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ground reality
MOTOR RACING
Nur Ali

By Muhammad Fawad Hussain

When India's latest sports sensation Narain Karthikeyan hit the headlines as the first Indian driver to qualify for the F1 Grand Prix circuit, many sports fans in Pakistan wondered whether any of their compatriots would ever put the country on the world motor-racing map.

The answer came sooner than they could have expected, in the form of an overseas Pakistani, Nur Ali. Just days after Karthikeyan was given a go-ahead to become a part of the F1 Grand Prix, Pakistan installed the US-based Nur on their team for a major international motor-racing competition which is scheduled to start in England this fall.



It was like a dream coming true for Nur Ali, who has always dreamt of emulating his childhood idols, Ayrton Senna of Brazil and Michael Schumacher of Germany.

"It is one of the most memorable moments of my life," a smiling Nur Ali told Us during a recent visit to Karachi.

The interview with Nur was actually made possible with the help of a few of his family friends who helped drag him out from among a sizeable number of fans who had surrounded him for autographs and snaps at a local hotel where a sleek racing car was also put at display. "I have never given that many autographs in my whole life," said the 30-year-old, beaming like a man having the time of his life.

Nur is the only professional driver from Pakistan in the Us where he has claimed back-to-back Southwest Formula Mazda Regional Series titles in 2001 and 2002. He has a seven-year experience as a racing-car driver.

Nur revealed how he was invited by President General Pervez Musharraf to drive for Pakistan. "The President met me in Los Angeles after somebody informed him about my being the only Pakistani driver on the US circuit. He invited me to come to Pakistan and represent it at the international level."

Nur's chance came soon thanks to Sheikh Maktoum Hasher Al Maktoum of Dubai who recently founded the A1 Grand Prix circuit. Nur would be on Team Pakistan when the inaugural race of the circuit is held in London in September this year.

The A1 is a concept quite different from F1 as it pits driver against driver in identical cars. In F1, where the cream of world's top drivers compete for international glory and prize money amounting to millions of dollars, the races place a driver against driver but in cars coming from different manufacturers.

"The A1 Grand Prix is an exciting, new concept which I'm sure would be a big success," says Nur.

The AI Grand Prix labelled as the Motorsports World Cup would be held on various destinations including Dubai, China, Japan, Malaysia, Australia, South Africa, Bahrain and Qatar this year. A total of 23 countries including Pakistan have been chosen for the inaugural edition of the World Cup and a few more may also get inducted ahead of the circuit's start in London.

Nur, who lives in Euless, near Texas with his wife Farah, is confident that he can win the title for Pakistan. "I believe I have the guts to excel even at such major event," he asserts.

Nur wants to go on to become the first Pakistani on the F1 Grand Prix. "If he (Karthikeyan) can do it, then so can I."

Before Karthikeyan's pioneering achievement, F1 was considered a field too good for any South Asian. "But Narain (Karthikeyan) has proved even we, desis, can do it. It is a big achievement."

Nur always wanted to be a F1 driver since becoming addicted to the fast lane during his various road trips with his father from Hamburg to Paris. "When I was a schoolboy our family lived in Hamburg. My father was in the clothing business and used to regularly commute between Hamburg and Paris, a journey that takes about five to six hours, one way. Since there are no speed limits in Germany my father drove quite fast and I used to find the experience really thrilling. In a way the course of my life was decided on those roads."

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