

The league of extraordinary batsmen



(My account of the
extraordinary batsmen of my
generation)

– Saurabh Choudhary

Introduction

I have written a book earlier & this is my second 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 14 in number. The 14 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 of this earth & I have essayed my charm of it as it deserves. So here is my new endeavour - expressing about the over one 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 the 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 in sports world. Grates to my fans & cric followers & here I present my loveful production with full thankfullness & honourfulness. I have named the players by some titles in the table of contents to make suspense, so that the readers have to go to the chapters to see who those players are. In the beginning I have given some general chapters & then there is a chapter on each batsman of the stack & then there is a compairitive chart of the record of all the 14 formatwise.

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1. My type of batting

The beginning should be done by stating what kind of batting I love, what is my idea of ideal batting. Because the batsmanship crafts in the play are of varied types & players are versatile with diverse capabilities on show, the first 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 unemphatic & unconvincing. Still there are two types of batsmen in this art - those who are more of a traditional & classical 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 & 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 score. Due to this I got a litte 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 striking @ 110-120 when I wish or I have to maintain a respect for the bowlers & maintain a strike rate of 85-90 which is my average. I wished to hit that hard like some of the other batsmen 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 types, 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 an innings or having required to chase a small target with us having batted our main in probably the second innings of the match. Batting second in the first innings 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 first two matches just as described above & have a good batting practise in the third 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 first two battles, chasing high but manageable targets, & clinch the series in the fourth encounter. Giving some concessions to the opposition gives a feeling of balance, which stores 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 at 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 & some batsmen might have been in that zone a few times during my growing up years. When Sachin had made those marathon twin hundreds in BGT 1998, I had for the first time felt that he must have been in a state of mind of full satisfaction doing just what he wanted & enjoying his art fully with full activeness during these innings. When Sachin had struck those 12 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 sub-conscious at that time when this zone is attained. Sachin, no need to say, had this potential & had he not encountered the two 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 third 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 second match in which Laxman & Rahul had chased down a target of 539 with an unbroken 5th wicket partnership of 316. 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 Sadagoppan Ramesh & I had set up a partnership of 200 for the first wicket, I felt that I was in that zone in that

inning & played with full concentration & confidence & enjoyed my knock with much joy. The first 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 shall be speaking about. There are mainly two types of external conditions in cricket - The pitch conditions & the weather 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 batting-friendly, but I don't like to take such risks & prefer the external conditions to be neutral. The rain is also an obstruction at times & it'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 first 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 regions 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 the 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 have been lucky to be part of many such partnerships in both formats of the game with Sehwag & Sachin respectively & it has 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 Seghwag & everytime of it has 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 35 matches which is less than the 54 of the 2003 edition which was very appreciated 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 in the round robin stage which means that there is at least one match between each pair of the teams participating & this means that the tournament's extensive. From there the top 4 teams go to a Super 4 where each team plays with each other once. 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 11 games in total which is equal to that of 2003. It will give the viewers full entertainment. The teams should carry the points earned in the round robin league 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 first 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 tied matches should be extended to Super Overs until they are decided. The top 2 teams from the Super 4 should go to the final. 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. My file & display board

As I have stated earlier that the idea of writing this book to me came from a file I maintained in my house earlier. I started compiling this file around 2006 when there were 6 great batsmen in the world - Sachin, Dravid, Lara, Ponting, Hayden & Kallis. I begun my file with these batsmen & put their wallpapers in this & some commentaries from my side. With time some more batsmen became eligible for this & my file grew. Then, there was a display board in my room which was capable of holding some posters & which was empty till this time. I thought of filling this with posters of yesteryears' batsmen & I listed 11 batsmen in this with a related title. This I named 'The league of perfect batsmen'. The names of these 11 batsmen I will reveal later in this book, all these batsmen of both the file & the display board I have given some sub-titles. Hence I enter the main course of my book with the array of the extraordinary batsmen beginning.

THE STACK BEGINS

6. The stack begins

My stack is in the order of ranking of the batsmen as I rate them. The top 12 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 this misadventure. My book contains many of those batsmen who have performed well against top teams. 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 their class after that as they were too great & it won't be easy to break their benchmark. Out of the 14 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 other batsmen who debuted in the 80's & '90s. So, here I begin with my first batter & typing down what is "The League Of Extraordinary Batsmen".

7. The GawwwD 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 around 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 him like Ponting, Kallis & De Villiers 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 & conditions. 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 & his 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 first 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 10000)" & 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 even a bit ever, has no desires other than the game & 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 he 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 the competitors & people around him, as he is extraordinary & extraordinary in many ways & going to rule the common space for long time & all of them get aspired from him. Sachin must have caused that turmoil in the Shardashram Vidyamandir School in '80s & 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 distracters. 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 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 two formats which is an ailment in many schools these days who consider some one format more important than the other & dissolve this belief in students also. Sachin's account of his childishness & innocense 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 10000 runs, he needed 2 wickets to reach 100 ODI wickets also, but he wasn't given the ball. When he was asked in the presentation ceremony whether he is upset 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 & 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 first

non-British player to play for Yorkshire. At 23, he became the first celebrity to be signed up for an SMC 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 international cricket. 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 '94 & '98 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 his game in the stadium or TV. He was a phenomenon happening in front of the people's eyes in their prime time. The moment he drove that Opel Astra in Sharjah we all felt we all Indians have done it. It was a hero's performance & he had made all us Indians proud. There have been instances when we have lost an easy match in a knockout. Such incidents pinch me. I often wish that I could have made the difference in such ties & won the tie for us. Sachin himself had won many such battles for our team in the '90s where India were going for a loss in an unhard contest. 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 trophy 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 six 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 anything. 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 23 had got victim of destiny.

These years another tiger was developing in the ODI format, the one from Bengal. He was also only second 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 of the ODIs had been released & India had at its batsmen at all of the top 3 positions with Dravid hanging in 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 10000 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 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 the overseas series & against stronger oppositions. Laxman's love for difficult situations & Sehwag's ability to stroke @ 95-96 even in Tests added to our mighty 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. 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 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. Ganguly experimented new things like trying me as an 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 competently. He was demoted to no. 6 in Tests to give Laxman a space at the 3rd slot where he had done very well in the '99 Tests, where also he did 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 drop of Nayan Mongia before India found Mahender 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 old or young. Sachin had played with many generations of cricketers & 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 not everyone has an aptitude for it. Sachin was among the top run getters of the year in 2001-2002 even when he wasn't at his best. He scored the second most 1391 runs in 2001 when he was considered in lesser form. 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 registered 115* even in an exhibition match on his comeback after the 6-month injury.

Sachin's tennis elbow came as a blessing in disguise for me as I got the opportunity to open in ODIs & 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 the 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, but I won't leave myself. He loved this game so much that he wanted to stay in it for even if one match 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 their role model. 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. 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. 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 them also. 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 '03 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 second 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 situation oneself. He had given hints of following this strategy many times earlier also like in the '96 WC. The tender age at which he got to debut at the international level is proof enough how potent he was already.

The Indian team's win in the final pleased everyone & the clinicality with which they reached the final winning all matches leaving two 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 third seamer as India were short of 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. India had clinched 6 wickets when the end of the day was nearing, there was a bit of a chance that Australia could escape with 1 or 2 wickets in remaining, when Sachin chipped in with 3 wickets & eased India's job. 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 WC 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 his 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 first double century of the ODIs in that inning only had he not got out to an unfortunate dismissal. The inning of 175 was also an unimaginable one 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 Tendulkar, 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 one decade. Even in that challenging tour of Australia in 2011 he had scored 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 a source of wisdom for millions.

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

My Salutations To The "GAWWWWD" of Cricket for Playing it his Way.

Chapter 2.

8. The great wall of India

There have been many gods of different types but there has been only one who has heaped up 10000 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 second most important batsman for India in his two decades & made the most runs in the twenty first century. He was a classical batsman by default & developed his technique around the old school of batting, focusing 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 first class level & 23 in the national. He was a principaled & disciplined spirit since beginning & focused 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. Coming from a South Indian family, calmness & composure were in his blood. Rahul, did his studies till graduation & attained 60% marks in B.Com. His school must have been one focusing 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. Rahul played I 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 first two matches. Rahul's career had a misfortune of being eclipsed by someone else on important occasions always & he always remained under the shadow. On the debut, Ganguly scored bigger hundreds in both the matches, on his record breaking 145 in Taunton, Sourav again eclipsed to 183, in the

historical Calcutta match, Laxman exceeded him, during his glorious run in the 2003 WC, he had to keep wickets. 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 of his only that he was titled "The great 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 for the Player of the Year that year. He hit 1 double century in each series & India dominated this entire season like champions. This period saw Rahul get great remarks from the top authorities of the world, like - Ravi Shastri stating that he had considered only 3 Indian batsmen great till now - Sunny Sir, Vishy Sir & Sachin. Dravid is the 4th one 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, no one thought I would come first, but finished first in the race of all. Sunny Sir stated during the inauguration ceremony of the NCA that the academy is being presided over by the best player of his generation (Vishy Sir) & it is only apt that it is being inaugurated by the best player of this generation (Dravid). 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. 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 Newzealand, 4 against Australia & 3 vs Pakistan. 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 second tie to manage to save both. India had finished with the more successful edge in the first fight & Dravid had almost snatched the match from their fist with scores of 222 & 73. India batted first in it & set up 500. NZ got bundled for 340. We posted a 200 in the second again & gave them the 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 second combat Kiwi batted 7 sessions to avoid losing in a piled 630. India just managed to avoid follow on with my gritty 60 in the beginning. The remaining game then was a formality. The series thus ended in a boring 0-0 but Dravid's masterclass trailed what he was up for. This series was followed by a triangular ODI in which India fought throughout & beat 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. 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 the series. 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 was sufficient to give them a pat for their overconfidence. Subsequently then they had to register a 421 to have sufficient score to bowl India out. 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 second match saw the history changer. Australia posed 400/5 on Day 1. On the second day they finished at 556 & gave India the chance to bat 1½ sessions. This was the beginning of the fightback. I & Virender Sehwag who had given India good starts in all the innings in this season again initiated with a 70-odd stand. But the magical duo of Dravid & me picked from this point & took the score to 180/1 by stumps. The third day Dravid batted all day & took the score to 477/3 with his 199. On the 4th morning he completed his double century & stretched India to 620 with his 233. Laxman also hit 148. Australia were then frustrated with India's fightback & hastened a second 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 152 which they managed with Dravid's anchoring 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 Virender 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

Australia 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 first & made 273/3 on Day 1 after being at 73/3 at one stage. Sachin & Laxman had a marathonic partnership & they took India past 615. 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 around 400 against an 8-fer of Kumble & India scrapped them 200 in the second innings also with his 4-fer.

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 first 2 finals only. Dravid had now developed into a Demi God & was being declared as the new God of Indian cricket. The third 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 & ODI series. The Test format was a total Sehwag show with his dominance from the first 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 first triple century by an Indian & he broke the record of VVS Laxman's 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 second match saw Pakistan bounce back & on a green pitch laid out to trouble India, top Indian batsmen faltered & Yuvraj (112) & me (139) were the only good scorers in this inning. Pakistan then savaged a 309 courtesy good innings from

Inzamam & Abdur Razzaq & the target set by India was 341. Sehwag shone in the 2nd innings also & Pakistan failed before this Indian prowess.

It was the third 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 to score fast runs for India. 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 July. 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. He remained captain for ten years leading in 88 Tests & 284 ODIs being the only captain to win 3 WCs.

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 OF THE HIGHEST LEVEL.

9. 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 treat to watch. His backlift, stance, swing & hitting style have a flashy flamboyance & 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 & had 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 were faced with a target of 308 & they 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 I inning & another ton in the II, 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 average.

He has as good an average in ODI 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.

10. The prince of 21st century

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 my most passionate phase in international cricket. 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 interactions. 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 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 can be liked. In that year Ponting amassed 1548 Test 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. At that time Rahul Dravid had said after the third day of the third 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 awards 2 times, Test player of the Year another time & the Wisden Cricketer of the Decade 2000-2009. His biggest record came in 2008 when he hit 8 consecutive Test 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 except India. 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 centuries. 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 after that. 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, 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. If Australia hadn't lost at the 2011 WC, Ponting wouldn't have been removed from the captaincy also. For me the Border-Gavaskar Trophy is the ultimate achievement in Test cricket & Ponting never won a BG Trophy match as a captain in India. In 2004, he had missed the first 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.

11. The wholesale manufacturer

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 scoring 600 runs in the 2007 WC. 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 sledge as well as religious family man. For his underplayed opportunities I call him 'The most underplayed Warrior'.

12. The Tall-Rounder

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 also & held the record of 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 gigiantically smashing Test 2100 runs in just a span of 12 month around 2005 after his father's death which had affected him much. 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 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 tally of 50 Test centuries also 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.

13. The classical 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 done 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.

14. The 4th innings specialist

Not many players have a good average in the 2nd innings 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 first tour of England in 2002 where his 259 at Lords still stands as a highest by the visiting batsman. He got the captaincy of South Africa at a very tender 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 1-5 & 0-5 to New Zealand & Sri Lanka in Tests & those to England, India & Sri Lanka in 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 0-2 defeat in Australia & a 0-3 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 first ODI against Pakistan on 04 February 2007, he smashed Naved ul Hasan for 27 runs in an over & became the first batsman to hit six 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 Proteas 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 first Test match at Perth, South Africa chased down a 414 with 6 wickets in hand. This was the second highest total ever chased down & the highest in Australia. In December 2008 Smith skippered an SA side that won a Test series against Australia on their soil, the first 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.**

15. 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 Lankan cricket who was a stylish 21st century batsman & who ended up with the second most runs in international cricket & also ODI cricket & the second most 200s in Test cricket also. He was a treat to watch out 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 for 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. He has effected 700 dismissals also as a wicketkeeper.

16. Rocket Launcher @ 400 S/R

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 @ 400 SR 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 hundreds at the SR of 100+ & 7 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. 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 team at a time when it was having some more GOATs like Kallis, Amla, Graeme Smith, Steyn & Boucher & the team clicked as a bunch at that time & did some really great stuff on the 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 & 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 past just in the last over.

17. The short format dynamite

The Mac O/S is the best O/S in PCs & McCullum was the best batsman among Kiwis. Hence I refer to 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 '08 & smashed a swashbuckling 158 (75) which is still the second highest in the tournament. 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 Newzealand, McCullum is the former leading run scorer in T20Is & is the first and so far only one of the two Kiwi players to have scored two T20I centuries (apart from Guptill). He became the first New Zealander to score a triple hundred in Tests. 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 Test century ever, in 54 balls, beating the 56-ball record of his hero, Viv, 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 T20 international and the third highest individual scorer in all T20. He played for the Calcutta 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.

18. The sublime rock

Arvinda De Silva is a rock of solidity in Sri Lankan cricket, who is regarded as one of the best players ever played for Sri Lanka, he played in the team as an all-rounder. De Silva was a key member of the Sri Lankan team that won 1996 world cup, where he scored a match winning century in the final, that brought Sri Lanka from underdogs status to present-day form. He has held various posts in Sri Lankan Cricket since his retirement in 2003. He was inducted into ICC Hall of Fame in 2023.

Arvinda is the only player to make a century and take three or more wickets in a world cup final. He is the first man to score two unbeaten hundreds in a Test, where he scored 138 and 103 against Pakistan in 1997.

He made his Test match debut in 1984 at Lord's against England. During the early part of his career he was known as a dashing but inconsistent batsman - he was given the nickname "Mad Max" for his tendency to get out to rash shots. He later commented on his aggressive batting style: "That's my natural game - I don't want to change because I feel confident playing that way. If someone is capable of dominating the bowling, they should do it. It's the way I've been playing since I was a youngster."

De Silva was instrumental in Sri Lanka's triumph in the 1996 cricket world cup where his unbeaten century and three wickets earned him the Man of the Match award in the final against Australia. His other notable achievements include scoring a century in each innings of a Test match on two occasions (only bettered by India's Sunil Gavaskar, Australia's Ricky Ponting and David Warner, who each performed this feat three times). One of these doubles was 138 and 105, both unbeaten, against Pakistan at Colombo's Sinhalese Sports Club in April 1997. This made him the first, and so far only, player to score two unbeaten centuries in the same Test match. As he had scored 168 in the second innings of the previous Test, he posted three hundreds in eight days. He finished the year with 1,220 runs at 76.25.

Sri Lanka had embarrassingly lost a first-class match against Pakistan Cricket Board Patron's XI and the following first Test against Pakistan both by an innings. He joined the team only few days before the second Test and was dismissed for a duck in the first innings; however, in Sri Lanka's second innings his third wicket stand of 176 runs with Chandika Hathurusingha helped to win the Test for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka went on to win the third Test and clinch the Test series against Pakistan 2-1. Sri Lanka also proved victorious with the same numbers in the subsequent three-match ODI-series against Pakistan, where de Silva was Sri Lanka's leading wicket-taker with five wickets at an average of 17.80.

In the three-nation Champions Trophy tournament in Sharjah in October 1995 with Pakistan and West Indies each team ended up with two wins and two losses in the preliminary round-robin stage, and West Indies and Sri Lanka were selected to play in the final due to their higher run rates. In the final Sri Lanka proved victorious by 50 runs. de Silva ended up with a modest 117 runs at an average of 29.25 in five matches. His batting form slumped lower in the three-test Series in Australia, where the Sri Lankan batsmen struggled with the bowling of Glenn McGrath, who took 21 wickets while de Silva managed 98 runs at an average of 16.33. In the third test he acted as captain after the regular captain Arjuna Ranatunga pulled out due to finger injury. The series was shrouded in controversy, as in the first Test Sri Lanka was first found guilty of ball-tampering only to be exonerated later by International Cricket Council, while in the second Test the Australian umpire Darrell Hair no-balled Sri Lankan bowler Muttiah Muralitharan seven times in just three overs for throwing. Concurrently with the Test series Sri Lanka also participated in three-nation ODI series with Australia and West Indies. In the seventh match of the tournament against West Indies Muralitharan was again called for throwing and did not play again in the ODI series. The tournament was won by Australia, who beat Sri Lanka in both final matches, confirming their favourite position in the forthcoming ICC World Cup in the Indian sub-continent. In the absence of Ranatunga, de Silva captained Sri Lanka in the ODI tournament until Ranatunga returned in the later stages and finished the series as Sri Lanka's top batsman with 258 runs at an average of 25.80.

In 1996 World Cup, Sri Lanka, who hosted the cup together with India and Pakistan, played only three games in the preliminary rounds as both West Indies and Australia forfeited their matches in Colombo due to security reasons. Neither Zimbabwe nor Kenya were able to truly test Sri Lanka team - in both matches de Silva was selected man-of-the-match following his 91 and 145 runs with bat. de Silva's 145 from 115 balls against Kenya was the highest ever score for Sri Lanka in ODIs, and the third highest in 1996 World Cup. India proved a stronger opponent, but despite Sachin Tendulkar's 137 runs, Sri Lanka cruised to a comfortable six wicket victory.

In the quarter-finals Sri Lanka defeated England by five wickets, the first time they had ever beaten England outside Sri Lanka. Their semi-final opponent was India, which had beaten Pakistan in their quarter-final match. Winning the toss at Eden Gardens, Calcutta, India selected to field and had a very good start with Javagal Srinath dispatching the Sri Lankan opening pair for only one run. Coming in at number four, de Silva led the Sri Lankan recovery hitting 66 runs from 47 balls as Sri Lanka set a target of 252 runs for India to chase. His 66 runs does not really stand out in statistics tables, however is regarded as one of his finest innings. In their response, the batsmen of India failed to score with the exception of Tendulkar (65 runs). After India had collapsed to 120 runs for 8 wickets at 34.1 overs, a densely packed home crowd vented their anger by throwing bottles on to the outfield and setting fire to the seating. Eventually the match referee Clive Lloyd had to abandon the game and Sri Lanka won by default.

However, the highlight of his career was almost certainly the 1996 World Cup Final against Australia, where he took 3 wickets for 42 runs (including the Australian captain Mark Taylor and the future captain Ricky Ponting), two catches and then followed that with 107 not out with the bat to secure Sri Lanka a convincing 7 wicket victory, thereby clinching the World Cup, and also the Man of the Match award. His role in the final was recognised by Wisden in 2002 as the eighth most significant batting performance in ODI cricket while his bowling was ranked 82nd in Wisden top 100 bowling chart.

De Silva's eight centuries makes him the top century scorer against Pakistan, against a bowling attack spearheaded by Imran Khan, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis and Abdul Qadir. His highest test score of 267 was made at Basin Reserve in 1991 against New Zealand. He scored another double century in his final Test innings as well as picking up a wicket with his final delivery in Test cricket (against Bangladesh in 2002), thus retiring with a place in cricket's history secure - from all international cricket after the 2003 Cricket World Cup.

All this pins De Silva as my twelfth extraordinary batsman of my series.

19. The compairitive record of all the 12 batsmen

In the end, I think it would be interesting to see the compairitive record of all these 12 batsmen & see who betters in which field.

TESTS

Player	Mtchs	Inns	NOs	Runs	Ave.	100s	Highest	S/R
Sachin	200	329	33	15926	53.79	51	248	54.08
Dravid	164	286	32	13288	52.31	36	270	42.51
Lara	131	232	6	11953	52.89	34	400	60.51
Ponting	168	287	29	13378	51.85	41	257	58.72
Hayden	103	184	14	8625	50.74	30	380	60.11
Kallis	166	280	40	13289	55.37	45	224	45.98
Langer	105	182	10	7696	44.74	23	250	54.23
G. Smith	117	205	11	9265	47.76	27	277	59.68
Sanga	134	233	16	12400	57.14	38	319	54.19
A.B.	114	191	18	8765	50.66	22	278	54.52
McCullum	101	176	9	6453	38.64	12	302	64.60
De Silva	93	159	11	6361	42.98	20	267	56.55

ONE-DAYERS

Player	Mtchs	Inns	NOs	Runs	Ave.	100s	Highest	S/R
Sachin	463	452	41	18421	44.83	49	200	86.24
Dravid	344	318	40	10889	39.17	12	153	71.24
Lara	299	289	30	10405	40.17	19	169	79.51
Ponting	375	365	39	13704	42.04	30	164	80.39
Hayden	161	155	15	6133	43.81	10	181	78.96
Kallis	328	314	53	11579	44.36	17	139	72.89
Langer	8	7	2	160	32.00	0	36	88.89
G. Smith	197	194	9	6989	37.78	10	141	80.82
Sanga	404	380	41	14234	41.99	25	169	78.86
A.B.	228	218	39	9577	53.50	25	176	101.10
McCullum	260	228	28	6083	30.41	5	166	96.37
De Silva	308	296	30	9284	34.90	11	145	81.13

20. Conclusion

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 rightly. 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"

Annexure
(Illustrations)

(The illustrations of all the 12 league batsmen)







