

THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY BATSMEN

**(My Account Of The
Extraordinary Batsmen Of My
Generation)**

- Saurabh Choudhary

Introduction

I have written one book earlier & this is my 2nd script in the series where I am writing about the great batsmen of my generation. This is the account & here I have inked as seems from the title of my book "The League Of Extraordinary Batsmen", my commentary about the batsmen I consider extraordinary. These are those batsmen who have played in the time I have played & whom I consider extraordinary. They are all legends & they are 16 in number. The 16 batsmen I have listed are common household personalities & hence their techniques & performances were clear in my mind & hence I could write about them easily. I have thrown light on only batsmen as I am a batsman & I have interest in batting more. The thrill of batting in my heart is the biggest fun on this earth & I have essayed my charm of it as it deserves. So here is my new endeavour - expressing about the around one & a half dozen batters I know best & who are the biggest legends of this game. The players I have selected only of my time also because I have lived most with them & hence I feel most for them. Thanks to people for appreciating my previous book, I hope this will also go down well. It's plainly a fun pursuit & I expect this to be a part of the ultra-joyful discourse that Cricket has in public life these days. Grates to my fans & Cric followers & here I present my loveful production with full gratitude & honourfulness. I have named the players by their nicknames in the table of contents to make suspense about them, so that the readers have to go to the chapters to see who those players are.

Table Of Contents

Chapter no.	Name	Page no.
1	My Type Of Batting	4
2	My Idea Of A Best Match	6
3	Tranquility Zone - The Summit Mode Of A Skilled Batsman	8
4	Ideal Conditions	10
5	The Stack Begins	13
6	The God Of Cric Marathon	14
7	The God Of Solidity	23
8	The Prince Of Style	29
9	The 21st Century King	31
10	The Most Underplayed Warrior	33
11	The Tall-Round Marvel	34
12	The Opening Champion - My Fav Role	35
13	The Monk Who Won Many A Ferraris	36
14	Rocket Launcher @ 4 / Ball	37
15	The Cook Who Knew All The Cuisines	38
16	The Cultimate Captain	39
17	Cricket's Apple	40
18	The 4th Innings Specialist	42
19	The Mac Of Kiwis' O/S	44
20	The Remover Of The Dark	46
21	The Sublime Accumulator	58
22	The Sum	50
23	Illustrations	51

1. My Type Of Batting

The beginning should be done by stating what kind of batting I like, what is my idea of an ideal batting. Because the batsmanship crafts in the play are of varied types & players are versatile with diverse capabilities on show, the 1st question arises is there a need for some compulsions on idealness, aren't all the styles which are successful right, the answer is Cricket is a game of beauty & elegance & style of display which makes the event attractive & exhibits class without which it's colourless & tasteless. The batting which comes with sound technique, positive mindset & persevered application, that appears impressive while the one which is a fluke, played over hit & trial method, that appears unjustified & unconvincing. Still there are two types of batsmen in this art - those who are more of a traditional & classicalist technique & play the game always by the book keeping fully inactive till a playable delivery comes & those who are a bit proactive & stay a bit alert for hitting even if a little playable delivery comes. These two types comprise the entire debate of batting as to what should be done ideally while there are still another category like Sir Viv & Sir Don who strike @ over 70 & are exceptions in the matter.

My personal choice while batting is the former most in which I take full rest & strike only when a properly hittable ball comes but such opportunities rarely came in the age I played when I had to play a little faster to win. Due to this I got a little less chance to hit the ball the way I wanted. One cause of this is this also that I also stayed in a bit of dilemma always impatient to play that properly hittable ball. I couldn't stay till then & thus had to always follow the second path. While in the One Day also I always had that dilemma whether I can go full berserk scoring @ 110-120 when I wish or I have to maintain a respect for the bowlers & maintain a strike rate of 86-89 which is my average. I wished to hit that hard like some of the other batsmen did but never had the clarity that I can do it & always settled for the cautious approach. However while watching other batsmen, I have got satisfaction from many batsmen playing the way I wanted at that time. This is a little summary of my type of batting & I have mentioned about these types of battings in

the chapters ahead while describing about my favourite players' favourite innings.

2. My Idea Of A Best Match

There are many kinds of enjoyable finishes in Cricket with funs of different kinds, but there are some kinds of matches which give the maximum contentment. My idea of a best match is one in which we bat long, bat big & crush the opposition easily defeating them by inning or having required to chase a small target with us having batted our main in probably the 2nd inning of the match. Batting 2nd in the first inning will give us time to collect our energies & relax before having to work. An easy match is always a pleasure. Easiness brings fun. The combination of big batting & easy winning gives us the joy of both the worlds. There used to be more such matches in the '90s & early 2000s but now even the minnows have advanced much & with Zimbabwe's suspension from Test Cricket, the scope of easy fodder has lessened further. An ideal series is also similar - In a 3-Test series, we win the 1st 2 matches just as described above & have a good batting practise in the 3rd one conceding the opposition some runs & ending in a draw or loss. In a One-Day also (If it's a 5-match series), we win the 1st 2 battles, chasing high but manageable targets, & clinch the series in the 4th encounter. Giving some concessions to the opposition gives a feeling of balance, which scores equilibrium of peace. But in more important adventures like the Border-Gavaskar Trophy or Tendulkar-Cook Trophy, we would like to go a bit more overboard & take the series 4-1 or 3-1. In longer projects like the WC or CT, it's important to have a squad full with talented players so that fatigued players can be changed in between or having taken sufficient rest before the runup to the tournament so that the longevity of the tourna doesn't take a toll before its end. An ideal Test season for me is one with an easy home series to begin with where we can take confidence from an easy triumph & then 1-2 challenging overseas projects which will form the mainstay of the thing.

A series win against a strong team in Tests with mighty performances in batting is what gives maximum satisfaction & a run like Australia in the 2000s is what the ultimate peak in Cricket is.

All this requires being in what many players call the Tranquility Mode or the Equilibrium Zone - means a state of

mind where the mind is at full peace with itself, no other thought or idea crosses the mind apart from the work in hand & the focus at the task of target is full. This is my subject of the next chapter. I have been in this zone many times in my career & it's been a contentful experience.

3. The Tranquillity Zone - The Summit Mode Of A Skilled Batsman

The first time I had heard about this zone is when Matthew Hayden made 380. Before this I had been in that zone myself 1-2 times & imagined that such a zone might be existing subconsciously 1-2 times also & imagined also that some batsmen might have been in that zone a few times during my growing up years. When Sachin had made those marathon twin hundreds of 155 & 177 against Australia in 1998, I had for the 1st time felt that he must have been during these innings in a state of mind of full satisfaction doing just what he wanted & enjoying his art fully with full activeness. When Sachin had struck those 9 tormenting centuries in 1998 & been totally flawless throughout the season, we all had started thinking that he will be unstoppable now & will never come down from this form ever. He must have worked to be in this zone during this period to achieve his aims & it becomes a bit subconscious at that time when this zone is attained. Sachin, no need to say, had this potential & had he not encountered the 2 accidents of his life which he did in 1999 (those of his back injury & his father's demise), he would have attained that. There had been started waving of banners like this in the 1999 WC that if Sachin wins this WC for India, he will become a superhuman. My first experience of this tranquillity zone had come in the 3rd Test against Australia in 2001 although I hadn't achieved much in that game or even by then. It was the effect of our performance in the 2nd match in which Laxman & Rahul had chased down a target of 387 with an unbroken 5th wicket partnership of 180. The ease with which they did it inspired me to play with a cool mind & fearlessly. We didn't think we will lose that match but we didn't even expect to reach the target so easily. Laxman Bhai's rise to super club with that inning & Rahul & his faith in the beauty of Test Cricket, committing to its temperament come what may, motivated me to focus with full concentration & play fully dedicatedly. This way when Shiv Sundar Das & I had set up a partnership of 200 for the 1st wicket, I felt that I was in that zone in that inning & played with full concentration & confidence & enjoyed my knock with much joy. The 1st time it came out in the open about this zone was when Matthew Hayden

acknowledged after his 380 that he was in this zone in this
inning & played at full peace with the thing & I think that
might have motivated batsmen to put effort for this type of
zone after that & it is a very delightful state of mind with
having everything in hand one needs & no need of any thing
else being there & no disturbance or doubt, only peace &
inner-happiness.

4. Ideal Conditions

The ideal conditions for batting are what here I will be talking about. There are mainly 2 types of external conditions in Cricket - The weather conditions & the pitch conditions. The weather is the best when it's sublime & maritime but not having dew in the air. It's what we call the spring weather in India & the pitch is best when it's neutral. Although all the external conditions should be neutral to save the game from being affected by unjustified forces, but the quality of opposition (bowling) gives the maximum satisfaction when it is the best. So an ideal condition here I will include is the quality of attack being of top. But in between there should be some easy matches like against the minnows or when the opposition has underperformed. Such matches boost our confidence & add to our enjoyment. They also offer the chance to make some records. Some people enjoy batting in adverse conditions like when the wickets are falling regularly or when the pitch is pacy or bouncy, but I don't like to take such risks & prefer the external conditions to be neutral. The rain is also an obstruction at times which's beyond our control. I hate the interruption of rain & it's a non-entity in my systems.

There's been much manipulation of the pitch fashionably due to the home team's right of preparing it as per their wish. This affects the match unnaturally & makes the toss important. India wasn't the 1st team to start influencing the pitch but followed the trend when other teams didn't comply. Why should the pitch affect the batting or bowling? The pitch is the best when it doesn't impact the players' performance & lets the merit decide the course of the match. It's time now that ICC should make the rule to make the pitches neutral & also have toss only once in a series alternating the chooser every other match. The weather conditions are also neutral at many places in many parts of the world & it should be seen to have matches more in those areas or more at those times in other places when the weather conditions are neutral. About the game conditions about which I have said before that some people like to score more in such situations when the wickets aren't supporting from other end as they get then the

opportunity to show their might, but my favourite condition's when we have a long opening partnership in batting which gives the team a solid foundation & makes it easy for the other batsmen to take the team to a good total. A huge opening stand's a big + in Cricket as it makes half the job done & provides the batsmen following much confidence & takes the game almost away from the opposition on an average day. I've been lucky to be part of many such partnerships in both formats of the game with Sehwag & Sachin respectively & it's taken us to mountaineous totals on each occasion. I hold the record for most 200+ partnerships between the same pair of batsmen in Tests with Sehwag & everytime of it's been mindboggling because Sehwag is a monster when the going is going. I'd like to mention here some points from my blog where I have made suggestable recommendations like a better format for the World Cup & a plan for the World Test Championship. A World Cup is best when there is a lot of competition in it & it means the minnows should be got rid of & there should be more matches per team. In my plan there are 46 matches which is less than the 54 matches of the 2003 edition which means that the competition isn't getting long. The teams are the 8 main teams of Cricket. They contest each one with each of the others once in the round robin stage which means that there is at least 1 match between each pair of the teams participating & this means that the tournament's extensive. From there the top 6 teams go to the Super 6 where each team plays with each of the other 5 once more. This means that each team's playing a lot of matches in the tournament which means that the teams are being tested fully for their capacity. The teams reaching the final are playing 14 games in total which is just 3 more than that of 2003. This I don't thing is very high & is manageable. It will give the viewers full entertainment. The teams should carry the points earned in the 1st round to their tally as the tournament should be a test of the teams' overall performance & not of just a few matches. Hence the points from the 1st round should be carriable further. The point system should be simple with 2 points for each win, 1-1 for no result & 0 for loss. The tie matches should be extended to Super Overs until they are decided. The top 4 teams from the Super Overs should go to the S/Fs with the point system being the same in the Super 6 as in the league round. The S/F is 3 vs 2 & 4 vs 1 concluding in the final. In this format each team is playing a lot of matches & some teams are playing even 2 or 3 matches against the same opposition which means they are being tested thoroughly for their mettle. This format will make the tournament more interesting & will finish in less days also than the 2003 WC. The WTC format also which I have suggested can be taken from my blog & the tournament can be scheduled every 4 years. I thus end my discussion on the general things

here before starting the main subject of my book & begin the stack of what for me is "The League Of Extraordinary Batsmen".

5. The Stack Begins

My stack is in the order of ranking of the batsmen. The top 16 batsmen I feel. I have given rating points also to them which I have appended at the end of the document. I find myself inadequate to give light on these players as they are all legends & I am incapable of traversing their greatness in my mind, but the imagination of the thrill that this book may produce in the readers has propelled me to carry out the misadventure. My book contains more of those batsmen who have performed much well against India as I have watched them closely & hence had more impact of them on my mind. In the 2000s I used to think that the 6 great batsmen of that era namely Sachin, Dravid, Lara, Ponting, Hayden & Kallis will be the last 6 batsmen of the great class in Cricket & no more batsman will be able to match them after them as they were too great & it won't be easy to break their benchmark. Out of the 16 batsmen of my rack there are only 3 - Sachin, Dravid & Lara who were on the top call from the first day of their career & didn't take even a little bit of time to reach that form which other batsmen took.

The stack in this book is also like the stack of data structures in 'C' as the first batsman to get in here is getting out the last from the building. Sachin is the first player to start playing from this lot & also the youngest, & he has retired at the maximum age of the group & also later than all the batsmen who debuted in the 80's or '90s. So, here I begin with my first batter & typing down what is "The League Of Extraordinary Batsmen".

6. The God Of Cric Marathon

There have been many Cricketers who have played other games as well like Sir Richards played football, Ashwin plays Chess, Kapil Sir & many others play Golf, but very few of them have the same command in that other game they play also which they have in their main game. But Sachin, if he had been an athlete of marathon he could have broken many records there also because he is a champion of marathon. His longevity of 24 years & that tall wall of 200 Tests & 463 ODIs is a fort that is higher than any other by miles. This is why I am saying he could be a marathon athlete also. He has played a marathon inning in Cricket. He has been argued as the best player to have ever played the game & probably perfect but his biggest achievement in my view is that he turned around Indian Cricket from a story of struggles to one of successes single handedly. His opening the inning in One Day Cricket in 1994 was I think the turning point of Indian Cricket. His super strike rate of 89-90 in his prime days & the maintenance of it around 86 till end is something which is extraordinary for a batsman of his longevity & consistency & it's also something we take for granted. Many batsmen we sometimes rate higher than Sachin like Ponting, Sangakkara & Lara have strike rate much lower than him but we believe that this is Sachin's thankless duty, we don't need to grate him for that. Sachin is by far the most complete Cricketer & he's maintained surprising consistency till the end of his career despite being obstacled by time, age & condition. He maintained super consistency in Tests when India didn't watch Test Cricket & other players didn't consider Test Cricket important. He's a very high quality man as a person also & 's strong roots provided by his family & coach. Sachin & Ramakant Sir are much like Dronacharya & Arjun or Chanakya & Chandragupt. This is also strengthened from a statement that Ramakant Sir once gave about him that Sachin is like Arjun who didn't remain satisfied with Acharya Drona's coaching & kept searching his own ways of the work. Sachin carried the load of almost the entire Indian team throughout the 1st half of his career & was burdened with even captaincy prematurely where he couldn't succeed because the other players didn't play like him. He took most of the records he broke to miles ahead of where any player was close to it. His greatness is loudspoken from comments like "I have seen God.

He bats at no. 4 for India. (Matthew Hayden, when he completed 10,000)" & his offering of sports management contracts of Rs. 100 crores & 500 crores by World Tel. In 2010 he was the highest individual tax payer in India & holds the record for playing most consecutive Tests also which is a big sign of his fitness. Sachin's career is example of many big traits which are rare in today's Cricket - He is supremely talented, has all the weapons in his armoury, has grounded upbringing, is rooted in valued culture, is awesomely focused on his task, doesn't distract ever even a bit, has no desires & hence remains fully concentrated on his goal. When a person has this high level of dedication in his pursuit, he's bound to win all the fortresses. He respects his seniors beyond imagination & treats them always with utmost honour & greet. He isn't satisfied by any amount of success in his performance & seeks to keep soaring higher & higher. Shoaib Akhtar might be right in estimating that Sachin would have ended with 1.3 lakh runs if he had played in today's times. Sachin attracted attentions & appreciations from his very first year of international run & had drawn eyebrows with even his conduct & nature.

The insights & anecdotes that he's given through his book in his coaching & developing years, they are an epic for every Cricket pursuer & he can learn world of things about character & commitment from it & they are also a revelation to the common people about the formats & processes of Cricket coaching which is very interesting. Thanks to Sachin for this.

When a person of this character begins his journey in the public world, he starts catching the view of his competitors & people around him, as he is extraordinary & extraordinary in many ways & is going to rule common space for long & all of them get aspired from him. Sachin must have caused that turmoil in Shardashram Vidyamandir School in the 1980s & his coach must have been witnessing the rise of this phenomenal student under his mentorship.

People are mostly jealous of such people & mostly try to harm them & block their paths but the born to excel are also born to defeat disturbers. Every victory of theirs frustrates them & drags them to follow to that path where they will fail yet another attempt to divert them & harm themselves as they are on the path of destruction.

Sachin had some other advantages also, like his brother was also a Cricketer, which means he had someone to look up to & consult from. The guidance of parents like his in Indian homes is a pre-built building block & stepping stone to success. The fact that he picked up the bat from the age of 3 is also something which that have encouraged him & impacted his motivation. Education / knowledge is always a powerhouse & being born in a family of education-based people is a source of strength. Sachin's Sir taught him the techniques of both limited overs & unlimited overs batting together & thus didn't

stir a difference in the 2 formats which is an ailment in many schools these days who consider some one format more important over the other & dissolve this belief in students also. Sachin's account of his childishness & innocence in early years in his book are proof of his cleanliness & simplicity & reveal only how great he is in every matter. He has stuck to his modesty & humility at many occasions in international region when dodged for it & has given iconic replies to questions of that merit. When he had completed 10,000 runs, he needed 2 wickets to reach 100 ODI wickets in that match also, but he wasn't given the ball. When he was asked is he upset in the presentation ceremony about it he replied that he thought they did the right job. In the Sharjah Cup '98 S/F he was asked does he think he can do the job with this form of his, he just said he hopes the same thing happens here also which had happened in the previous series (India had won all the league matches, but lost the finals). Sachin's middle class & budgeted upbringing made him a tougher boy. Be it travelling long distances in trains & buses or staying with his uncle & aunt, he had done all the hard practises during his growing up days. Sachin's mention in his book that they used to play all the time in school & kept talking about Cricket all the other time shows how focused & rigorous they were in the school. The other illustrious achievement that I think Sachin had in his career was that he maintained perfect balance between Test Cricket & ODI Cricket till the very end of it & never let his performance in any one format dip under the other. People who get more success in one form than the other tend to stress that this format is more important than the other but Sachin didn't let that get onto him despite a few slumps in his trajectory.

Sachin was the face of new India which aspired for duty as well as success & he represented it in every sphere of it - be it personality, honour, fame or money. His life is a bible to take lesson from in every aspect of life. No surprises people toss such slogans as "Cricket is our religion & Sachin is our God." Another biggest achievement of his is that he has been able to rise & fight back everytime he has slipped to deep ridges under which circumstances most people would have succumbed. & To top it all most of his achievements have come under record ages also. At the age of 18, he became the 1st non-British player to play for Yorkshire. At 23, he became the 1st celebrity to be signed up for a million dollar endorsements management contract in India. By the age of 22, he had produced many such match turning innings of the quality of which most aren't able to do it in an entire career. The speed with which he surpassed the record of most runs & most centuries in ODI, the holders of those records & his seniors kept watching & he swept it from underneath their feet at a bullet speed. His Ranji season was also a miracle. He smashed

8 hundreds in a span of 9 games & the pace with which he piled up those centuries, people got no time to say this lad is still a boy & should be tested more before fielding in an international match. His temperament for an aggressive batsman & a classical batsman both were natural. He approached the game with a mindset like a student of academics - respecting the subjects, keen in knowing, ready to work as much hard & considering every aspect of the subject bigger than himself. The supreme most phase of Sachin's career was I think between 1994 & 1998 when he opened the inning & scored at a very high rate (probably 90+) in most matches. He was young at that time & had all the energy in the world with the climax of that phase peaking in the '98 ODI season in which he smashed 9 tons & registered some of the greatest ODI knocks ever. People at that time left all jobs & came to watch Sachin's game in the stadium or TV. He was a phenomenon happening in front of people's eyes in their prime time. The moment he drove that Opel Astra car in Sharjah we all felt we all Indians have done it. It was a hero's performance & he had made all us Indians proud. A similar opportunity came in the Champions Trophy 2000 when India had beaten Australia & South Africa comprehensively to reach the finals where they were in the leading position with a total of 260 in the 1st inning. NZ were 130/5 & could have easily lost by 30 or 40 runs but I think the Indians let their shoulders loose & the match slipped out of hand. Ramnaresh Sarwan went on to drive the car in that tournament. Such incidents pinch me much where we lost an easy target. I often fantasise that I could have made the difference between win & loss easily in those matches & won the tie for us. Asia Cup 2004 & Champions Trophy 2002 are 2 such examples only where India lost in a convenient combat. Sachin himself had won many such battles for India in the '90s where India were going for a loss in an unhard encounter. That back injury in '99 & that accident in the WC '99 turned breaking for Sachin. We had just started imagining about what heroic way Sachin can win that Cup for India & how romantic it will be that the sad news came that he has been diagnosed with a back injury & will be out of the game for 6 months. The report was clearly of disturbing level as a back injury is always back breaking & it most probably will take longer time to recover. We ended up doing nothing but curse our fates. The final jolt came before the Zimbabwe match when he had been orphaned & this could be more disturbing than any thing. The champion's courage & strength were still much accumulated as he went on to score a 140(101) in the next match. The mishap however took its toll in the more testing operations & India missed out from a Semi Final berth succumbing to an irrational rule by the ICC that only the points earned against the teams qualifying for the Super 6 will be counted for the Semi Finals. The hero who had

amassed 500 runs in 7 innings in the World Cup he played at the age of 22 had got victim of destiny.

These years another tiger was developing in the ODI format, the one from Bengal. He was also second only to Sachin in rankings & together they roasted many an oppositions at the opening slot. I remember at a time after the 1999 WC when the batsmen rankings for the ODIs had India at all of the top 3 spots with Dravid hanging at the 3rd one, all the Indians had been saying that the Indians are all over the top in the rankings. Dravid is a big example of commitment & perseverance delivering more than talent & temperament with 10,000 runs in his ODI kitty & having been in the top 3 of the ODI rankings for years when everyone sidelined him as a Test specialist.

It's surprising to note that both Ganguly & Dravid are older than Sachin in age & made their debuts 7 years later than him. Sachin's rise through the '90s & cable TV boom in India are a fairy love tale that peaked Indian Cricket & business in India. Sachin's journey got well complemented when India got Laxman & Sehwag in 2001. Dravid was already in the same zone as him since before & the rise of Laxman & Sehwag saw India rise in overseas series & against stronger oppositions. Laxman's love for difficult conditions & Sehwag's ability to score @ 95-96 even in Tests added to India's mighty batting lineup. That epic inning of 281 in 2001 showed Indian team & the world that more was possible in Test Cricket. & Australian great run through the 2000s was an example what further height could be attained in international Cricket. Dravid & Laxman bonded well & partnered many times in this decade to achieve what was the most invincible thing in international Cricket at that time - beating Australia in tough matches. Australia was lucky to have a big team to choose from & India managed to beat it those many times on the strength of its comparatively smaller pool only. Ganguly was an aggressive captain with outrageous attitude who believed in challenging the oppositions & played eye-to-eye with them. His approach rubbed on to the youngsters & encouraged them to follow their instincts & take risks. Sehwag & Laxman could develop into those fierce campaigners that they did only because Ganguly backed them to pursue their instincts & play from their heart. Sachin also peaked in Tests in Ganguly's captaincy only & reached some of his highest scores under him. Ganguly experimented new things like trying Sehwag as opener in the WC & giving Dravid the duty of gloves. Dravid also assisted him as the VC very well & discharged all the duties that were assigned up to him efficiently. He was demoted to no. 6 in Tests to give Laxman space at 3rd slot where he had done very well in the 1999 Tests, where also he did very well. He developed a pool of pacers to choose from who could be tried at different times resting the rest. Different

wicketkeepers also were given chances after the retirement of Nayan Mongia before India found Mahendar Singh Dhoni.

Ganguly's biggest contribution was in team-building where he did the job which no Indian skipper has done till now. He prepared a perfect blend of experience & youth in which he gave chances only to talent irrespective of whether they were young or old. Sachin had played with many generations of players & did better than all of them. He remained the team's biggest inspiration despite not remaining successful as a captain. He didn't succeed as a captain not because he was not a good leader but because leadership is a difficult job & not everyone has this quality in him. Sachin was among the top run getters of the year in 2001-2002 even when he wasn't in his best form. He scored the 2nd highest 1,391 runs in 2001 when he was considered in lesser form of his. He scored some or the other middle level scores even when he had't done very well, but that goes undernoticed. In an interview Sachin had said that he watches videos of his dismissals when he isn't playing Cricket. That's his only involvement other than Cricket. No wonder he registers 115* even in an exhibition match on his comeback after a 6-month injury.

Sachin's tennis elbow came as a blessing in disguise for me as I got the chance to open & show some of my striking abilities which got noted in the eyes of my captain. In this period India started winning overseas & Indian Cricket gained recognition in world. Ashes has a history, otherwise Australia-India series were more interesting in this phase. It was as heartening to see that Sachin wasn't ready to leave his job even till the last moment, he said drop me when I amn't good enough, but I won't leave myself. He loved this game so much that he wanted to stay in it for even if one second he could more. Most players who started playing after him retired before him. He had become a household personality in India who got the eyes stuck to the T.V. for the whole duration that he played & became every mother's dream son & every sister's dream brother. He was the reason an entire generation of people started watching Cricket & had become a role model for them. T.V. had become an essential commodity in even poor households due to him. Add to it the stories of his bloodwarship, like the one Mr. Sidhu narrates of his continuing to play even after a blow on his nose. It can be understood that he had practise of it as he often returned blood stained from his coaching school. Sachin brought an entire era in Indian Cricket. When Mr. Gavaskar retired, it was asked who will lead India next. Sachin became the answer to this question. When Sachin made debut for India, most Indian players were of that era of the '83 World Cup winning team & Sachin had the privilege of playing under the leadership of some of the greatest captains like Kapil Dev & Krishnamachari Srikant. Even Mr. Vengasarkar played a few

years with him. This was the reason he matured early & got the chance to captain at the age of 23. The 2003 World Cup was a revolution in Indian Cricket which saw not only Ganguly peaking as a captain & some young guys developing as stars of future, but also Sachin showed that he can never be written down & could score the most runs in a tournament in even the 2nd half of his career & when some people were seeing him going down. He was like a suppressed tiger in that tournament who had been caged for many years & had got his hunt suddenly. He fired from the ball 1 of the match 1 & showed that runs could be scored in bulk in a tournament if a little extra consciousness is shown from the beginning. It's like going a step ahead & catching hold of the bowlers & oppositions with force. He had given hints of following this strategy many times earlier also like in the '96 World Cup. The tender age at which he got to debut at the international level is proof enough how potent he was already. Had India not lost nerves in that final of the 2003 & had the team not dropped its shoulders before losing the game, the result could have ended on the other side. Sachin lost wicket early in that match purely due to the surmounting pressure & the compulsion of scoring from the 1st ball. His thorough preparations & his faultless techniques which he had practised from childhood saw him score in bulk in every tournament.

The Indian team's loss in the final disappointed everyone but the clinicality with which they reached the final winning all matches in between leaving one won all hearts. Ganguly had said in the press conference after that match that Sachin is an asset for any captain. He has scored nearly 700 runs in a World Cup which's unbelievable. Ganguly had persuaded Srinath to play in this World Cup as India's 3rd seamer as India lacked one. Sachin had a golden arm also, when he turned it for a googly at times, he succeeded in getting breakthroughs most of the times. And he bowled both leg break & off break. He'd a tendency of taking many wickets when he had already scored a big hundred in the batting inning. He had played an important role in that historical match of Calcutta also in which India needed to dismiss Australia for 382 on Day 5. India had clinched 6 wickets & the end of the day was nearing, there was a bit of a chance of Australia escaping with 1 or 2 wickets in hand, when Sachin chipped in with 3 wickets & eased India's operations. In his later years he bowled a bit less as the competition in batting had warmed up. 3 times when I didn't expect Sachin to do that well as he did was in the 2007-08 tour of Australia, the 2010 Test season & his final year. After the 2007 disaster of World Cup, the India team was at its lowest ever & Sachin wasn't expected to pile up tons in a tour like Australia at that declining age. But he did, & that also 2, & that also 153 & 154. This showed that he gave up every thing & fought with his life when nothing was left.

In 2010 also India were up against some mighty Sri Lankans with 600s & 700s & similar Australia with 400s & 500s, but he defied age & produced 2 double tons which fetched him the maximum number of runs in the year & the Player of the Year. In his final full season in 2013 again he was delivering 70s & 80s in every 2nd inning. It was demanded on the day of his superannuation that he be given the Bharat Ratna & so declared the Indian government to be bestowed on the next 26 January. Life with Sachin was also filled with funny & hilarious incidents with teammates every now & then as is disclosed from an incident involving Virat in his debut year. This is that incident which Sachin has described in his book also. Virat had made his debut for India & all the team were aware of his passion for his duties & respect for Sachin. This is when Yuvraj Singh, Munaf Patel & Irfan Pathan found an idea to play a prank. They said to him that if he takes blessings from Sachin, he will be well blessed for his career & will have a good relationship with him. He took it seriously & touched Sachin's feet & it was then that both of them saw the 3 musketeers laughing from the corner & understood the joke. Sachin has been hailed as the most complete Cricketer by many like Ricky Ponting for his wholesomeness & dedication which he proved with his longevity. He is one of the 5 Indians to be inducted in the ICC Hall Of Fame. I had a lot of belief when Greg Chappell had been appointed India's coach that he will be a very good coach as he had a lot of plans for India & many blueprints for India's missions which he had presented in his interview but his getting mismotivated & misadventures destroyed the things about which Sachin has reported in his auto. Sachin's greatness as a player got witnessed in ODIs also when he played those 3 innings of 163, 175 & 200 in 2009 & 2010. In the inning of 163 he had reached close to the 200 getting to his final score in the 45th over only. He could have struck the 1st double century of the ODIs in that inning only had he not got out to an unfortunate dismissal after that. The inning of 175 was also an unimaginable as no other batsman cooperated & India couldn't have been expected to chase such a huge target against the Australians. The 200 finally was a miracle & relieved the Indians that finally an Indian only broke that record, & that too Sachin. Sachin is every Indian's pride & 's been so for so long that it seems like a part of our inner self only. When he hits those smash shots, we feel we have done it. When he climbs over those warred worlds, we feel we have done it. Faf Du Plessis has put it in right words that when he stands in front of Sachin, he feels he is a student & Sachin is a professor. Vinod Kambli also had touched his feet once when he had met him at a stage. Our national coach Sandeep Patil Sir also was a much competent coach like Achrekar Sir & he mentored us very well for 1 decade. Even in that depressing tour of Australia in 2011 he

had been scoring 70s & 80s in every second inning. After retirement Sachin has been doing a very guiding role of motivating the Indian team on Twitter & torchbearing on matters of national importance. First he heartened all with that delighting book of 'Playing it my Way' & then he took up the platform of social media to express his feelings & share his wisdom. His statements & anecdotes are read passionately by people across continents & he's become a source of wisdom for millions.

I conclude this chapter on him with this comment on him that he's the most complete Cricketer & 's been the biggest champion of Cric marathon. The fact that contemporaries like Ponting & Kallis who were being predicted to chase his records, failed to do so, & the likes of De Villiers & Amla also retired earlier raises this anticipation that his records may never be broken & he will never end up as the God of the Bat-Ball game.

My Salutations To The "GAWWWWD" Of Cricket For Playing It The
Way He Did.

Chapter 2.

7. The God Of Solidity

There have been many Gods of different types but there has been only one who has heaped up 10,000 in both formats & earned the title of "The God Of Solidity" with a defensive approach. He has raised the building with the wall of technique & rightfully got the title of "The Wall" of the team. He has been the 2nd most important batsman for India in his 2 decades & made the most runs in the 21st century. He was a classical batsman by default & developed his technique around the old school of batting, focussing on only defending & hitting the ball only when it's of that merit. He got selected in the higher teams late - at 18 in the 1st class level & 23 in the national. He was a principled & disciplined spirit since beginning & focussed hard on his game & studies & didn't get distracted ever towards anything else. Humility & determination not to get distracted by anything were his first ethics & they reflected as much in his play as in his personal conduct. Growing up in a middle class family & service doing parents Jammy picked up the art at the age of 12 & learned the skills in a reputed coaching school. He had an elder brother also who played Cricket. Rahul understood the importance of education & realised that his parents have struggled hard to meet his & his brother's needs meet. Coming from a South Indian family, calmness & composure were in his blood. Rahul, did his studies till graduation & attained 60% marks in his B.Com. also. His school must have been one focussing more on the older format, that is why he developed a more traditional approach. Jammy worked in different modes accomplishing the different goals of life, but what remained common in these was his commitment to Cricket & his diligent work out. Rahul played 1st class Cricket for Karnataka for 5 years & reached his destination gradually. The first time he got to wear the national jersey was in 1995 in an ODI match. His Test debut happened with Sourav in which he made 80s / 90s in both of the 1st 2 matches. Rahul's career had a misfortune of being eclipsed by someone else on important occasions always & he always remained a lesser sung. On the debut, Ganguly scored bigger hundreds in both the matches, on his record breaking 145 in Taunton, Sourav again surpassed to 183, on his follow on winning match in Kolkata, Laxman exceeded him, during his glorious run in the 2003 WC, he had to keep wickets, in his

captaincy stint from 2005-07, India climaxed badly in the 2007 WC. All through his passage he had to bear misfortunes which undermined his calibre. But Dravid never irked a bit in any situation & discharged all the duties with the utmost sincerity. It's due to this quality that he was titled "The Wall" of India. Dravid's rise to supersolidity started in the Test season 2003-04. He struck 3 big double centuries there in a span of 9 matches. He had already played some innings of solidity in the WC 2003 due to which he had been started considering as the most stable batsman of India. The Test season of 2003-04 saw him taking India to big scores in almost every inning. Within a span of 16 innings he scored 1296 runs & emerged as the no. 1 batsman of the year. This fetched him the Garry Sobers award of the Player of the Year in the inaugural ICC awards. He hit 1 double century in each series & India dominated this entire season like champions. This period saw Rahul Dravid get great remarks from the top authorities of the world, like - Ravi Shastri stating that he has considered 3 Indian batsmen great till now - Sunny Sir, Vishy Sir & Sachin. Dravid is the 4th Indian to walk into that club. Vivian Richards commented that Dravid was the most stylish batsman of the time because he was never no. 1, was always no. 3 or 4 but finished first in the race of all. Sunny Sir stated during the inauguration of the NCA which was presided by Vishy Sir & inaugurated by Dravid that it is only apt that the academy has been presided by the best player of his generation & inaugurated by the best player of this generation. Ian Chappell had also verbed that Dravid is the joint no. 1 batsman of this world at present along with Hayden & Lara & is likely to finish among the top 10-12 of all time. Before this year also Dravid had smashed 600 runs in a 6 inning series in England with 4 consecutive centuries between West Indies & England. In West Indies India had lost an opportunity to win a series 3-0 which it had lost 1-2 by losing 2 easy matches. But Dravid more than made up for it by dominating England. The 2003-04 Test season I will describe in elaborate detail as it was the most golden phase of Dravid's era.

The season involved 2 Tests vs New Zealand in India, 4 against Australia on their soil & 3 vs Pakistan there. New Zealand had come determined that they will draw both the matches. This is the reason they played slow run rate in both the matches & batted 2½ days in the 2nd tie to manage to save both. India had finished with the more successful edge in the 1st fight & Dravid had almost snatched the match from their fist with scores of 222 & 73. India batted 1st in it & set up 500. NZ got bundled for 340. We posted a 200 in the second again & gave them a target of 360. They ended up 272/6 opposite to it. Had the bowlers got one more session, they would have routed up this Kiwi lineremaining.

In the 2nd combat Kiwi batted 7 sessions to avoid losing in a piled 630. India just managed to avoid follow on with my gritty 64 in the beginning. The remaining game then was a formality. The series thus ended in a boring 0-0 but Dravid's masterclass trailored what he was up for. This series was followed by a triangular ODI in which India fought throughout but succumbed to the Australian might in the final. The ODI triangle was followed by India in an Australian summer which was being predicted as a full whitewash of India by the Australians in both formats. Pakistan experts had predicted that India will lose 0-4. Indian PM was in Australia at that time with the Australian PM who predicted that Australia will cleansweep India. The series saw India firepower from the first match though. The starter was affected by rain which was the reason that the match didn't result. Australia got bundled for 329 in the first inning amid 3 days of rain & showed that they were pumping in bubbles only till now. Indian fightback was led by Ganguly with a captain's 144 & managed 490 with my defiant 81. The lead of 190 runs was sufficient to give them a pat for their overconfidence. Subsequently then they had to register a 421 to have sufficient score to bowl out India. But the time didn't develop & India closed the match at 84/3.

Still, Stuart McGill was at his teaser best & said that rain saved India & Australia will still wipe 3-0. The 2nd match saw the history changer. Australia posed 400/5 on Day 1. On the 2nd day they finished at 556 & gave India the chance to bat 1½ sessions. This was the beginning of the fightback. Akash Chopra & Virendar Sehwag who had given India good starts in all the innings in this season again initiated with a 70-odd stand. India were however reduced to 85/4 soon. But the magical duo of Laxman & Dravid from this point picked & took the score to 180/4 by stumps. The 3rd day Dravid batted all day & took the score to 477/6 with his 199. On the 4th morning he completed his double century & stretched India to 523 with his 233. Laxman also hit 148. Australia were then frustrated with India's fightback & hasted a 2nd inning batting for proving they can still win. But Ajit Agarkar took advantage of this hurry & ran through their order. They summarised for 196. India got a target of 230 which they managed with Dravid's anchoring of 72*. Steve Waugh was moved with this fightback & brought back the winning ball & handed it to Dravid as a regard. This match was clear indication of the new power India were developing.

The third match was even more entertaining where Australia laid a greed top in Melbourne & India had to bat first. This was Virendar Sehwag's day & he produced an explosive 195 on the first day only & India were 300 before the fall of the first wicket. I had contributed 180 in this partnership. India totalled to 546 in this inning vs which Austrlia tallied 558. This had consumed more than 10 sessions

& India gave Australia a target of 286 in the 2nd inning in reply to which they could finish only 105/1.

India entered the decider with a lead. The Indian confidence was now justified & backed by a reason. The Sydney pitch was a spinning one & on this turner track Anil Kumble & Harbhajan Singh unrooted Australia twice before reaching the target. India had batted 1st & made 273/3 on Day 1 after being at 73/3 at one stage. Sachin & Laxman had a marathonic partnership & they took India past 600. Sachin remained not out on 241 & Laxman secured a 178. India were now safe to seal the series as the score was too high for the opponents to beat. Australia ended up a 400 against an 8-fer of Kumble & India scrapped a 200 in the second innings also with Sachin posing 60*. Aus had a target of 424 chasing which they ended up at 280 with Kumble scalping a 4-fer in the 2nd innings also.

THIS WAS INDIA'S GREATEST OVERSEAS VICTORY EVER & IT FINALISED
WITH A SCORELINE OF 2-0.

In the VB series that eventualised also India played competitive in all the matches & managed to reach the finals unbeaten but the finals were tough by Australia & they conquered with mammoth margins in the 1st 2 finals only. Dravid had now developed into a Demi God & was being declared as the new God of Indian Cricket. The 3rd tour was of Pakistan. India were playing Pakistan in Pakistan after 15 years & hence there was much hype about it. Some terrorist groups had threatened to shoot Sachin & Sourav. The series went as expected & India swept both the Test & ODIs. The Test format was a total Sehwag show with his dominance from the 1st inning to the last inning & the exploder devastated the Pakistani attack on a flat pitch & wayward bowling on Day 1 reaching 228* & finishing on 309 on Day 2. The day when Sehwag was on 228, news came that his wedding had been fixed & he was to wed immediately after the Pak series. This was the 1st triple century by an Indian & he broke the record of VVS Laxman of highest score. Sachin contributed a 194* in this partnership & India reached 675 then & he made a record of scoring the most (495) runs in a stretch without getting out. The rest of the match was a formality & India won by an inning.

The 2nd match saw Pakistan bounce back & on a green pitch laid out to trouble India, top Indian batsmen faltered playing overconfidently & Yuvraj (112) & Pathan (49) were the only good scorers in this inning. Pakistan then savaged a 389 courtesy good innings from Inzamam & Abdur Razaq & the target set by India was 241. Sehwag shone in the 2nd innings also & Pakistan failed before this Indian prowess.

It was the 3rd Test then that was Dravid's magna show. He piled up a fantastic 270 in India's 600, & in that too he got out only trying to score fast runs after his 250 when India had scored many runs. This was also a gem of an inning. Technically perfect & elegancewise classic. It was after these innings that Dravid got remarks like these - "All the talk going around here on aggression is rubbish. If you want to see real aggression, look into Rahul Dravid's eyes. (Matthew Hayden)" & "Dravid's (this) 270 was a class of an inning. You could see how much he was concentrated there on the job. (Ramiz Raja)". This way Dravid ended up as the leading run scorer of that year. The ICC award was held in London, around 15 June. He got a car in the Player of the Year. That season must have motivated the rest of the teams also to hit harder.

The next milestone was hitting a twin ton in a Pakistan match. Which came in 2005. After that, he was selected as the captain in the Rest of the World team in the Super Test Match organised by ICC. The biggest achievement then came in September 2005 when he was promoted as the captain of the Indian team. India's performance under Dravid was expected to be very good as he would lead by example. Under Dravid's captaincy India won series in England, West Indies. One low point came in between when India exited from WC 2007 without qualifying for the Super 8. His last big achievement was in 2011, when he scored 3 centuries in England totalling 461 in England. It was a low series for India it had lost 0-4. In that disasterous series Dravid had shone brightly & won the Man of the Series for India. He hung his boots in ODIs in Jan 2012 & Tests in Aug 2012 after getting stretched over & not being able to perform high. He was not an unable captain, but he couldn't fare long because of his failure in the 2007 WC & stepped down after that. The coach also was sacked after that & Anil Kumble was made captain for 1 year.

Still he managed to aggregate 10,000 in ODIs & 13,000 in Tests & averaged 50 & 40 respectively in both with 48 centuries.

He was an underdog of the game & finished like a master. Even today he is a server of the game in India having been in the Advisory Committee & now an India 'A' coach. It's been said lately that he's performed very well as the coach of the India 'A' team & it's due to his contribution that India has been able to developed a strong bench strength which was visible in IPL 2020.

Overall, Dravid has been a powerful exponent of the game & a fierce competitor for the opponents & a dream player for the viewers to cherish.

I END THE CHAPTER ON DRAVID WITH THESE WORDS THAT IT WAS DUE TO HIM THAT TEST CRICKET GOT THAT RECOGNITION IN INDIA WHICH

IT GOT & HE IS A ROLE MODEL FOR THE ASPIRANTS OF THE GAME ALL
OVER THE WORLD & AN ICON IN HIS OWN RIGHT.

8. The Prince Of Style

Many stalwarts have played the game but few've that elegance, swag & style that Lara has. He's a class in his batting style which makes him a treat to watch. His backlift, stance, swing & hitting style have a flashy flambuoyance & grace in it. He plays along the line of the ball very much & hits the ball very much along the ground when playing in Tests & opens up aggressively in the shorter format. He lifts the bat high before hitting it & punches it hard even when defending. His swings are very curvylicious. & He takes on fast bowlers also on the head. He's played many epic innings in Test Cricket & saved or won his team many a times single-handedly. He had a knack of hitting big scores since the beginning only & made a 277 against Australia in his 5th match only which was his 1st ton. Scored a world record 375 in his 4th year in international Cricket & struck a first class highest 501 also the same year. He was rated as the best player with pure talent since the beginning only & was compared with Sachin & other greats of the past. His 153 in the 4th innings at Barbados is considered as the second greatest Test inning ever. These rankings have been compiled by ICC. He had played a 213 also in that series saving the team from loss & equalling the series. In that inning of 153, WI was faced with a target of 308 & WI were losing wickets regularly in the chase being reduced to some 100 odd for 5 & 200 for 7. Lara hung in from one side alone & took his team to victory with 1 wicket remaining.

The inning of 400 again that he played in 2006 to regain his world record is also ranked among the top 10 innings of all times. Because of his batting style he was called the prince of style & because of his team's poor performance throughout the decade of '90s he has been called to be in a wrong team. WI slumped to low phase after the greatness of the '70s & '80s. During this phase the team flopped in many matches despite Lara's heroics. Lara remained captain also for many years but never accepted that he is in a wrong team.

There is an instance of a series in 2001, in which WI had lost 0-3 in a series of 3 matches. In that series Brian had scored a 688 with 3 centuries for which he had won the Man of the Series. In the third match of that series he had hit a double ton in the 1st inning & another ton in the 2nd, yet WI

lost by an inning. In the last 2 years of his career also, when he was sensing his end near, he struck many centuries & double centuries in Test Cricket to lift his record.

He has as good an average in ODI Cricket also & has registered many centuries for WI. It's believed Lara would have scored much better in his career had he not succumbed to vices like overpartying etc. in between. WI Cricketers are said to have the most natural cricketing abilities & A.B. De Villiers is said to have the closest style flair to Lara.

9. The 21st Century King

This is my favourite chapter of the book & I can write for the endless length over it as it's about my favourite batsman. Ricky Ponting is the batsman who has entertained me the most as he is the batsman whose prime period coincided with the phase I watched Cricket the most passionately. My love for Ricky Ponting started from 2003 WC when he scored that hammering 140(121)* in the final. He had a big-match temperament & performed well always in big matches. Before that I wasn't such a fond of Ricky & Australia. I rather considered Ricky to be a rough person because he behaved mostly rough in his public interfaces. Australia was also developing in its streak of great runs in international matches till that time. By after that win it had developed the skill of beating teams 3-0, 4-0 in their own lands. Australia was ruthless in its 2003 run & won all the matches comprehensively including even the 2 matches it had come close to losing but was saved out by some of its craftsmen gallantly. The final vs India was one-sided & showed how deep they were. They managed 359 at the loss of just 2 wickets & had a 250+ partnership in the end. It was then that I started believing that roughness also has a charm & it must be liked. In that year Ponting amassed 1548 runs in the calendar year in 11 matches & had struck 3 double centuries in them. They had swept SL 3-0 in their home as well as away. Ricky was the top run getter in the India tour of Australia Test series also & had tallied 705 runs. At that time Rahul Dravid had said after the 3rd day of the 3rd Test that Ponting & Hayden are respectively the no. 1 & no. 2 batsmen in the world at present. There was no looking back after that. He kept piling runs in heaps & bulks & kept scoring @ sky touching averages & continued to do so for the whole decade. He had perhaps realised that there was scope of recording much higher performance in Cricket, especially batting, than the normal & there was scope for much more fame & recognition in Cricket if that is done. He broke many records in that era, won many an awards also which included the Player of the Year in ICC, Test player of the Year another time & the Cricketer of the Decade

2000-2009. His biggest record came in 2008 when he hit 8 consecutive centuries. In that age he must have averaged around 100 in Tests & 60 in ODIs. He was as good a captain & led from the front. His team's run in the 2007 WC also was a ruthless one & it crushed all teams badly. He was blessed to have players like Hayden, Langer, Gilchrist, McGrath & Warne which made his task easier. But he also fell to the law of averages between 2009 & 2013 when he scored just 1 century. He took his retirement at such a time when he was being predicted to break Sachin's record of most Test hundreds. Probably he could see that nothing would remain if he didn't retire immediately & he needed to do so immediately to save his things. For me he is the king of aggressive batting & is the biggest representative of aggression both on & off the field & is the ultimate symbol of a champion. It's true that he got such a team in heritage which was extremely talented but he carried that legacy & executed it to perfection. Australian players seem extra good also because of the high standards they are made to maintain. Steve Waugh was sacked from the ODI captaincy just because he lost one series & was dropped from the ODI team forever. Before that he's leading the team like Alexandar. Ponting is the captain to win most ICC events (4). I think the Champions Trophy shouldn't have been played every 2 years after 2004, it should have been played every 4 years after that because it had got too congested & the schedule didn't allow it. In that case, Ponting might have won only 3 titles. Australia lost in 2011 also because India are too strong at home. I had expected Ponting & Kallis to play till the 2015 WC. & So also Dravid & Laxman. If Australia hadn't lost at the 2011 WC, Ponting wouldn't have been removed from the captaincy still. For me the Border-Gavaskar Trophy is the ultimate achievement in Test Cricket & Ponting never won a BG Trophy match as captain in India. In 2004, when Australia had routed India badly, he had missed the 1st three Tests off injury & after that India never lost a match to them here till his retirement. Ponting was as rough person & straightforward in personal interactions. Be it the media exchanges or the presentation ceremonies, he's blunt in speaking his mind & roughed up with all entities. Some might consider this rudeness but for me this is beautiful aggression of a successful player. Virat is growing in my ladders as the GOAT, but till now it's Ricky who is no. 1.

10. The Most Underplayed Warrior

There have been many unfortunate players in the game who've been unlucky in different ways, but I feel the saddest about Matthew Hayden. He got regular in the team from the age of 30. It's inconsistent to believe a player of his class can be overlooked for so long. Matthew got selected in the team 3-4 times between 1993 & 1999 but couldn't succeed ever. It was after the 1999 WC that he got permanent. After which there was no looking back. His first super success was in the India series of 2001 in which he amassed 549. Then he scored 5 centuries each year from 2001 to 2004. He broke Lara's record of highest individual score in 2003 & registered his name in the hall of fame. His another great achievement was top scoring in the 2007 WC with 659 runs & also top scoring in the 2007 T20 WC. He missed on Sachin's record by 14 runs. He had to finally surrender to repeated injuries in 2009. Matty had built many a great partnerships with Gilchrist at the opening slot in ODIs & Langer in the Tests. He wasn't a batsman less than Ponting but he remained less successful than him due to less opportunities. A very humble person at the same time, he conducted himself with the utmost modesty & dignity till his very end. He had written a book also in which he had stated how he was a ruthless sledger as well as religious family man. For his underplayed opportunities I call him 'The most underplayed Warrior'.

11. The Tall-Round Marvel

There have been many all-rounders in the game but not many have been tall-rounders. Tall-rounders means all-rounders of the stature of tall. Like Garry Sobers & Kallis. When we were growing up we heard stories of 4 great all rounders of the '80s - Kapil Dev, Hadlee, Ian Botham & Imran Khan. They were the only genuine all rounders then - they could bat big along with their main job of bowling hard. When we grew up, we came to know there was one earlier also who was another cut above these 4 - the only Sir Sobers who had amassed 8000 runs & held the record for the most runs for some time. A player of his class only came in the mid 2000s who was a pacer who took 250 wickets in both formats along with making 10000 runs. His tally of wickets was higher than many greats of the game. Kallis was just a good batsman till 2004 after which he rose gigantically smashing 2100 runs in just a span of 12 month around 2005 after his father's death which had affected him enormously. He had broken down much after than incident & took it as a motivation to attain some spiritual virtues. He then started scoring highly & did so for almost a decade hitting a century every 2nd or 3rd match, for which Ravi Shastri had declared him the best batsman of this decade & the Mr. Steel of International Cricket. He was supported by some great players in his unit also who were all very good & made up a very good team - like Graeme Smith, Allan Donald, Amla, De Villiers & Steyn. The South African team of this decade was much one of the strongest teams of all times. The legacy of Hansie Cronje was carried forward very well by his juniors. He was chasing Sachin's record of 51 centuries very well but he also succumbed to the pressure of longevity. Perhaps the strong bench strength of his team also led to his exit. Tall-rounder.

12. The Opening Champion - My Fav Role

My fav batsman I have played with in my fav format of Tests. Justin Langer. I have so much extra fondness for him because he also was an opener like me, he also came around the same time as me, he also was a typical traditional technician like me & I have thought a lot about him while playing with him. A good opening partnership always does half the job for the team as I have already said. Justin had built so many such partnerships with Hayden which made Australia superpowerful. I always dreamt I should also have such opening partnerships with my opening partner to strengthen my team. That's why I considered him a player like me only & had great fondness for him. I feel pity he was given only 8 ODI games. It all happened due to Australia's high standards. He had impressed me in my debut series only which was his debut series also, with that mighty 223. Then every time we heard of a massive Test win of Australia he & Hayden had scored a terrific opener in that. He retired early in my books & his average also understated him. He was worthy of having an average of at least 55.

13. The Monk Who Won Many A Ferraris

There was a monk who sold his Ferrari. And then there was this monk who won many a Ferraris. The elegant southpaw of Sri Lanka who was a stylish 21st century player & who ended up with the 2nd most runs in international Cricket & 2nd most runs in also ODI Cricket & the 2nd most 200s in Test Cricket. He was a treat to watch for the spectators, so beautiful, so cool & so handsome. Formed the largest partnership in international Cricket with Mahela Jayawardene & registered many a records like the highest one-match partnership & the most consecutive ODI hundreds. Missed a WC for his team in 2011, won one in 2014, reached many World Championship finals & captained his team also well in many series. His curvilicious cover drive was a feast for the eyes. & On top of that, he was a wicketkeeper. One of the exponents who played role in establishing SL highly at the world level. Certainly he was a great ambassador of the game & a gentleman to the core. His smile for India's happiness in the WC 2011 final is a legendary image & is considered one of the profile photos of Cricket.

14. Rocket Launcher @ 4 / Ball

Many powerhouse batsmen have come. But none have been named Superman. And this title hasn't been bestowed in flow of emotions. A true superhuman of the game, who showed that bowlers could be hammered around @ 4 / ball in every match. The natural successor of Brian Lara from the point of view of batting style & a genuine 21st century batsman. He has scored all his 25 ODI centuries at the SR of 100+ & 9 of them in under 75 balls. At the same time he has played many Test innings like 43(297) & 33(220) to save Tests. His world record of 149(44) is a miracle & he has played quite many like these in limited overs Cricket. He is able to play scoops & reverse scoops with perfect ease & any shot which any batsman is able to play & creates terror in the opposition camp the moment he descends on the pitch. The T20 is a format suiting to his style & he explodes like an atom bomb in that. Many people who love just his style of Cricket & have seen him most consider him the GOAT. He also came to the South African Cricket team at a time when it was having some more GOATs like Kallis, Graeme Smith, Amla, Steyn & Boucher & the team clicked as a bunch at that time & did some really great stuff on the Cricket field. His average of 54 is just symbolic of him in the limited overs format. His nickname of Mr. 360° is a title which proves how skilled he is in the innovative strokeplay. He delivered some really memorable performances for South Africa but unfortunately South Africa haven't been able to overcome the Chokers tag yet & have won only 1 ICC title. He's a tremendous fielder too & dives with much spring like agility just like his compatriot Rhodes. He is in my view an ODI batsman of the class of Sachin & Sir Viv. He has played many a dangerous innings in the IPL also & had got very close to the final in the WC 2015 where NZ edged just in the last over.

15. The Cook Who Knew All The Cuisines

We travel many places in the world & dine different cuisines but there is just 1 cook who knew all the cuisines. He treated us with muscular dishes when we went to England or he came to India. He is the highest Test scorer for England & somewhere 4th or 5th overall. He had a knack of hitting big hundreds & finished with 38 overall. His 294 against India in 2011 which is his best was a knock which gave us a lot of pain. He suppressed us under it despite our & despite declaring after 700 with which he terminated our hopes of coming back. He has played many a mighty knocks for England like the 766 in the Ashes 2010-11 & the 2 big hundreds in the India series 2012-13. He has captained England also for long & is the most capped England player with 161 appearances & that too just between 2006 & 2018. He was a prominently classical player & played mostly in the classical format only. His style of batting was also an feasty one & he served many a cuisines to the watchers all over the world with his elegant strokeplay.

16. The Cultimate Captain

Stephen Rodger Waugh AO (born 2 June 1965) is an Australian former international cricketer and twin brother of cricketer Mark Waugh. A right-handed batsman, he was also a medium-pace bowler. As Australian captain from 1997 to 2004, he led Australia to fifteen of their record sixteen consecutive Test wins, and to victory in the 1999 Cricket World Cup. Waugh is considered the most successful Test captain in history with 41 victories and a winning ratio of 72%.

Born in New South Wales, with whom he began his first-class cricket career in 1984, he captained the Australian Test cricket team from 1999 to 2004, and was the most capped Test cricket player in history, with 168 appearances, until Sachin Tendulkar of India broke this record in 2010. Thought of in the early stages of his career as only a "moderately talented" player, at one point losing his Test place to his brother Mark, he went on to become one of the leading batsmen of his time. He is one of only thirteen players to have scored more than 10000 Test runs.

He was named Australian of the Year in 2004 for his philanthropic work, and inducted into the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame in front of his home fans at the Sydney Cricket Ground in January 2010.

Waugh has been included in a list of one hundred Australian Living Treasures by the National Trust of Australia, awarded the Order of Australia and the Australian Sports Medal. Known as an attacking and sometimes ruthlessly efficient captain, Waugh rebuffed criticism over "manipulation of the points system" during the Cricket World Cup to ensure his team's progression, and was often critical of the media.^[6] Described in 2003 as a "cold-blooded, scientific" leader, cricket columnist of *The Times* Simon Barnes noted that "Waugh wants to defeat you personally." At the end of his final Test match, Waugh was carried by his teammates in a lap of honour around the Sydney Cricket Ground. In a fan poll conducted by the CA in 2017, he was named in the country's best Ashes XI in the last 40 years.

17. Cricket's Apple

People say there have been 3 important apples in history - Adam's apple, Newton's apple & Steve Jobb's apple. But I say there's been one more - The Cricket's apple. Cricket's apple is Adam Gilchrist, whom I am referring to as an apple because of his common name with Adam who had an apple linked with him. A ferocious batsman, utterly destructive against all forms of bowling, a wicketkeeper beyond assessible skill & an average which makes him at par with the top batsmen of history. Adam made his debut in 1996, played 3 ODI World Cups & hit 50+ scores in the finals of all of them. He averaged 50+ in Tests & 35 in One Days besides being an electric some wicketkeeper. He had played many a knocks of top quality in both formats & was the 2nd highest strike rate in ODIs after Afridi at 96 till his time. His technique was of the highest category & he styled the batsmanship of attacking the bowler in the most aggressive manner. He was a delight to watch both for his audacious strokeplay & technical batting. He happened to be in the Australian team in its prime time & thus was always centre of the massive attention. He along with Hayden formed a fearful opening partnership in ODIs & gave Australia many a good starts in the format. His strike rate of 81 in Tests despite an average of 50 in nearly 100 Tests is proof how strong his technique must have been. He was able to hit at this rate in a fool proof technique. He was also the Vice Captain in Ricky Ponting's captaincy & is also known for his high conscience due to walking out of the field many times when he knew he was out even if he was not given out by the umpire. My memory goes that whenever I've seen Gilchrist he's always on the top of the ball & playing a monster of an inning. He made a thunderous 149(104) in the 2007 WC final which was reduced to 38 overs / side & played a pivotal role in Australia ensuring their title. He hung his boots after that, but played in IPL for a few years. He captained Deccan Chargers to victory in the IPL 2009. He played all the matches which Australia played throughtout his career. He batted at no. 6 in Tests but was given the opportunity to open in the ODIs

for his explosive style so that he could avail the advantage of the powerplays. He is one of the greatest batsmen ever & is of the class of Viv Richards & Brendon McCullum. His slaughter at the opening in Australia gave them depth in batting. Shoaib Akhtar had said that he is the most difficult batsman he has bowled to & he did not understand in which area he should bowl to him as he hit him for 4 wherever he delivered him. In my mind & in sum, he was a terror for the bowlers & took away games single-handedly. I hail this man as a super gun & rate him at one of the tops in the aggressive batting category.

CRICKET'S APPLE

18. The 4th Innings Specialist

Not many players have a good average in the 2nd inning of the team, but Graeme Craig Smith was a 4th innings specialist. He had a knack of scoring big hundreds in the later inning since the beginning. He struck a 277 & 259 vs England in England in his 1st tour of England in 2002 where his 259 at Lords still stands as a record highest by a visiting batsman at the ground. He got the captaincy of South Africa at a very young age of 22 & became the most capped captain (104) & most successful also (53). Along the side, he's also regarded as one of the greatest Test openers ever. He'd amassed 714 runs in the series. In 2004, South Africa had a poor run of form with losses of 5-1 & 5-0 to New Zealand & Sri Lanka in Tests & those to England, India & Sri Lanka in the ODIs, but South Africa won a 3-1 Test series against West Indies at home & Smith & Gibbs produced a 300 opening partnership. In the subsequent years Smith achieved many a milestones like being selected as the captain of the World XI against Australia in the Super Test match, scoring 3 successive centuries in West Indies in 2005, however in their tour of Australia & the subsequent return tour they succumbed to a 2-0 defeat in Australia & a 3-0 whitewash at home. Yet for his performances in the year 2005 he was named in the ICC Test team of the year. The pride was restored when Smith led South Africa to a record chase of 438 in an ODI final. In the 1st ODI against Pakistan on 04 February 2007, he smashed Naved Ul Hasan for 27 runs in an over & became the 1st batsman to hit 6 fours in an ODI over. With his knock his team registered the highest ever ODI total against a Test playing nation (excluding Zimbabwe, 392). As a captain he led the Protea team to 20 consecutive undefeated games in ODIs in 2005. In early 2007, Smith's South Africans replaced Australia from the top of ICC rankings in ODIs & he started the World Cup with 4 successive 50s.

South Africa later went to Australia for a Test & ODI series which was billed as "The Heavyweight" series. It was the world champions Australia taking on the no. 2 side. In the 1st Test match at Perth, South Africa chased down a 414 with 6

wickets in hand. This was the 2nd highest total chased down in history & the highest in Australia. In December 2008 Smith skippered an SA side that won a Test series against Australia on their soil, the 1st home defeat for the opponents in 16 years. Smith was a tiger Cricketer & he by the end of his illustrious career, accomplished distinctions like batting with a broken hand in an entire inning, being named the captain of the World XI by ICC in 2008 & bringing SA back at the top of the ICC rankings in 2012. All these attainments show what a great crusader he was & he did all this before the age of 34.

MY PROUD SALUTES TO THIS GREAT WARRIOR OF SOUTH AFRICA
CRICKET.

19. The Mac of Kiwi's O/S

The Mac O/S is the best O/S in PCs & McCullum was the best batsman among Kiwis. Hence I refer him as the Mac of Kiwi's O/S. Mac was another devastating batsman who rampaged bowlers ruthlessly. He was a T20 specialist & participated in IPL for a very long time. He was in the team of KKR which played the inaugural game of IPL in 2008 & smashed a swashbuckling 158 (75) which is still the 2nd highest score in IPL. He showed the world how interesting T20 is capable of being & set the rolling stone for what became a revolution in Cricket. He played all formats, and also a former captain in all forms. McCullum took quick scoring to Test matches as well, notably recording the fastest test century ever. He is considered as one of the most successful batsmen and captains of New Zealand, McCullum is the former leading run scorer in Twenty20 Internationals and is the first and so far only one of the two Kiwi players to have scored two T20 International centuries (apart from Guptill). He became the first New Zealander to score a triple hundred in Tests, 302 runs against India on 18 February 2014. In 2014, he also became the first New Zealander to score 1000 runs in Test in a calendar year. The record was bettered by Kane Williamson in 2015. In his last Test outing on 20 February 2016, McCullum posted the fastest ever Test century, in 54 balls, beating the 56-ball best by his hero, Vivian Richards, scoring a total of 145 off 79 balls. McCullum was the first batsman to score 2 tons in T20Is. He was the previous record holder for the highest individual score in a Twenty20 International and the third highest individual scorer in all T20 cricket. He played for the Kolkata Knight Riders from 2008-2010 and again from 2012-2013, while in between he played for the Kochi Tuskers. He played the 2014 and 2015 seasons for the Chennai Super Kings. McCullum was a wicket-keeper until 2013.

On 22 December 2015, McCullum announced he would retire from international cricket at the end of the southern summer, joining his brother who had earlier that year announced his

retirement from all forms of cricket. He is also the highest (170) runs scorer by a captain in his farewell test and first captain to score a ton in his farewell test. He retired from all international cricket on 24 February 2016.

20. The Remover Of The Dark

There have been many revolutionaries, but Michael Clarke is a remover of the dark. He handled the Australia Cricket when it was going through a phase of transition after the retirement of the legends of '90s & 2000s. He was still very young, he came to the scene in 2003 & was appointed as the captain after Ricky Ponting's stepping down because of his prominent human skills. Michael Clarke was a proof of Australia's deep strength & added to the Oz aura as he came as an extra to the great team of the likes of Ponting, Hayden, Langer & Gilchrist. He had made his debut after scoring 23000 FC runs in 2003 at an age of 23. This is proof how deep Australia are & scored a record breaking 151 in his 1st match for any Australian debutant. His sound technique only added to the team's strength & he achieved a high average in both Tests & ODIs. He skippered the team to victory in the 2015 WC. It was sad that he was sacked from the job & dropped from the team forever just because his team stumbled to a 60 in an Ashes.

Highlights Of His Career

- (1) He made a highest Australian score of 151 on debut.
- (2) He made a 141 against New Zealand in November 2004 on his debut on home-soil making him the only Australian to score a century on both home and away debuts.
- (3) His best Test bowling figures of 6/9 (6.2 overs) came against India, at Mumbai, in 2004-05.
- (4) His 1st Ashes century came in December 2006, when he hit 124 at the Adelaide Oval to help Australia to a victory.
- (5) He dismissed India's last 3 batsman in 5 balls on the fifth day of the 2nd Test on 6 January 2008.
- (6) He won the Australian Man of the Series in the 2009 Ashes. He was nominated by the England team director Andy Flower for his "Excellent batting".
- (7) He was named full-time one-day and Test captain of Australia on 29 March 2011.

- (8) Clarke's highest Test batting score of 329* was the highest at the Sydney, and the fourth highest by an Australian.
- (9) This was also the record for the highest Test score by any batsman in at number 5 & also only the 2nd triple century at number 5 after Sir Bradman.
- (10) Clarke made 210 in Adelaide, thereby joining and Wally Hammond as the only players to have made a triple century & a double century in the same series.
- (11) Clarke's score of 259* made against South Africa at Gabba is the highest Test score at the ground.
- (12) Clarke is the only Test batsman to reach four double centuries in a single calendar year, with a double (230) at the Oval on 22 November 2012.

This way Michael Clarke removed much dark from the Australian Cricket & brought fresh light into it.

21. The Sublime Accumulator

Denagamage Praboth Mahela de Silva Jayawardene (Born 27 May 1977) is a former Sri Lankan cricketer who is the current consultant coach of the Sri Lanka National Cricket Team and the Head Coach of the Indian Premier League franchise Mumbai Indians. He is the most successful captain for Sri Lanka along with Sanath Jayasuriya. During the time of his captaincy, he was known mainly for his tactical acumen for decades and was rewarded for his captaincy instincts.

He made his Test cricket debut in August 1997 and his One Day International (ODI) debut the following season in January 1998. In 2006 along with his team mate Kumar Sangakkara, Jayawardene made the highest ever partnership in First-class cricket, scoring 624 runs for the third wicket in the first test match of Sri Lanka's home series against South Africa. He appeared in 652 international matches representing Sri Lanka in a career spanning for about 18 years. During his international career, he also formed a friendship and healthy rivalry with fellow veteran player Kumar Sangakkara.

Mahela is the first player in the history of Sri Lankan cricket to score over 10,000 Test runs and is also the second Sri Lankan player to score more than 10000 runs in ODIs after Sanath Jayasuriya. Mahela Jayawardene currently serves as the Chairman of Sri Lanka National Sports Council.

Jayawardene's highest test score, 374 against South Africa, is the highest score by a right-handed batsman in the history of Test cricket. Along with teammate Sangakkara, he has the most career partnership runs for the 3rd wicket in Tests, scoring 5890 runs surpassing the 5826 run record of Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar.

Jayawardene was a key member of the team that won the 2014 ICC World Twenty20 and was part of the team that made to the final of 2007 Cricket World Cup, 2011 Cricket World Cup, 2009 ICC World Twenty20 and 2012 ICC World Twenty20.

In 2006, Jayawardene was named by the International Cricket Council as the best International captain of the year and was nominated in 2007 as the best Test cricket player of the year. He is also known for his fielding skills in the inner ring, with a report prepared by Cricinfo in late 2005 showing that since

the 1999 Cricket World Cup, he had effected the most run-outs in ODI cricket of any fieldsman, with the fifth highest run-out/match ratio in ODI's. Statistics also reveal that *c Jayawardene b Muralitharan* is the most common bowler-fielder combination in the history of Test cricket.

Jayawardene also worked as an international TV commentator in the first test at Headingley on 19 May 2016 between England and Sri Lanka. Mahela Jayawardene holds the unique record of being the only player as of now to have scored a hundred in both a World Cup final and a World Cup semi-final. He is also the only player to have scored a century in a World Cup final in a losing cause.^[14]

He also serves as a board member in several unlisted public limited companies in Sri Lanka. He has been a vocal critic of Sri Lanka Cricket over the years especially after 2015 where Sri Lanka national cricket has suffered the worst decline at international cricket.

In November 2021, he was inducted to the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame.^[16] He became only the third Sri Lankan to be inducted to the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame after Muttiah Muralitharan and Kumar Sangakkara.

22. The Sum

So friends, this's the end of my book. I've poured my heart out here to publicise what is my feeling for Cricket & batting. I have been a good batsman myself & have loved the art much all my life. I have included in this book all the feelings I have hearted in my life for Cricket at different places, timings, situations & platforms along with different people, players, authorities & experts. The purpose of writing this book was only to celebrate what is this colossal art of Cricket & its substream batting. & Such expressions in a country where the game is a devout religion of 1 billion people, must keep coming & they will entertain the people. I hope I have done it sufficiently. My life is an open book of Cricket whose every character has been written with the core of my soul & I share fraternal sentiments with all my fellow players, aspects & followers. So this is the terminal of my book. I hope I have arrayed the right set of players. Thanks for giving me attention & I promise to serve our art with the same spirit through all my arenas where I am involved in right now like social media & media & together we will build an even higher paradise of cricket.

"HEY CRICKET"

23. Illustrations

(The illustrations of my 16 league members of my extraordinary batsmen)







