



How I pretended to like sports to fit in

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Okay, this was like seven years ago, you can't judge me now; you know my name not my story. Everyone did questionable things due to peer pressure in our teen years. Although nobody forced me to watch sports, I wanted to be accepted by my fellow classmates. This is my story of trust and betrayal.

It all started in 5th grade. I shifted to a new school, so I had to start from zero again. With extensive knowledge of how class culture worked from the last four grades, I knew I had to be like them for them to like me. So, I laughed at their stupid jokes, shared my shingara with them and helped them cheat. Everything was going smoothly and I swiftly integrated into the group.

Eventually that fateful day came when I had to pull off the biggest heist to establish my fake personality.

I distinctly remember the day, a couple of my classmates were talking about club football and I just stood there with them. After finishing their conversation they asked me which club I supported, and suddenly my brain went into fight or flight mode. Without even thinking my mouth blurted out, "Manchester United."

Why Manchester United? Probably because most people I interacted with back then supported this club, it was the club the cool kids supported. I was relieved that they didn't ask any other questions because the only player I knew was Rooney. Heck, I didn't even know his first name. Thus, this is how the façade was created.

Here's the thing, I didn't want to be a blatant liar. So you know what I did? I started watching sports to turn that lie upside down. I memorised most of the players in Manchester United, and I even tried to remember the names of all the other clubs, like Celtic and Sunderland. After that whenever my friends talked about football, I gave them my two cents about how Chels*** is going to lose to the best club in history, the guys in red, Manchester United. It was an amazing feeling. What was surprising was that they never stopped and questioned my knowledge, they were only interested in badmouthing the opposition and I was really good at that.

Whenever my friends talked about a big match, I tuned in, since everyone would talk about it the next day. It's amazing what the human mind is capable of. Even though it was torturous for me to sit through

those ninety minutes, I made myself believe that I was having fun. When the first El Clásico occurred during this phase, they asked whether I supported Real Madrid or Barcelona. Madrid was my answer. Why? Well, Ronaldo left United and joined them so why not? That's not all I did. Not only did I want recognition, I wanted to feel superior. So, I did the same thing for cricket, and I went so far that I even watched the Olympics to present my vast knowledge to my peers. It was a dark time in my life.

Eventually I grew up and it turned out just fine. Am I ashamed of my deeds? Not really, school life can be pretty cut throat. I knew what I had to do to survive. Okay, it wasn't exactly like that but it's cool to think that was the case. Now, everyone knows that I don't watch sports and when my friends talk about player transfers and stuff, I just stand there, and then the conversation transitions into my football Facebook posts from back in the days. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Shoaib Ahmed Sayam tortures himself by watching fake sports and Vietnamese cartoons. Send help at: fb.com/ooribabamama





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