

Jack Russell (England 1988 to 1998)

The essential Jack Russell is portrayed by the image of him leaning over his crouching, and clearly exhausted, captain in Johannesburg in 1995 loudly exhorting in the style of a regimental sergeant-major for yet more effort in the England cause. Atherton smiled wryly, but Russell pictured the brave military stand at Rorke's Drift and remembered the wrenching disappointment of Barbados. Russell's devotion, determination and emotional immersion in Test cricket complete and unquestioned.

Jack Russell's unbeaten 29 in Johannesburg was an innings of a little over four and a half hours. His first Test innings was almost exactly the same length. There he almost became the first Englishman to score a century as a nightwatchman. Russell's nightwatchman innings are shown below.

Date	Opponents	Venue	In	Out	Minutes	Score
Aug 1988	Sri Lanka	Lord's	40-1	233-3	276	94
Apr 1990	West Indies	Bridgetown	10-3	166-6	306	55
Aug 1990	India	Manchester	312-3	324-4	19	8
Nov 1990	Australia	Brisbane	46-3	93-7	116	15
Jan 1992	New Zealand	Christchurch	310-4	390-5	101	36
Feb 1994	West Indies	Jamaica	63-4	126-5	76	32

Jack Russell's NWM Appearances in Test matches

England v Sri Lanka, Only Test, Lord's August 1988

England had not won a Test match in eighteen attempts, and had just been beaten by the West Indies. Sri Lanka had had little recent experience. Their captain, Ranjan Madugalle, rued the fact that his side had played only one Test in the previous 16 months: "It is very hard for the chaps to train 365 days of the year for just one big game. Playing regular Test cricket is such a help and it is no accident that our best results were achieved when we played nine Tests in a seven-month period during 1985 and 1986." They had then won their series against India and drawn a series against Pakistan.

Russell was the third wicketkeeper used by England that summer. Paul Downton had started in residence, and in truth did no worse against the West Indies than many of the England batsmen, averaging 21. Still, selectors' desperation will show through. Jack Richards was one straw clutched for the final two tests against the West Indies. He was soon blown to the wind, scoring 13 runs in four completed innings. The national press clamoured for Russell; the selectors, probably thankful for some direction, obliged. Arriving at Lord's the day before the Test was due to start gave little time for acclimatization, especially to the four new players. Subsequently, the norm was for the team to gather two days before a Test, but Russell felt rushed at Lord's. His unsettled state was reflected in two dropped catches; one a simple chance from David Lawrence that passed straight between his gloves. Sri Lanka's batting was so rusty, however, that these mistakes were not costly. The tourists collapsed to 63 for six just before lunch. The afternoon saw more fight, Sri Lanka reaching 194. Having progressed smoothly against a modest bowling attack Tim Robinson checked a shot and chipped a catch to midwicket. Russell was sent out to play the last 16 balls of the day.

Relieved at completing this job satisfactorily, Russell was determined to keep Graham Gooch company the next morning and see the shine off the ball. The pitch was good and the bowling not too demanding. However, very early on, having moved on to 10, Russell edged an attempted on-drive to the keeper. Amal Silva had made an initial movement to the leg side and could not recover to take the chance. Reprieved, Jack outscored a strangely subdued Gooch and reached lunch on 37, Gooch on 54. A pull to the fine leg boundary brought Russell his half-century. Gooch's form continued elusive and he was dismissed after almost four and a half hours for 75; England 171 for two. Kim Barnett replaced Gooch. Russell carried on, passing his previous highest first-class score of 73.

Barnett had straightaway batted attractively and now attempted to nurse Russell over unfamiliar ground to three figures. The crowd was willing him on. *Wisden* lamented "Impatience was the downfall of Russell ... he chased a wide ball from [Graeme] Labrooy and was caught at cover." The mistimed square drive left Jack on 94. He "leaned forward momentarily on his bat transfixed in disappointment, then turned for his standing ovation" (*Times*). The exhilaration of the reception gave way to irritation and anger at his inexperience: "It was a horrible shot, and I didn't want to go. It has got me out a couple of times already this summer. I wish I'd left the ball alone." Nevertheless, Jack's knock drew much praise. Christopher Martin-Jenkins in *Cricketer International* hailed a sensible and confident innings, highlighted by 11 "sweetly timed fours with a nice variety of cuts, drives and glances."

England were 233 for three when Russell fell. Russell wondered if he'd get a better chance to score a Test century, but he had done a splendid job as nightwatchman. Somewhat to the surprise of Micky Stewart, the England coach, who in the evening's press conference said he had seen Russell go in as nightwatchman twice before and each time had been dismissed first ball. Perhaps endorphins from excessive exercise had added Stewart's brain. Asked why with this background Russell had been chosen as nightwatchman, Stewart explained, "if he hadn't been able to do the job, he wouldn't have gone in." Further tactical insights from their coach were unnecessary for the rest of the Test as Sri Lanka succumbed to a seven-wicket defeat, albeit with a much better showing in their second innings with 331.

Sri Lanka 1 st Innings 194		
England 1 st Innings (overnight 47-1: Gooch 24, Russell 2)		
GA Gooch	lbw b Ratnayeke	75
RT Robinson	c Samarasekera b Ratnayeke	19
RC Russell	c Samarasekera b Labrooy	94
KJ Barnett	c Ranatunga b Labrooy	66
AJ Lamb	b Labrooy	63
RA Smith	b Ranatunga	31
DR Pringle	c Silva b Labrooy	14
JE Emburey	c de Silva b Samarasekera	0
PJ Newport	c de Silva b Ramanayake	26
NA Foster	not out	14
DV Lawrence	c Mendis b Ramanayake	4
Extras		23

Total (143.2 overs)		429
FOW: 1-40, 2-171, 3-233, 4-320, 5-358, 6-373, 7-378, 8-383, 9-420		
Sri Lanka 2 nd Innings 331 and England 2 nd Innings 100-3		

Russell's next Test match brought a reversal of fortunes. In the First Test of 1989, Australian pace bowlers had dished out the short stuff, and Jack struggled. Having suffered from that assault, Russell had to endure barbs from the media. Richie Benaud was particularly upsetting by claiming Russell did not have the guts to cope with fast bowlers. Jack's remedy before the second Ashes Test was described in the pen picture written when, a year later, Russell was *Wisden Cricketer of the Year*.

"Early arrivals on the first day of the Second Test at Lord's might have noticed a curious sight at the Nursery End nets. A group of MCC groundstaff boys were hurling scarlet plastic balls at an England cricketer from fifteen yards. For twenty minutes, Russell did not play a shot. He simply ducked and swerved, avoiding each delivery. The Australians had decided in the First Test that the left-handed Russell was vulnerable - plain scared, if you like - to anything bowled short and fast at the body. Russell, with Alan Knott as his adviser, was determined to work it out, and subjected himself to a trial by teenagers which many of his colleagues would have found demeaning."

The exercise was devised by Alan Knott and a longer session had been held the previous day. Russell was convinced that Knott's inventive approach saved his England career. On the first day at Lord's with England in trouble on 185 for six, Russell strode out to face the rancorous Aussies, who were convinced a bunny was approaching. Armed with one of Knott's old bats with a very short handle to help him control shots against short balls, Jack proceeded over the next three hours to silence Australians, on the pitch and off, with a fine undefeated 64, laced with "good old-fashioned Anglo Saxon" (*Wisden*). Recognizing a worthy opponent the Australians clapped him off the field. Later in the series Russell scored a Test century, marking the completion of his education against short-pitched bowling.

West Indies v England, Fourth Test, Bridgetown, April 1990

Russell's graduation was timely, as the next winter he moved into higher academia; pitting his wits against that professor of pace, Curtly Ambrose. Testing though this was to prove, it was England who got off to a fast start. Dismissing a complacent West Indies in Jamaica for a mere 164 and batting them out of the game gave the tourists a Test victory for the first time in the Caribbean in 16 years. Rain, usually English salvation, had ruined the Second Test and in the Third denied a seemingly inevitable second victory. At lunch on the final day England required another 80-odd to win with nine wickets remaining. Graham Gooch's broken hand did not dampen England's optimism, but a storm turned the field muddy. Play resumed in tricky conditions, amid mounds of sawdust and precarious footholds. Forty minutes were taken to bowl three overs, but Russell at least admitted the West Indies could not be blamed; England too would have slowed down the game.

Indeed, at Bridgetown, England did precisely that, stooping to "shameless delaying tactics to preserve their fragile advantage" (*Times*). The West Indies found their form, outclassing their opponents and declaring towards the end of the fourth day with a lead of 355. Many considered Viv Richards had delayed his declaration unduly, but the 50 minutes he left England to face that evening were too tough an examination for them. Only nine overs were bowled but three English batsmen failed. The last wicket sparked formal legal proceedings. By the next morning, more lawyers seemed to be employed than England had runs.

Wisden was an eye-witness: "Bailey was given out in controversial circumstances by umpire Barker after a charging finger-flapping appeal by Richards which was at best undignified and unsightly. At worst, it was calculated gamesmanship." Alec Stewart was at the bowler's end at the time: "Ambrose sent one down the leg side. It brushed Rob's thigh pad, to be taken by the wicketkeeper Jeff Dujon. Viv Richards ran from slip, whooping and hollering, eventually ending up at my end. To my amazement, umpire Lloyd Barker gave Rob out. I had a clear view and Rob got nowhere near that delivery. In my opinion the umpire had allowed himself to be intimidated by Viv." Christopher Martin-Jenkins on *Test Match Special* alleged Barker had given Bailey out "against his better judgement" because Richards had led an orchestrated appeal. The remarks prompted outrage. Writs were issued the following day to Martin-Jenkins for defamation and the BBC for disseminating them. The *Voice of Barbados* dropped Martin-Jenkins from its commentary team. Martin-Jenkins withdrew any implied criticism, and the lawyers dispersed sadly shaking their heads for want of fees¹.

After a rest day filled with these shenanigans, Russell had a game to save. Having been sent in as second nightwatchman after Gladstone Small had failed, he and Stewart resumed the final day with England on 15 for three. The odd delivery kept low, but the first hour passed calmly. By lunch, however, Stewart had gone and Allan Lamb, after an hour's defence, fell in the afternoon. English hopes rested on Robin Smith and Jack Russell. They battled through to tea. In so doing they gradually silenced the celebratory music from the Kensington Stand. The *Daily Gleaner* enthused over Russell's innings: "an effort of grim determination and precise judgement. With the West Indian pacers having given up trying to blast him out from early in the morning and deciding to attack him on or about off stump ... Russell gave a perfect exhibition of when to play and when not to play."

¹ The reputation of the legal profession's foot-soldiers is long-standing. James Boswell recounted; "Johnson observed, that 'he did not care to speak ill of any man behind his back, but he believed the gentleman was an attorney'"; *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791).

Tea was welcome respite from a disciplined vigil, as well as an opportunity to lubricate the vocal cords. Rehearsing for Johannesburg, Jack had bellowed at himself between balls to sustain his concentration. After tea, overs flashed by rather more quickly than hitherto; 15 bowled in three-quarters of an hour. Richards explained, "We were trying to get the overs through quickly in an effort to get the new ball as we figured once we got out Russell or Smith, we could run through them." Jack reached his half-century but barely noticed. Then Ambrose was tossed the new ball. Pausing, Jack surmised Curtly's height and a new hard ball would combine to produce more bounce. So, having alerted himself to stand a little taller, Russell prepared for the first delivery. The result was an unplayable shooter. "Russell did not stand a chance" (*Guardian*). "The base of the stump was hit by a ball which misbehaved more dangerously and more significantly than any throughout the day" (*Times*).

Over five hours of heroic defence (*Cricketer International*) was ended. Jack remembered: "I dragged myself off the pitch, thinking that we still had an excellent chance of saving the game, as long as the rest of the guys rallied around Robin [Smith]. But Ambrose was now irresistible, and he blew the England batting apart." Taking five wickets in five overs and finishing with 8 for 45, Ambrose levelled the series with realistically only half-an-hour's play left. "It was a sickener", shuddered Angus Fraser. Jack despaired; even though undone by a grubber he thought England would escape. This match was lost, but his experience at Bridgetown was to save a later Test in Johannesburg. For now, the *Daily Gleaner* sympathised: "even the staunchest West Indies fan should have a word of praise for the valiant Russell."

West Indies 446 & 267-8 declared and England 1 st Innings 358		
England 2 nd Innings (<i>overnight 15-3: Stewart 4, Russell 3</i>)		
AJ Stewart	c Richards b Ambrose	37
W Larkins	c Dujon b Bishop	0
RJ Bailey	c Dujon b Ambrose	6
GC Small	lbw b Ambrose	0
RC Russell	b Ambrose	55
AJ Lamb	c Dujon b Moseley	10
RA Smith	not out	40
N Hussain	lbw b Ambrose	0
DJ Capel	lbw b Ambrose	6
PAJ DeFreitas	lbw b Ambrose	0
DE Malcolm	lbw b Ambrose	4
Extras		33

Total (91.4 overs)		191
FOW: 1-1, 2-10, 3-10, 4-71, 5-97, 6-166, 7-173, 8-181, 9-181		

So Jack Russell's fine innings was spurned by his team-mates. The end of the match left England shattered mentally. They had only a day to recover before the decisive Test at Antigua started. It was not long enough. The West Indies rammed home their superiority, winning by an innings to take the series 2-1, but not without facing more fight from a battered England side. Jack, now battle-hardened, had secured his place as Test match wicketkeeper and a man for a crisis. His career was interrupted, eventually curtailed, as England sought to cram as many skills as possible into a side of eleven. Ultimately Alec Stewart was unveiled as superman; opener-cum-wicketkeeper-cum-captain. Jack Russell's diligence and skill continued; applied after his cricket career through paint and brush.

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