

NWM Centurions and Near-Misses

Nasim-ul-Ghani, England v Pakistan, Second Test, Lord's, June 1962

Pakistan toured in 1962 for their second Test series in England, having drawn the first in 1954. Accustomed at home to dead turf wickets, the Pakistan players struggled. They were to win only four of their 29 tour games. However, despite generally poor results, before the Lord's Test Pakistan surprised Yorkshire at Bradford (Yorkshire 246 and 137, Pakistan 285 and 28 for none), gaining what the *Times* described as a moral victory and instilling hope for Lord's. Hopes were harboured, for different reasons, by the ground authorities. For some years, a ridge at the Nursery End had caused balls to rise nastily. From the mid-1950s bruises and chipped bones were commonplace, together with early finishes. For the Test against South Africa in 1960 the wickets were pitched a yard closer to the pavilion in an attempt to take the ridge out of play. After a lively Ashes Test in 1961, the MCC had the square inspected and decided to excavate and re-lay over the back end. They were hopeful the pitch for the Test against Pakistan in 1962 would be true. Quite apart from the damage to batsmen, early finishes to Lord's Tests had rather harmed the bank balance.

Hopes were dashed when, faced with a humid atmosphere and a green pitch, Javed Burki decided to bat. Fred Trueman and Len Coldwell enjoyed their morning, sending Pakistan in for lunch at 76 for six. Over the next day or so, England built up a first innings lead of 270 and thirty minutes before the close of play on Friday, Pakistan fell to 77 for four. The *Cricketer* believed that "Pakistan's spirits could not have been lower than they were then"; although perhaps the MCC's Treasurer was even gloomier, imagining the traditional bumper crowd expected for the Lord's Saturday melting away. Two restoratives emerged. The MCC Secretary announced an exhibition match would be played between the two teams if the match ended before 3.30 pm. This news was carried in the Friday-evening and Saturday-morning newspapers. A twenty-over exhibition match (unaccountably not promoted as Twenty20 and spawning endless repetitions) had been held at Lord's on the Saturday in 1958 for the same reason against New Zealand. A crowd of 25,000 had plenty of fun, especially amused by Peter Richardson, the England opener, keeping wicket in the style of Godfrey Evans.

The second, more substantive, tonic emerged from the Long Room into the Friday evening sunlight; Nasim-ul-Ghani, Pakistan's 21-year-old left-handed spin bowler, nightwatchman for Imtiaz Ahmed. Nasim had kept watch successfully, the youngest to do so, against the West Indies in the Trinidad Test of February 1958. Earlier in the 1962 tour he had rescued Pakistan with a nightwatchman's knock of 73, his highest first-class score, at Grace Road. At Lord's with his captain, Burki, Nasim saw Pakistan through to the close of play at 103 for four. A temporary hiatus in England's serene progress; the *Karachi Dawn* summing up the situation with "Pakistan slid headlong towards an almost certain innings defeat." Nevertheless, Saturday saw 20,000 spectators at Lord's, accompanied by broad smiles in the Committee Room, and in the first hour a grim battle. Trueman and Coldwell bowled well, the latter off his longer run. Burki was twice beaten for pace and the ghost of the ridge made balls rear awkwardly at the Nursery End. With the score on 108 for four, Nasim, driving at Coldwell, edged the ball to gully shoulder-high but Peter Parfitt failed to hold it.

As the pacemen tired, England's captain, Ted Dexter, turned his thoughts to a bowling change. "Came a lull in the speed of the falling wickets and the crowd began to chant, 'We want Lock, we want Tony Lock!' Now against my better judgement Lock had been included in this Lord's side. He did not get a bowl in the first innings and when this cry went up in the second I thought, fatally, 'we're here to entertain them, I'll give Lock a bowl.'" Like the Lord's pitch, the career of England's captain had recently been far from smooth. Walter Robins¹ was appointed Chairman of Selectors before the 1962 season. Robins strongly favoured entertaining cricket. Gubby Allen, the out-going Chairman considered the selectors must urgently "inculcate a more aggressive approach into the batting".

¹ Roly Jenkins the popular Worcestershire professional once authored an article on spin bowling for a magazine. Shortly afterwards he met Walter Robins, who commented: "That was a very good article, Jenkins. Who wrote it for you?" The immediate response: "I wrote it myself, sir. Who read it for you?" Perhaps an example *Wisden* had in mind when explaining Roly's Test career as being shortened by "his propensity to make remarks that were not always appreciated by starchy authority."

Picking up the baton, Robins on his appointment declared: "Play aggressively at all times; otherwise you will not be chosen for England." Robins was manager on the England tour of the West Indies in 1959-60. Colin Cowdrey, who stood in as captain for the injured Peter May, remembered the 'extraordinary histrionics of our manager' during the Final Test when England were protecting a 1-0 lead, as Robins tried to persuade him to declare to make an entertaining finish. Robins decided to use the five Tests against Pakistan in 1962 as trials for the captain for the ensuing Ashes tour, and considered three: Cowdrey and Dexter being joined, rather surprisingly from his missionary work in London, by the Reverend David Sheppard. Doubtless, the Reverend would relish bringing recalcitrant Antipodeans to God, but the Chairman of Selectors seemed, not for the last time, to be the one most in need of guidance.

In choosing to bring on Lock, Dexter may have recalled injunctions for entertainment, but he certainly answered Pakistan's prayers, initiating a sparkling period of play. Nasim, as Dexter remembers, "was soon thrashing Lock all over the field. Burki, encouraged, followed suit" and in the second hour of the morning Pakistan added 90 runs. Dexter's own bowling was wayward, conceding nine in one over, and his thinking as imprecise, believing it would be an insult rather than a mercy to take off Lock who was well on his way to giving up 78 runs in 14 overs. Nasim lofted Lock for four back over his head to surpass Pakistan's previous best 5th wicket partnership and brought up the 200 by smashing him for six over long on. In the afternoon, Burki and Nasim moved the score on to 255 for four. The new ball was taken, but the first efforts of Trueman and Coldwell were repelled. Just after 2.30 pm, Pakistan drew level with England. Five minutes later, as the *Karachi Dawn* enthused: "Nasim cracked Coldwell to the midwicket ropes to reach 101 and was given a tremendous ovation". He became not only the first Test nightwatchman to score a century but the first Pakistan player to do so in a Test in England. It was also his maiden first-class hundred. Barely, however, had the cheers died down, than he edged Coldwell's next ball to first slip. Nasim had batted for three hours, hitting fifteen fours and one six, and the crowd rose to him as he made his way to the pavilion.

Nasim, "whose elegance made one think at times of a left-handed Graveney" (*Observer*) left the crowd in raptures, Pakistan on 274 for five, and England with the possibility of chasing an awkward total on Monday, after the Sunday's rest. Sadly for the visitors, not long afterwards Burki was given out by a poor lbw decision. The remaining batsmen struggled and Pakistan were dismissed for 355. In truth, the "magnificent stand" had been unlikely to save the match, and England won at six o'clock, but Nasim's innings broke new ground. After witnessing "as happy a day's cricket as they will enjoy this year" (*Times*) the crowd left the ground with cheerful memories. Nasim-ul-Ghani's century for Pakistan on a bright June day fifty years ago persists still on the Honours Roll in the Visitor's dressing-room at Lord's.

Pakistan 100 and England 370

Pakistan 2nd Innings (overnight 103-4: Burki 15, Nasim-ul-Ghani 13)

Hanif Mohammad	lbw b Coldwell	24
Alimuddin	c Graveney b Allen	10
Saeed Ahmed	b Coldwell	20
Mushtaq Mohammad	c Millman b Trueman	18
Javed Burki	lbw b Coldwell	101
Nasim-ul-Ghani	c Graveney b Coldwell	101
Imtiaz Ahmed	c Trueman b Coldwell	33
W Mathias	c Graveney b Trueman	1
Mahmood Hussain	b Coldwell	20
A D'Souza	not out	12
Mohammad Farooq	b Trueman	1
Extras		14

Total (119.3 overs)		355

FOW: 1-36, 2-36, 3-57, 4-77, 5-274, 6-299, 7-300, 8-333, 9-354

England 86-1

Tony Mann, Australia v India, Second Test, Perth, December 1977

The Indian tour of Australia in 1977-78 coincided with the first season of World Series Cricket (WSC). Desperate to attract audiences to the alternative programme of SuperTests, Kerry Packer's agents in the media rubbished the Indian team - no Indian players had been sought for WSC - and trumpeted the allegiance of star Australian cricketers. An anxious and restrained Australian Cricket Board (ACB) had to let events on the field do their talking, but a favourable crowd for an official cricket match could always be counted on to coax them out of their shell (or, perhaps as their former Test players might have said, to pull their heads from the sand). Instead of analyses of batting averages, bowling figures and match situation, the Australian public were regaled zealously from one side or the other throughout the summer with detailed comparisons of crowd sizes, ground location and weather conditions. Reports of games no longer began with the close of play score, rather "Today's attendance was ..."

Australia used only three of the players who had lost the Ashes series 3-0 in England in 1977: Craig Serjeant, Kim Hughes and Jeff Thomson. Bobby Simpson was recalled at the age of 41 as leader. India were led by Bishen Bedi. Erapalli Prasanna recalled Bedi as the first Indian captain to be firmly on the players' side rather than politicking with the selectors. Bedi, a tough cricketer but also an extrovert who joked with his boys, was perhaps the ideal leader for the situation, not least from the ACB's perspective. Kapil Dev fondly remembered Bedi's generosity, his willingness to gamble and his drive to win, even if that risked defeat. India generated a good deal of interest in the Test series by playing brightly in their four tour games before the Tests started. They won the matches easily; three (South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales) by six wickets and one (Queensland) by an innings and plenty.

The First Test at Brisbane met the wildest dreams of the ACB. India were set 341 to win. Sunil Gavaskar paced the race with a sober 113, despite seeing the middle order fall by the wayside. However, he fell to the second new ball and soon afterwards India were flagging on 275 for eight. Gaining a second wind, Syed Kirmani and his captain got the scoreboard rattling with a lively stand of 40 runs. The Australian bowlers completely lost control (*Wisden*) and India sprinted to 318 for eight. With tension high Kirmani, on 55, mis-pulled a very short bumper to midwicket. Serjeant hung on to the catch. Bhagwath Chandrasekhar couldn't manage to stay with his captain and Australia won a thrilling match.

At Perth in the Second Test Australia had a chance to show their paces as they aimed at an almost identical total, 339, to win. Earlier in the match they had been in trouble on 149 for four, replying to India's 402. Simpson, with a wonderful 176, took them to near-parity. He supervised nightwatchman Steve Rixon, who scored maiden Test fifty and, as Tiger O'Reilly put it; "help the skipper to turn the tide in Australia's direction." Starting the run-chase, Australia's first wicket fell late on the penultimate day. Simpson turned to another nightwatchman, Tony Mann, who prevented any further reverse. Aside from dealing with India's bowlers, Australia had to worry about the clock. Tony Mann remembered the situation in an interview with the *Melbourne Age*: "I couldn't hang about. I had to get on with it." As a left-hander, Mann didn't mind playing the Indian spinners and "decided to get down the track and meet them" (*Adelaide Advertiser*). But the loss of Serjeant after barely five minutes of the morning's play had to be dealt with first. From 33 for two, Mann and David Ogilvie forged an impressive balance. Ogilvie, slow and obdurate, ceded the pace-setting to Mann. At one point Ogilvie remained scoreless for 44 minutes, concentrating on defence by lunging from the crease, while Mann had success at the other end by using his feet.

By lunch the early loss had been put well behind them, and Australia had moved to 95 for two. Ogilvie had scored 16 runs in night on two hours while Mann was on 57. Simpson clearly gave orders for quick runs after lunch. The *Adelaide Advertiser* saw Mann become even more aggressive, "beautifully square-driving Chandrasekhar and then pulling him to the fence." Of the Indian spinners, only Bedi managed to extract any turn from the hard pitch. "Anything outside off stump was there to cut", recalled Mann, who took full advantage of India's weakness in bowling to left-handers. After three hours at the crease, Tony Mann became the second nightwatchman to score a century with the crowd standing in excitement as he approached the milestone. Shortly afterwards, he was out to a bat-pad catch off Bedi, the ball ballooning behind to Kirmani. Tony's 105, scored off 165 balls with 10 fours took Australia to 172 for three.

Mann's only other first-class century came when he was a nightwatchman against a touring team and also at Perth. He had fun with Ray Illingworth's England in December 1970. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described his knock for Western Australia of 110 in 122 minutes: "there was no semblance of luck about his innings, he drove and cut and pulled with the aplomb of a specialist." Tony generally extended rough hospitality to tourists at Perth. Before this Second Test in December 1977, he had taken 56 off India, batting at No. 7 for Western Australia, and he would score an unbeaten 56 off the West Indies attack of Malcolm Marshall, Colin Croft and Joel Garner in January 1980.

As Mann accepted the ovation from the crowd at Perth, Australia were confident of victory. Oglivie's vigil ended at 195 for four, and Simpson and Peter Toohey built on that foundation. Into the evening session they batted and with 14 of the mandatory 15 overs remaining in the last hour, they had moved the score onto 295 for four, 44 runs away from victory. Victory seemed straightforward, but Madan Lal, recovering from his follow through, ran out Simpson with a brilliant piece of fielding. In the same over he nipped a ball back and trapped Hughes leg before; Australia 296 for six. The crowd "went wild as Toohey and Steve Rixon edged the score forward" (*Times*). The pair added 34 and the tension began to ease as they moved Australia to within nine runs of victory with six overs to go.

Toohey, having played with great discipline, suddenly had a rush of blood against Bedi, attempting a lofted drive which was clutched gratefully by Mohinder Armanath. "There was a suggestion of panic" as Rixon, in the same over, drove wildly across the line and was pinned leg before. Australia were now 330 for eight with only the fast bowlers remaining. They may have been the calmest folk at the ground. Thomson and Wayne Clark carefully took five singles and a two from the next two overs. Bringing an end to a pulsating match, "Thomson put the crowd out of their misery with a boundary". Bishen Bedi was able to smile about the narrow defeats in the first two Tests: "These sorts of results are not good for the heart." Splendid, however, for the ACB, whose hearts were gladdened further as the tourists fought back. India won the next two Tests easily, by 222 runs at Melbourne and an innings at Sydney, to level the series 2-2 going into the final Test.

India 402 & 330-9 declared and Australia 1st Innings 394		
Australia 2nd Innings (overnight 25-1: Serjeant 9, Mann 6)		
J Dyson	c Vengsarkar b Bedi	4
CS Serjeant	c Kirmani b Madan Lal	12
AL Mann	c Kirmani b Bedi	105
AD Oglivie	b Bedi	47
PM Toohey	c Armanath b Bedi	83
RB Simpson	run out	39
KJ Hughes	lbw b Madan Lal	0
SJ Rixon	lbw b Bedi	23
WM Clark	not out	5
JR Thomson	not out	6
Extras		18

Total (8 wickets; 87.2 overs)		342
FOW: 1-13, 2-33, 3-172, 4-195, 5-295, 6-296, 7-330, 8-330		

Brilliant though he was as a nightwatchman, Mann struggled with the day job against India despite a bright start. His first international spell in the First Test of this series yielded 3 for 12. "Piece of piss, this Test cricket", he recalled but soon noticed that India adjusted, "Gavaskar played me with a stump virtually. Every time I played, Sunil got a century. He played beautifully." After that first spell, Mann took one more wicket (which in a complete absence of fraternity was that of a nightwatchman) at a cost of 304 runs. He was dropped for the final and decisive Test. Nevertheless, he had a long career in cricket. Alec Stewart played under his captaincy at Midland-Guildford in Australia and recalled Mann as: "An intelligent man, he was the best captain I have ever played under.... He had that Breatley-esque quality of inspiring his players with clear, decisive thinking and excellent man-management skills."

Tony Mann watched from the boundary, as with the series tied, the Fifth Test ended with surprising tension. Australia had started the match with a soothing 505 and preserved the calm mood as two days later they set India 493 to win. Chasing this unlikely target, India moved to 320 for four with an hour's play left on the penultimate day. Almost two years earlier at Port-of-Spain, India had chased down 403 to beat the West Indies; their 406 for three rendering Clive Lloyd averse to spin bowling. The Australians looked set for a fretful night, until Anshuman Gaekwad was caught and bowled driving at Bruce Yardley and Vengsarkar, perhaps unwisely trying to score quickly off a jaded attack late in the day, was caught at long on. India closed on 362 for six and slumbers were not so disturbed. Kirmani and Ghavri proved unsettling in the morning, however, as with some ease they moved the score to 415 for six. The third new ball broke their stand and put Australia in sight of victory. India fought hard to the last man, falling eventually 48 runs short on 445.

Bobby Simpson and Bishen Bedi had led their sides in an addictive display of attractive and engrossing cricket. "Another triumph for traditional cricket" blazed a headline after the Fifth Test. Large crowds enjoyed a closely fought series. The most equitable comparison of gates was the WSC SuperTest at Adelaide with the Third Test at Melbourne: the only time the rival matches were played simultaneously in large cities. The total attendance over four days was 15,430 at Adelaide and 82,100 at Melbourne. Of course, WSC was to become much more prominent the following year, but for now traditional cricket had been well served.

Mark Boucher, Zimbabwe v South Africa, Only Test, Harare, November 1999

Never can a Test team have faced the problems besetting Zimbabwe for the one-off match at Harare in November 1999. Their country was facing the worst economic crisis under Robert Mugabe's 19-year regime with inflation running at over 70% and half the workforce unemployed. Zimbabwe's involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo was draining reserves, and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund suspended loan arrangements. Hardship was exacerbated by the selfishness of the regime. Having refused to give civil servants a 20% pay increase and ignored doctor's requests for better conditions, Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament voted themselves pay increases of between 160% and 300%, backdated several months. The Zimbabwe Cricket Union, with a plentiful cash reserve since England's visit in 1996-97, followed the lead of their government, emphatically rejecting before the Test a request from cricketers for a pay increase. Alistair Campbell resigned his captaincy two days before the match. One of the team reflected; "Money isn't everything but the whole issue has had an effect on morale that in turn has impacted on our performance. The board's whole attitude to us just isn't right".

Zimbabwe had more problems on the playing field. Heath Streak and Neil Johnson, their front-line seamers were not fit enough to bowl, yet the head groundsman, seemingly as conscious of life's realities as his government, prepared a well-grassed pitch. With South Africa's Allan Donald and Shaun Pollock to face, this was rank sabotage. Predictably, Zimbabwe lost the toss. Their tribulations were not over. Rain, which had fallen for the first time in weeks just before the match, interrupted play after 12 overs on the opening morning, and then relented to allow the refreshed bowlers 11 more overs in the afternoon, before ending the day's play at tea. Zimbabwe stuttered to 48 for three. The Test match conditions stipulated if playing time was lost, proceedings would begin half an hour earlier than usual. Zimbabwe's misery was complete. They had to bat twice in the morning on a green pitch at Harare where the wicket was always at its most lively before 11 am. The well-rested Donald and Pollock decided the match. Zimbabwe were dismissed for 102 before lunch on the second day.

The wicket was still helpful but Zimbabwe did not have the bowlers to take advantage. South Africa moved carefully to 207 for four by close of play; Mark Boucher in as nightwatchman for Jonty Rhodes. Little devilment remained in the pitch on the third morning, but the new ball was taken early on and Zimbabwe bowled tightly. South Africa lost Jacques Kallis and then Rhodes just after the morning drinks break to slip to 237 for six. Boucher fought hard and with restraint against tight bowling, reaching lunch on 33 not out. He had seen Klusener fall, just before the break at 281 for seven.

After lunch, the bowling wavered a little and Boucher and Pollock hammered 60 runs in seven overs, launching their record-breaking stand. Gavin Rennie, fielding that day, remembered the batting display:

“Mark Boucher drove brilliantly on that wicket and anything short he put away; you cannot bowl short to him. He batted really well and his temperament is pretty good too; his focus was brilliant. For us fielding it was a good lesson that the temperament, choice of shots and the discipline he showed was quite an example to follow.”

Boucher and Pollock added 148 runs in 37 overs in a record 8th wicket partnership for South Africa. Boucher reached his century with a boundary off Murray Goodwin, his cutting and driving drawing much admiration. He had compiled 125, having batted for more than five hours, when he went down the track to loft a ball from Trevor Gripper. *Wisden*: “It was a chanceless innings, a personal best, and he could not hide his disappointment when he mis-hit to mid on to give part-time off-spinner Gripper his first Test wicket.” Boucher attained the highest score by a nightwatchman, leading South Africa to a first innings lead of 360 and heightening the ascendancy they had established on the first two days. An understandably disheartened Zimbabwe succumbed. They were 141 all out halfway through the afternoon session on the fourth day.

Zimbabwe 102		
South Africa 1st Innings (overnight 207-4: Kallis 101, Boucher 1)		
AM Bacher	c A Flower b Strang	8
HH Dippenaar	c Johnson b Olonga	33
JH Kallis	lbw b Strang	115
DJ Cullinan	c A Flower b Strang	0
WJ Cronje	c Rennie b Olonga	58
MV Boucher	c Goodwin b Gripper	125
JN Rhodes	c GW Flower b Mbangwa	4
L Klusener	c Olonga b Mbangwa	25
SM Pollock	c Campbell b Olonga	61
AA Donald	not out	12
PR Adams	not out	3
Extras		13

Total (9 wickets declared; 154 overs)		462
FOW: 1-20, 2-96, 3-105, 4-205, 5-230, 6-237, 7-281, 8-429, 9-451		
Zimbabwe 141		

Zimbabwe's economic depression was matched by England's Test cricket status. Defeat in the home series to New Zealand left them bottom of the ICC rankings table, their selectors in confusion and Duncan Fletcher, newly-appointed England coach, with a clear view of the bumpy road ahead. England administrator Brian Bolus² regarded youth as the future and wanted to end the careers of Mike Atherton, Alec Stewart, Andrew Caddick and Phil Tufnell. The party chosen was criticised by South African opinion as a blunder. Duncan Fletcher, whose contribution was to insist Michael Vaughan was included, was inclined to agree: "so many players were being tried out that it had the look of a development trip rather than a full-blown Test tour." Vaughan impressed in the first Test after Donald, on a damp green pitch under dense cloud cover, condemned England to their worst start in Tests - two for four within three overs - but the other Test debutants were found wanting by the end of the series.

South Africa took the First Test, their tenth consecutive home Test win, equalling India's record. The Second Test was drawn, although with more urgency South Africa might have won that too. The Third Test at Durban saw England patiently build a winning position around captain Nasser Hussain's ten-and-a-half-hour knock. He was supported most notably by two reprieved Bolus rejects: Stewart scoring 95, enabling him to declare on 366 for nine; and Caddick, who hustled out South Africa for 156 with a best performance in Tests of 7 for 46. The follow-on was enforced, but the march to victory was arrested when on 90 for one Gary Kirsten was saved by poor footwork from Tufnell. As *Wisden* reproves: "Kirsten, then 33 and batting with all the co-ordination of Bambi on ice, played back to Tufnell and must have been lbw had not the bowler, unforgivably for a spinner, overstepped the crease." Kirsten's feet soon found their rhythm, and by the close of play he had reached 126 with South Africa 251 for four. Mark Boucher was in with him as nightwatchman.

With a lead of only 41 runs going into the final day, South Africa remained in danger of losing the advantage in the series, but England could not breakthrough in the morning session. Boucher gave a half-chance when he was 14 attempting a cut and top-edging Tufnell over the head of slip. In the next over an inside edge off Andrew Flintoff barely missed leg stump. At the other end Kirsten played faultlessly. At lunch South Africa had moved pretty smoothly to 343 for four, but England's tread was heavy after a long two-and-a-half-hour session in repressive heat and dangerously high humidity. Caddick, having the misfortune of being a magnet for the ball, and forced to run several long chases in the field, suffered the most.

After the break, Boucher upped the tempo, pulling and driving gloriously. With his score on 66 and South Africa's on 369, however, Boucher reprised his curious tendency for generous donations to part-time bowlers (beneficiary number one, Trevor Gripper). Boucher greeted Darren Maddy, brought on to bowl for the first time in Tests, by proffering a regulation return catch. Maddy failed to pocket the chance. England's progress stalled and South Africa quick-stepped to safety. Kirsten reached his double century with a single and off the next ball Boucher, having dashed through the nineties in only six balls, hit his 14th boundary to reach his second century as a nightwatchman. The procession was ended by the formal inauguration of the Boucher Charitable Foundation for Jobbing Bowlers. His front-line bowlers sapped by the conditions, England captain Hussain gave Chris Adams a first spell in Test cricket. After plundering some runs, Boucher's altruism emerged and a mis-timed pull from outside off stump presented another maiden wicket.

² Brian Bolus dealt with his first ball in Test cricket even more spectacularly than David Gower. Opening against the West Indies at the Oval in 1963, he was to be blooded by the fearsome Wes Hall. Earlier in the year Tony Lewis recalled going in to face Hall at Cardiff Arms Park when Alwyn Harris the opener was dismissed: "the Glamorgan team always reckoned that Alwyn was so fast getting off and I was so slow getting on that we were the only first-class cricketers ever to cross in the lavatory." Wes Hall, accustomed to superiority in the middle, was stunned when the debutant Bolus drove the first ball straight back over his head for four.

Mark Boucher scored 108 in almost 5 hours with 16 fours and one six. Christopher Martin Jenkins commented: "He played most of the day's memorable strokes, including a six pulled high over square leg off Silverwood and a back foot force, perfectly timed, next ball." *Wisden* noted: "the game was taken out of [England's] hands by the fifth-wicket partnership of 192, a South African record against all countries, between Kirsten and Boucher." South African captain Hansie Cronje had no doubts about using Boucher as a nightwatchman when his side was in difficult circumstances: "Mark relishes such pressure situations ... He enjoys the challenge of moving up the order."

England 366-9 declared and South Africa 156		
South Africa 2nd Innings (overnight 251-4: Kirsten 126, Boucher 1)		
G Kirsten	b Butcher	275
HH Gibbs	c Maddy b Caddick	26
JH Kallis	c Stewart b Gough	69
DJ Cullinan	c Stewart b Flintoff	16
WJ Cronje	c Stewart b Flintoff	1
MV Boucher	c Stewart b Adams	108
L Klusener	b Butcher	45
SM Pollock	not out	7
Extras		25

Total (7 wickets; 209.2 overs)		572
FOW: 1-41, 2-193, 3-242, 4-244, 5-436, 6-537, 7-572		

Boucher departed with South Africa on 436 for five and England bowlers on sore feet. There was to be no relief, however, as Kirsten and Lance Klusener ran up a century partnership at better than a run a minute. Kirsten was finally dismissed for 275 after almost 15 hours, his wicket ending the match with South Africa on 572 for seven. Indeed, Kirsten and Boucher not only saved this Test match but won the next, for they forced England's bowlers to send down 203 overs in two days in awfully sultry weather. This draining effort, mentally and physically, was paid for within a week by South Africa's overwhelming victory in the Fourth Test by an innings to take the series.

Near-Misses

“My Friend, the Enemy”: *Jack Fingleton*

Harold Larwood, Australia v England, Fifth Test, Sydney, February 1933

Undersea cables between England and Australia continued to hum after the arrival back home of Douglas Jardine's team in 1933. The MCC committee, having perused the reports of the captain and managers, complained to the Australian Board of Control in June of the objectionable barracking experienced during the tour. The committee omitted to remark on the standing ovation, the thunderous applause and cheering from every man on the Hill, given to Harold Larwood as he walked back to the pavilion at the end of his nightwatchman innings.

The series had been decided before the Sydney Test. Australia made 435 in their first innings. England, on 153 in reply, lost a second wicket just before the close of play. Jardine sent Larwood in as nightwatchman, clearly not wanting him to stay too long at the crease so he could put his feet up: “I was very largely guided in my decision by his brilliant bowling in the first innings ... It seemed to me imperative that if he was to give of his best in the second innings as a bowler, he should be given every chance of a good rest.” Larwood saw little sense in this: “I couldn't understand it. I'd bowled my guts out [more than 32 overs taking 4 for 98] ... I was angry. I didn't want to go in³. If it was necessary, I was determined to get out.” He gifted Don Bradman a run-out chance that evening, but the shy was wild and garnered four over-throws.

The reluctant Larwood resumed his innings in perfect conditions. The Hill, sniffing an opportunity for revenge when pace bowler Harry 'Bull' Alexander opened the day's proceedings, bayed “knock the bastard's head off”. One ball grazed his nose, but Larwood stood up, hooking and pulling to great effect. He played and scored so well that Bill Woodfull turned to spin after 20 or so runs had been added. Harold continued in good form, outscoring Walter Hammond, and cutting the ball well off Tiger O'Reilly. Alexander came back with the new ball, but in his second over, Larwood pulled successive balls for four. After 77 minutes at the crease, a drive off Bert 'Dainty' Ironmonger brought up his 50. He gave a chance to mid on off Ironmonger almost immediately, his only error, but got to lunch on 62. England were 253 for three, having lost Hammond just before the interval.

Harold carried on in the afternoon; a man possessed. Thirty minutes after lunch Alexander came back for one more try, sparking more savagery: Larwood thrashing bumpers to the boundary. Off-break bowler Perker Lee was brought on but was punished. Larwood crashed a straight drive for six and a four to midwicket. After Larwood had taken 14 off four balls from Lee, Maurice Leyland came down the pitch and said “Hey, Harold, ease up a bit. Look at the scoreboard, you're 98”. The interruption, well-intended, quelled the spirit. Larwood remembered:

“I intended to hit Lee to the fence again, but as I went to play the next shot, an on drive, I thought of the century and hit the ball uppishly. The ball hit the bat rather than the other way around for the only occasion in my innings.”

The chance sailed to Dainty Ironmonger at mid on. Larwood had time to watch, regret mingled with hope. Dainty was not a good fielder, his nickname deriving from the clumsy way he plodded to pick up the ball in the field. Of similar background to Larwood, Ironmonger had lost the top two joints of his left index finger working machinery before his first-class cricket career began at the ripe age of 33; his Test debut in 1928-29 coming at the age of 45. The ball from Larwood ballooned to Ironmonger's left side, always a problem and making the catch difficult. But on a day that Larwood batted like Hammond, Ironmonger caught like him.

³ Had Harold been born in Yorkshire and played for them alongside his England colleague, he would have been spared this indignity. Bill Bowes was tall, clumsy-looking and wore glasses. *Wisden* thought he looked like a college professor and, moreover, batted and fielded like one. But Yorkshire knew his value. He was there to take wickets, nothing else. Any silliness like wasting energy trying to bat was not to be countenanced. If he showed the slightest inclination to do so, his partners were under standing instructions to run him out.



Harold Larwood swishes his bat in disgust at being dismissed for 98 at Sydney (*Wisden Cricket Monthly*). Dainty Ironmonger, who can be seen over Harold's left shoulder



..... shows off the wondrous hand to Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies and Australian captain Lindsay Hassett (*MCG Library*).

O'Reilly recalled: "Harold Larwood, who went in as nightwatchman and stayed to bat beautifully the next day, was cheered to the echo by the crowd and players alike as he left the Sydney Cricket Ground after making 98. Everyone would have liked to see him get his century - provided of course that he got out immediately afterwards." Jardine described it as a grand innings in every way and greeted his faithful servant in the pavilion with: "You little bastard - I knew you could play." Harold Larwood did not play for England again.

Australia 435		
England 1 st Innings (<i>overnight 159-2: Hammond 72, Larwood 5</i>)		
DR Jardine	c Oldfield b O'Reilly	18
H Sutcliffe	c Richardson b O'Reilly	56
WR Hammond	lbw b Lee	101
H Larwood	c Ironmonger b Lee	98
M Leyland	run out	42
RES Wyatt	c Ironmonger b O'Reilly	51
LEG Ames	run out	4
E Paynter	b Lee	9
GOB Allen	c Bradman b Lee	48
H Verity	c Oldfield b Alexander	4
W Voce	not out	7
Extras		16

Total (171.2 overs)		454
FOW: 1-31, 2-153 3-245, 4-310, 5-330, 6-349, 7-374, 8-418, 9-434		
Australia 2 nd Innings 182 and England 2 nd Innings 168-2		

Jack Fingleton visited Harold when Australia toured England in 1948 and they talked of emigration. Over the next couple of years, arrangements were made. In April 1950, full of beer and reminiscences from a few hours with Jack Hobbs in a London pub, Larwood embarked on his journey to Australia on *SS Orontes*, the ship that had taken him there 18 years before. This time Jardine was not at his side but he clutched a telegram that read: "Take care of yourself. Good luck always, Skipper." Arriving and setting about a fresh start, the pit-pony boy from Nuncargate wanted no idle sinecure; "I'd rather shovel muck than do a charity job". Thus it was that Harold Larwood, England's finest fast bowler, began in Australia as he had ended, a lifetime before, as a nightwatchman in Sydney.

“While Hemmings was there Australia had little chance of bowling England out”: *Sydney Morning Herald*

Eddie Hemmings, Australia v England, Fifth Test, Sydney January 1983

Almost 50 years later at the same venue, another Nottinghamshire bowler came close to a century. England saved the First Test in the Ashes series of 1982-83 (Bob Taylor helping as nightwatchman), but then fell victim to a self-imposed problem. In the preceding English summer a one-bouncer-per-over rule had been introduced by the TCCB for domestic matches and the Tests against India. This was hardly ideal preparation for facing Jeff Thomson, Rodney Hogg and Geoff Lawson on hard Australian pitches. The Second Test of the 1982-83 series proved the point. On a bouncy track at Brisbane, English batsmen saw almost more bouncers than they had during their entire summer. They were not practised mentally or technically to deal with so many short-pitched deliveries, often four in an over. Attempting shots or fencing at balls, the England line-up succumbed to the Australian pace attack, which took 18 wickets. Consequently, a safety-first approach was adopted and batsmen were advised to ignore short-pitched balls. This policy helped not one jot at Adelaide; again England fell to pace.

Allan Lamb thought the policy was flawed. There were very few balls left to score off and England's play became submissive, even against the spinners. The bounce had been uneven at Brisbane so shot selection and timing had been difficult anyway. After more thought, and having lost two Tests in a fortnight, England reversed course and decided to be more aggressive. Chris Tavare led the way in the Fourth Test at Melbourne, one of the best to be played. In terrific tension England sneaked home by three runs. Lamb remembered the final day as "the most exciting, gripping day of cricket I'd ever experienced ... We could hardly believe it at first. After never being in the series, if we won the New Year Test in Sydney we could retain the Ashes."

By common consent, at least among English players, the Sydney Test was marred by an appalling decision in the first over of play. With the scoreboard as yet untroubled, John Dyson was reprieved when he was a couple of feet short of safety attempting a run. Dyson went on to score 79 in a stay of just over five hours. After each team had batted, Australia led by 77 runs. Early in their second innings, the pitch started to turn and Geoff Miller and Eddie Hemmings exerted some pressure. Kim Hughes appeared to have been caught at short leg off Hemmings: a wicket which would have left Australia on 88 for four with their last two recognised batsmen in the middle. Again the umpire was unmoved. Hughes went on to a marvellous 137, and Australia declared late in the day. England were set 460 runs to win and had half an hour to bat to see out the day.

As fifty years previously, the deputed nightwatchman was stunned and angry to be told by his captain to pad up. Eddie Hemmings had bowled 47 overs in the Australian second innings and was knackered, ready (as Larwood ever was) for a beer⁴. Captain Bob Willis believed Bob Taylor was too tired, so Hemmings was cast for a role he previously had never performed, either for country or county. Hemmings felt he was being treated like a junior professional, but didn't argue and reached for his pads. Barely had Eddie got them on than Geoff Cook was trapped leg before in the second over. Lawson bowled well and Hemmings was lucky to survive the evening. Taking the last over of the day a thin inside edge ran safely to the boundary. England closed on eight for one.

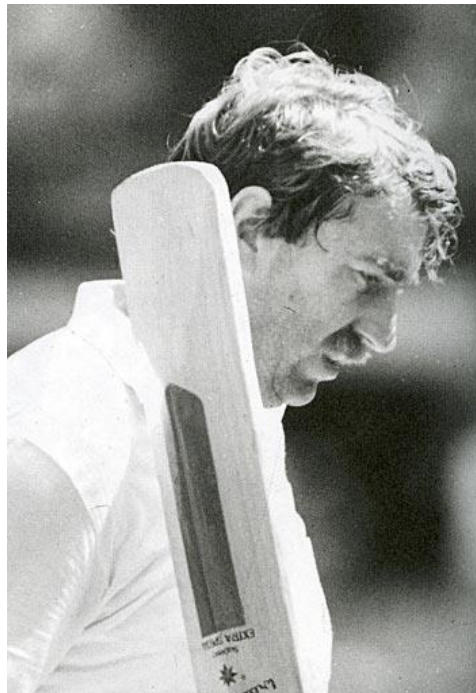
Overnight the media, while acknowledging England's task was impossible, thought they must make an attempt to be aggressive rather than shrinking to defence. On the final morning, Greg Chappell crowded Hemmings with close fielders. Eddie responded (again, following Larwood) by attacking the bowling. He struck fours through the gaps between the in-fielders and scored 22 of the 34 runs accrued in the first half hour. Chris Tavare was dismissed but Eddie kept up the momentum. Tiger O'Reilly reckoned Hemmings had adopted the role of pace-setter: "In partnership with David Gower he maintained a scoring rate of 4.5 runs an over for the first hour, thereby threatening Australia that it should be a manageable job to amass more than 400 runs in the mandatory 90 overs for the day."

The new ball found some venom in the pitch early on, and amid the stroke play Lawson struck Hemmings painful blows on the fingers and to the chest. Approaching lunch Hemmings and Gower had taken the score into three figures when Gower was out. The dismissal rendered any lingering hopes forlorn. Shortly before lunch Hemmings reached his maiden Test fifty, but received poor reward as he took another blow on the hand from a Lawson bouncer. He went into lunch with a broken finger, which was to leave a lump still with him. England were 112 for three. Now, much work was needed to save the Test. For more than an hour in the afternoon, Hemmings made painful but steady progress. He saw Allan Lamb fall at the other end and was joined by his county mate Derek Randall. They added another 41 runs, with Hemmings in much pain but nearing a milestone. Six months previously, Randall had seen Hemmings score a maiden first-class century at Worksop. Now a Test century beckoned. Nearly four hours at the crease had yielded 95 runs when, having played Bruce Yardley with utmost confidence, Eddie lifted his head slightly to a ball which pitched in the rough and spun across him.

⁴ Eddie, not particularly svelte, enjoyed his beer. As did Colin Milburn, who was told by his county captain Keith Andrew: "You'll have to lose some weight. For a start, why don't you drink halves instead of pints?" Colin then went on to hit 150 in three hours. In the bar, his skipper offered him a celebratory drink - "I'll have two halves, please, guv."



Eddie Hemmings pulls for four on his way to 95 at Sydney (*Getty Images*)



... and walks off after much hard work, head bowed by disappointment and the heavy weight of a feckless umpire (*Getty Images*)

Hemmings swore the ball missed his bat, but the umpire saw a thin inside edge.⁵ Hesitating with disappointment, Eddie looked rather forlorn on his way back to the pavilion. Rightly, however, he was to hear high praise for his innings. Robin Marlar remembered: "Hemmings began to get on top of the Australian attack, playing on the back foot against the quick bowlers ... and getting down to Yardley on the front foot. His judgement was excellent, his eye good, his resolution admirable and his search for runs energetic."

Australia 314 & 382 and England 237		
England 2nd Innings (overnight 8-1: Tavare 1, Hemmings 4)		
G Cook	lbw b Lawson	2
CJ Tavare	lbw b Yardley	16
EE Hemmings	c Marsh b Yardley	95
DI Gower	c Hookes b Yardley	24
AJ Lamb	c & b Yardley	29
DW Randall	b Thomson	44
IT Botham	lbw b Thomson	32
G Miller	not out	21
RW Taylor	not out	28
Extras		23

Total (7 wickets; 96 overs)		314
FOW: 1-3, 2-55 3-104, 4-155, 5-196, 6-260, 7-261		

Eddie took England to 196 for five. Later, with the score on 293 for seven, Miller and Taylor survived the last eleven overs against a new ball to finish off the Hemmings's work. A headline in the *Times* thundered "*Hemmings keeps England's honour intact.*" The tourists returned home having fought hard when facing a 2-0 deficit. Doug Insole, the manager, and Bob Willis, with the full support of the squad, travelled determined to convince the TCCB to abandon the bouncer limitation rule. Indeed, with Tests against Pakistan and West Indies on the horizon and batsmen short of experience, the TCCB might have been applauded had they instructed the counties to bowl a stipulated minimum number of bouncers per over.

"Alex Tudor won my first Test as captain with an unbeaten 99, playing brilliantly and turning what looked like becoming a nervous run chase into a convincing win": *Nasser Hussain*

Alex Tudor, England v New Zealand, First Test, Birmingham, July 1999

The New Zealand tourists in 1999 were discounted by the press. The Kiwis had recently had much the worse of a home series against South Africa, whereas England had beaten the Springboks 2-1 the previous summer. Further, New Zealand had not won a Test in England since 1986 when Richard Hadlee had match figures of 10 for 140 on his 'home' ground of Trent Bridge. A balanced reporter might have countered that England had won only twice against New Zealand tourists in the same span. Further, before the series David Lloyd was allowed to leave as coach without being replaced. Selector Graham Gooch was left to supervise nets and fielding practice. The last time England had started a Test series without a coach was 1986 - when they lost to New Zealand.

⁵ Both sides suffered from poor decisions in this series. Frank Lee, Somerset opener and first-class umpire, told a lovely story. The Angel of Light and Angel of Darkness agree to play a friendly cricket match. "There's one thing that bothers me: all good cricketers go to heaven when they die, and we've got Grace, we've got Trumper, we've got Ranji and a whole crowd of champions. I don't see how you can raise a side to give us a game." "Don't you worry", replied Lucifer, "we've got all the umpires down our way".

Nevertheless, before the First Test, new England captain Nasser Hussain was not expecting the easy ride predicted by the media, thoughtfully claiming that “ups and downs” lay before him. At the end of an astounding Test, *Wisden* commented: “he had been through so many that he felt as if he had aged 20 years in the two and a half days it took to claim victory. His emotions were sent spinning every which way, but he never lost control of his thoughts or his strategies. It was an encouraging debut as leader.”

Hussain’s pragmatism might have been grounded partly by the fate of his eight immediate predecessors, each of whom had lost their debut Test at the helm. By lunch on the second day Hussain looked set to continue the streak. England had started well enough. New Zealand opted to bat on what everyone considered to be an unpredictable pitch, but fell victim to a combination of swing and poor judgement to fall to 104 for six. Alan Parore was then missed badly by Alec Stewart in the slips when he had scored only seven. Stewart, displaced as England captain and wicketkeeper, went the wrong way. Parore exacted payment; his 73 took the tourists to 226. When, in the morning session of the second day, England were floundering on 45 for seven, Hussain seemed set to become the ninth despondent skipper⁶.

He was saved from utter despair by his bowlers. First, Andrew Caddick and Alex Tudor each batted for an hour and forty minutes scoring 33 and 32 not out respectively to prevent a complete rout. Then, after a stirring speech from Hussain, Caddick took five wickets to leave New Zealand on 52 for eight. England’s hearts were lightened, but Stewart missed another catch in the slips, relieving Stephen Fleming, who nursed the tail to a lead of 207. Stewart capped a miserable day, falling for the second time third ball to Geoff Allott, this time to a splendid yorker. His were the 1st and the 21st wickets to fall in the day, and prompted the appearance of Tudor as nightwatchman. His team was in a much better position than seemed probable before lunch, but still looked like losing. “England left on the rack”, headlined the *Times*, and the *Daily Telegraph* thought only a brave man could see England getting the runs. Some experts (Vic Marks amongst them) were less pessimistic, feeling New Zealand were only just favoured and expecting a tight struggle.

England coach Graham Gooch talked to the team before Saturday’s play began about batting positively. Little could he have imagined the effect of his speech. An inkling of the day was given when Alex Tudor got off the mark with a super back foot cover drive for four off Allott. Tudor almost played on twice soon afterwards, but continued to go for his shots, “lancing anything wide through the covers” (*Wisden Cricket Monthly*). He and Mark Butcher combined big shots with quick singles, and brought up 50 in the ninth over of the day. They were helped considerably by bright and breezy weather, which drastically changed the bowling conditions. As Scyld Berry put it, “the only thing that was swinging was Tudor’s bat”. Alex enjoyed some fortune; a mis-timed pull soaring back over the bowler’s head for two, and a miscued hook which finished nestled by the feet of the ‘keeper. Nevertheless when New Zealand turned to spin for the tenth over of the morning, Tudor welcomed Daniel Vettori with a lovely off drive for four and cracked him through extra cover for another. Alex’s innings would have delighted Edward Verrall Lucas’s singing cricket ball:

*“Give me the batsman who squanders the force on me
Crowding the strength of his soul in a stroke
Perish the muff and the little tin Shrewsbury
Meanly contented to potter and poke”*

When Butcher was dismissed in the 17th over of the day, England were on 76 and in decent fettle. Hussain joined Tudor and carried on the swift progress against some inconsistent bowling from Nash and Cairns. Just before lunch Vettori returned to the attack and Tudor stroked him for four through extra cover again to bring up his maiden Test fifty. At lunch England were 128 for two with Tudor on 55. He surpassed his highest first-class score with a well-timed flick to the midwicket boundary off Allott, prompting chants from the crowd. Thereafter, it seemed England scored solely in boundaries. The seven overs after lunch brought 51 runs, and when Hussain was dismissed, England were only 30 runs short of victory; Tudor on 84.

⁶ Hussain might have needed reassurance. Ian Peebles tells a story of Robins, skipper at Middlesex, after a trying day in the field against Sussex at Hove. Seeking solace in the bedside ‘Texts for All Occasions’ provided by the hotel management Robins; “turned to the section devoted to times of trial. Apparently some previous tenant had done likewise, for scrawled underneath the official words of comfort, was the footnote: ‘Go to 78 Marine Parade, knock three times, and ask for Maisie.’”

Graham Thorpe joined Alex Tudor in the middle. "I asked Alex whether he wanted to get a hundred." Quite what answer was Thorpe expecting to hear? Anyhow, the modest and utterly likeable Tudor recalled; "When Graham Thorpe came in he told me he would try to push ones and give me the strike. But I said to him that all I wanted was to win the game. That's the most important thing." Thorpe admitted later that he "shouldn't have listened". With the scores level Alex was on 95. An attempted pull for six resulted in a top-edge over the keeper for four. Tudor, who had scored 131 runs, unbeaten, out of England's total accumulation of 337, walked off to rousing cheers from a standing crowd.

New Zealand 226 & 107 and England 1st Innings 126		
England 2nd Innings (overnight 3-1: Butcher 3, Tudor 0)		
MA Butcher	c Parore b Nash	33
AJ Stewart	b Allott	0
AJ Tudor	not out	99
N Hussain	b Allott	44
GP Thorpe	not out	21
Extras		14

Total (3 wickets; 43.4 overs)		211
FOW: 1-3, 2-76, 3-174		

Graham Thorpe remembered getting a "bit of stick" from the same crowd. He learned the lesson. Five years later at Lord's he played out dot balls at the end of four overs in a row to ensure Nasser Hussain got to a hundred. Alex Tudor never complained: "another run today would have been perfect but I'll settle for this." Hussain knew that Tudor had worked hard on his batting: "Alex is a lovely lad. Anyone who knows him and his family will tell you that no-one deserves this more than them." Sadly, Tudor's body was as fragile as his nature was pleasant; a series of injuries cutting into his Test career. He was to play in only nine more Tests. Interviewed in 2004 for ESPN, Alex reflected: "I'm possibly more popular for not having got to the hundred! But to tell you the truth, I am gutted. At the time I was ecstatic - I'd won the game for England." His achievement, the highest score by an English nightwatchman, was celebrated ten years on by *Croydon Today*. Tudor remembered returning to the Surrey dressing-room with Thorpe later in the week after the Edgbaston Test, whereupon Thorpe was roundly abused by his county team-mates. "He got hate mail", explained Alex, "and I think he still gets it from my Mum."



Alex asks Graham Thorpe for his address on behalf of his Mum (Getty Images)

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