Caribbean

The apprentices and residents at Lindenbaum showed real solidarity. Five of them took part in the Kyburg run instead of Nawroz and raised 1,700 Swiss francs.

One of the great centres of cricket is the former British colony of Barbados. Henderson relates that the Swiss U19s were lucky enough to be invited to the Caribbean island for an international tournament. The team needs to raise around 15,000 Swiss francs, says coach Henderson: "We have already got together 9,000 francs. In spring, the U19s are organizing a marathon hike in the Lake Geneva area and, according to Henderson, the players hope to add more money to the campaign.

On foot through the Near East

As Nawroz says, he hardly dreams of the Caribbean - but of participating in an international cricket tournament, of competing with teams from all over the world. If he really does fly to Barbados, he will have come a long way across several continents.

"I found my way by following the garbage refugees had left behind."

Nawroz's family fled from terror and war in Jalalabad in East Afghanistan to Peshawar in Pakistan. That was where Nawroz learned the game of cricket. On both sides of the border live Pashtuns, an ethnic group to which Nawroz's family also belongs. Nevertheless, Afghan refugees were discriminated against. Nawroz's parents gave their son money to flee to Switzerland.

The money got me as far as Iran," says Nawroz. With the help of a colleague he arrived in Turkey, where he worked for three months in a metal factory. The meagre factory wages paid his journey to Budapest. The 15-year-old walked all the way through steppes and forests. "I found my way by following the garbage that refugees had left behind. There were a lot of people on the road at that time," says Nawroz, "I had nothing to eat in Hungary for four days. Finally, I managed to get on a train and travel to Switzerland."

Three Afghan Friends

Nawroz immediately liked the training with Patrick Henderson. He also met the team's other two Afghans who became his friends. All three are bowlers: "They are all incredibly fast," says Henderson.

Nawroz can't remember why he took on the role of bowler in the cricket team: "That's just the way it happened." The memories of his first few years in Switzerland also seem to have faded. Only a first impression remains unforgettable: "It rains so beautifully in Switzerland." (Der Landbote)