

Cricket: Mahmood calls for end to mental health 'taboo'

August 27 2014, by Julian Guyer

Former Pakistan all-rounder Azhar Mahmood hopes to make mental health less of a "taboo" subject in South Asia.

Last week cricket stars from several countries gathered at a leading London hotel for Mahmood's benefit dinner, where tributes to him were led by Pakistan great Wasim Akram.

But the dinner also saw more than £18,000 raised on the night for the mental health programme across South Asia backed by the British Asian Trust—a charity of which Mahmood became the first Pakistani cricketer to be appointed an ambassador earlier this year.

Asked why he had decided to focus on mental health, Mahmood told AFP: "It's because it's a taboo subject. Mental health is a major problem...Back home in South Asia, people have no idea about this stuff. We just want to raise awareness.

"We know we've already raised £18,000 (\$30,000, 22,607 euros) and it was great that so many people came to support me and the charity," said Mahmood of an event where a cricket-related auction produced enough funds to support one hundred [mental health](#) patients over the next three years.

Turning to cricket, Mahmood questioned the timing of the decision to refer Pakistan off-spinner Saeed Ajmal for a suspect bowling action.

Ajmal will miss part of his side's one-day series against Sri Lanka as he undergoes tests on his action in Australia.

The 37-year-old, ranked number one in one-day internationals and Pakistan's main bowling weapon, had his action reported during the first Test against Sri Lanka at Galle earlier this month.

"It's not fair when they say he's not bowling with a legal action," said Mahmood. "He's been playing cricket for so long, so why now?"

At the age of 39, the much-travelled Mahmood recently helped Surrey to the last four of English county cricket's Twenty20 Blast.

Asked how long he would keep his career going, Mahmood, described by Akram as "an all-rounder any captain would be delighted to have in his side", replied: "As long as my body is holding up and as long as I keep enjoying my [cricket](#), I want to keep playing".

A hard-hitting batsman and canny seam bowler Mahmood—who marked his Test debut for Pakistan with 128 not out against South Africa in Rawalpindi in 1997—is now one of a select group of truly global 'freelance' cricketers playing in a variety of Twenty20 competitions including the Indian Premier League, Australia's Big Bash League and the Caribbean Premier League.

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Citation: Cricket: Mahmood calls for end to mental health 'taboo' (2014, August 27) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-08-cricket-mahmood-mental-health-taboo.html>

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