

Summary

The Job

Harold Larwood went in to bat muttering darkly and resolved to resume his evening ablutions by way of suicidal single to cover. Masood Anwar arrived at the crease to face the West Indian pace men and surveyed a track considered by the fielding captain as the worst he had played on in a Test match. Ian Salisbury, originally uninvited to the party, was thrust into the gloaming while his teammates prepared for the evening jollities. Test nightwatchmen all, a job regarded with warmth only by those who benefit from it.

Matthew Hoggard (2000-2008): *“The one job that everyone quite blatantly tries to avoid is being nightwatchman, the bloke who has to come in to bat when nobody else wants to, a few overs before the close of play, when it’s getting a bit dark and the precious, darling batsmen need to be protected.”*

Allan Border, speaking for the ‘precious’, acknowledged that facing the last ten overs of the day was:

“never an easy time to bat, simply because you don’t want to. You’d much rather the openers hang on, or a nightwatchman does your ‘dirty work’ for you”.

The work could be very dirty. Michael Holding and Andy Roberts, Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis, Curtly Ambrose and Courtney Walsh, Allan Donald and Shaun Pollock: all wonderful to watch. Harder to relish from 22 yards when they know a rest beckons in twenty minutes and the shadows lengthen.

Some captains have preferred not to use nightwatchmen. Steve Waugh considered the practice was too defensive and, anyway, wondered why someone who had less chance of surviving than the chap he was protecting should be sent to the wicket. Waugh’s era was one of ‘relishing challenges’, so clearly recognised batsman ought to thrive on batting out time assailed by bowlers with their tails up. However, his views were shared in earlier times. Peter May went in late in the final Ashes Test in 1953 after Len Hutton surprisingly had been run out, believing he would be more likely than a nightwatchman to stop the Australian bowlers capitalising on their luck. Victor Richardson, Waugh’s predecessor in 1935-36 believed fading light called for a proficient batsman not a tail-ender².

W.G. Grace never liked changing the batting order: “If there’s any trouble out there who’s more likely to deal with it than me?” Of course, The Champion may have been puzzled by a disinclination in his less-talented top-order batsmen to brush aside challenges he regarded as commonplace. However, he was criticised for not sacrificing tail-enders in the Second Ashes Test of 1891-92 when England, set 230 to win, had to bat out the day in poor light. The batting order was unchanged and England finished on 11 for three, W.G. himself among the victims. The pitch played well the following day but England’s top-order batsmen could only watch from the pavilion. Australia won by 74 runs and took the series two matches to one.

Ambitions for the morrow influence decisions. In the 1961-62 Test at Melbourne, England were set 234 to win, and lost an early wicket. A short time remained for play but Ted Dexter did not use a nightwatchman. He felt it was important to set an example and show confidence by going in himself. Moreover, he wanted to be able to dictate to the bowlers in the morning at the start of what promised to be a tense day. Dexter went on to make 52, leading England to a victory which he considered his most satisfying.

¹ “Duty is what one expects from others, it is not what one does oneself”; Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance* (1893).

² Richardson once used artifice rather than a nightwatchman. Walking out to open an innings in poor light in Sydney he headed not for the pitch but towards the Hill. The opposing captain, New South Wales’s Tom Andrews, called “Vic, where do you think you’re going?” Richardson: “Call out again Tommy. I can hear you but I can’t see you.” When he reached the wicket an appeal against the light was promptly upheld. (Anecdotes are drawn not only from Tests, as any worker in the twilight deserves some sun.)

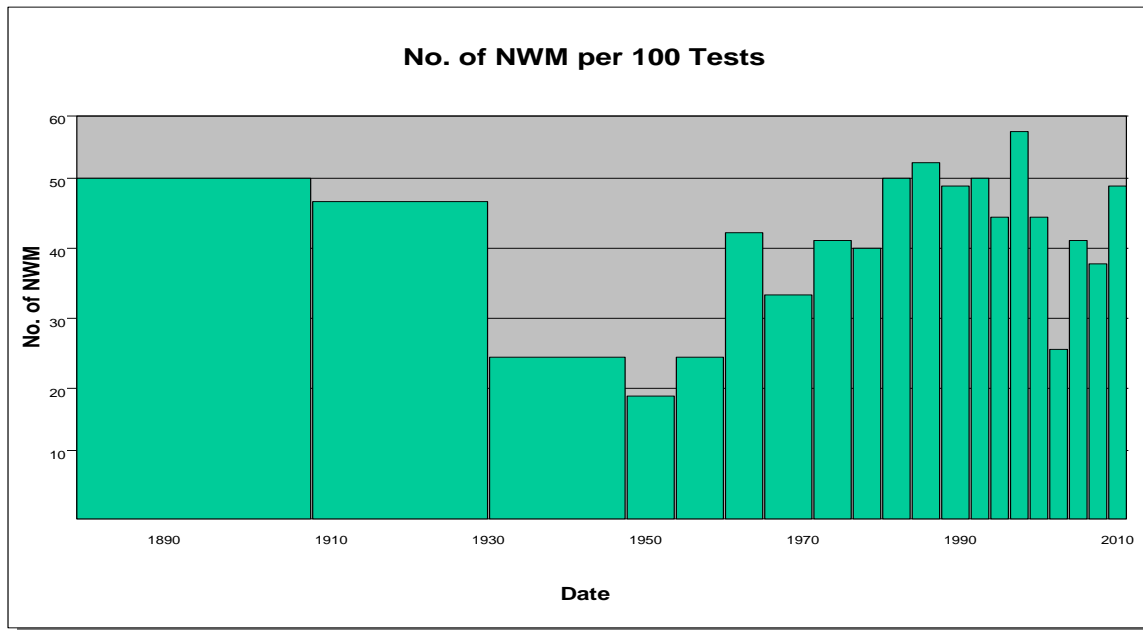
Ray Illingworth brought up in the Yorkshire ethos of pressing on with the game to maximise the time available to force a win echoed Dexter's concern about the morning after. Illingworth used a nightwatchman in the 1970-71 Ashes series but rather than the established choice of Derek Underwood, he sent in Alan Knott so that runs could be scored at a decent rate the next day. Captains who have used nightwatchmen when their team has been in a dominant position have generally been criticised. Andy Flower admitted it was wrong to use a nightwatchmen when England were over 300 runs ahead and pressing towards a declaration in St John's in February 2009.

So, some captains have been damned for using a nightwatchman and others praised. A captain might be advised to avoid the need for one. At Sydney in 1954, Australia were 213 for seven when England took the new ball in the evening session. Soon afterwards, Frank Tyson had Ron Archer taken at slip and induced Ray Lindwall to glove a bouncer to Godfrey Evans. The light was deteriorating and if England took the final wicket quickly, their openers would have to face two or three overs. Lindwall in the twilight was not a heart-warming prospect. England captain Len Hutton, one of the aforementioned openers, instructed Tyson to bowl wide down the leg side. The crowd barracked loudly, Bill Johnston the Australian tail-ender tried to sweep one-handed; Hutton impervious. With exactly ten minutes to play before the scheduled close, Hutton motioned to Trevor Bailey who proceeded to remove Gil Langley's middle and off stumps with what Frank Tyson described as "an air of affected indifference".

Statistics

Players sent in as nightwatchman have been identified by examining close of play scores and batting orders, comparing the latter with line-ups in adjacent Test matches and Test career batting records. *Wisden* and contemporary newspaper reports were consulted. For many decades these sources refer to a nightwatchman as "an (overnight) stop-gap", "sent in to keep up an end" or "sent in to play out time". The term "nightwatchman" appeared only from the early 1950s. For some Test matches, especially those before the Second World War, other sources have been consulted, typically memoirs or books describing tours. In the 200 Tests played up to December 1930, there remain 9 instances where it is unclear whether a player was sent in as a nightwatchman or promoted for another reason; 8 instances in the following 800 Tests; and 2 instances in the remainder.

Usually, wicketkeepers and bowlers serve as nightwatchmen, but occasionally, recognised batsmen have been used early in their careers. Ironically, Steve Waugh did a stint in the Second Ashes Test of 1986-87. Asif Iqbal, twice in 1964-65, and Kapil Dev in October 1978 have also done the job. All players who were recognised, *at the time by reports, commentators or players*, as being sent in as a nightwatchman (or "stop-gap" or "to play out time", in the earlier parlance) to protect a superior batsman from facing the bowling in the tail end of the day have been included in the statistics. No criterion such as career batting average or normal batting position in the order, for example, has been applied. If a player was sent in as a nightwatchman, he is included. The diagram below shows how many nightwatchmen have been used in each block of 100 Test matches. The width of each block depicts when the 100 Tests were played.



Batsmen who have been promoted for other reasons than to be a nightwatchmen are excluded from consideration. They could be knocking off a few runs to win, seeing out the final minutes in a match destined for a draw, scoring quickly to set up a declaration or batting above a player who has dropped down the order owing to injury or to have a rest³. All-rounders often batted in different places in the order so they could recover from, or get ready for, bowling. Inzamam-ul-Haq had rest imposed upon him against South Africa in 2007. Having suffered a nasty shoulder injury Inzamam did not field, and had to wait a corresponding time before he could bat. Wickets fell so quickly that Mohammad Sami had to bat ahead of him.

Test match wickets were not always fully covered. Rain, followed by sun and breeze left the strip sticky and very awkward to bat on. Once the pitch had dried out completely batting became easier. Tail-enders were often sent in first on 'sticky dogs' to use up time; recognised batsmen being held back until conditions had improved. There are many examples in Test match history some with interesting declarations, but the promoted tail-enders are not counted as nightwatchmen.

Players have been sent in earlier than usual because of a particular quality. Nicky Boje was promoted to No. 4 against the West Indies in April 2001 to disrupt the bowlers' rhythm because he was left-handed. Iqbal Qasim was sent in early against India in March 1987 as he could play the turning ball. In the Second Ashes Test of 1961 captain Neil Harvey sent in Bobby Simpson, slated to bat in the middle order, after the loss of the first wicket. Fred Trueman and Brian Statham were expected to bowl until the close. Harvey hoped that Simpson, opener for his State side, would see out play without further loss.

Echoing this, at Centurion in April 2006 New Zealand employed what Dale Steyn described as a "new ball watchman." Stephen Fleming shielded his batsmen by sending in Kyle Mills first wicket down. Mills batted high in the order for Auckland and if he could stay in for a few overs life would be easier for the following batsman. Previously Australia decided that rather than merely seeing the shine off the new ball through crease occupation, bludgeoning the covers off it would be more effective. Thus did Andy Bichel emerge to bat at No. 3 against England in Sydney in 2003, returning with 49 to his name from 54 balls, leaving the ball in some disrepair from eight boundaries.

³ Or for other reasons: on the final day of the Third Test against India in 1984-85 Allan Border's wife was expected to give birth. Australia had to bat through the final two sessions to save the game. The task was not thought to be too arduous and Border decided not to bat hoping he could scoot off to be with his wife. However, at tea, Australia were 61 for three, and Border had to stay at the ground. During the evening session a phone call confirmed the baby had been born. Soon afterwards, there being no peace for new fathers, another wicket fell and Border had to go in.

Successful Nightwatchmen

The obvious criterion for success is for the nightwatchman to reach the close of play. Pochiah Krishnamurthy managed this with utmost efficiency in the West Indies in April 1971. He went in after Sunil Gavaskar had been caught at deep midwicket. As the batsman had crossed, Krishnamurthy calmly watched the remainder of the over from the bowler's end. Set to face his first ball he appealed against the light. The umpires accepted; job complete.

Such appeals confidently made surprisingly can be denied⁴. In the early tours of Australia, England often took, or nominated, their own umpire. Johnny Briggs, Lancashire all-rounder, sent in as nightwatchman in the Melbourne Test in January 1898, was instructed by his captain to appeal against the light. The Australian umpire seemed amenable. But then, as Johnny recalled, he consulted his colleague; “‘our’ umpire, who was supposed to voice our interests, but the order came back to play on, and angrily enough we had to submit to the inevitable - a glaring piece of business, uniformly condemned.”

Pat Pocock received assistance from the crowd to complete his evening shift at Karachi in March 1973. The *Guardian* reported; “spectators turned the National Cricket Stadium here into a national park today.” People had strolled onto the field twice earlier in the day, once throwing seats as a precursor. The third invasion came when Mike Denness was out late in the evening. This wicket brought in Pocock as nightwatchman. A little later he called for a dressing for an injured finger. While being attended, “people wandering aimlessly about the playing-area”, brought the day to a premature close, saving Pocock ten minutes at the crease.

A nightwatchman whose dismissal is so late that close of play follows must also be accounted successful. He has prevented the recognised batsman in the pavilion from being exposed to the bowling that evening. Indeed, circumstances might make such a timely dismissal highly desirable. Angus Fraser managed matters with aplomb as nightwatchman for Robin Smith against South Africa in Cape Town, only to be let down by the opposition. Artfully managing to edge the last ball of the day to Brian McMillan at slip, Fraser descended deeper into resigned weariness when the chance was spilled. This irresponsible piece of clumsiness condemned him to face a fresh and ardent Allan Donald in the morning.

Reaching close of play is not the only consideration. Derek Underwood was sent in as nightwatchman for Alan Knott in the Second Test in Jamaica in February 1974. Dennis Amiss met him in the middle and said: “You’re not out here just to protect Knotty, you know. You’re here to protect me as well.” Thus, a nightwatchman ought to take as much of the strike as possible. He cannot orchestrate timely singles as an accomplished batsman might. However, a nightwatchman might be expected to refuse singles other than at the end of the over, and to accept them if his partner calls. Needlessly exposing the recognised batsman at the other end who is then dismissed is failing to do the job, even if the nightwatchman survives until the close of play.

The table shows how often nightwatchmen have been used by each Test-playing country and how successful they have been. The figures include Tests played up to May 2022; a total of 2461. One Test involved a combined ICC team, which did not use a nightwatchman.

⁴ Memorably in the 1971 Gillette Cup semi-final, the umpires decided at 7:30 pm that the game should be played to a finish. An hour later, Jack Bond, batting with his side needing 25 runs off five overs, complained about the appalling light. The Gloucestershire captain remembered the ensuing exchange. Umpire Arthur Jepson said, ‘What’s that?’ pointing to the sky. ‘The moon,’ said Jackie. ‘Well, how bloody far do you want to see?’ rejoined Arthur. David Hughes settled the argument.

Country	Tests Played	Total NWM	Tests per NWM	Success Rate (%)
Australia	842	143	5.9	85
Bangladesh	130	22	5.9	82
England	1048	253	4.1	85
India	564	100	5.6	81
New Zealand	453	105	4.3	76
Pakistan	444	94	4.7	83
South Africa	452	91	5.0	84
Sri Lanka	301	57	5.3	79
West Indies	563	123	4.6	80
Zimbabwe	115	34	3.4	79
Afghanistan	6	1	6.0	0
Ireland	3	-	-	-
Total		1023	4.8	82

Players who have made six or more successful nightwatchman appearances are shown in the next Table covering Tests played up to May 2022. None of these players nor any of those who have had five successful nightwatchman innings are affected by the uncertainties mentioned previously.

Player	Country	Test Match Span	Test Innings	NWM Innings	Successful NWM Innings
JM Anderson ⁵	Eng	2003-	239	23	18
DL Underwood	Eng	1966-82	116	13	12
Saqlain Mushtaq	Pak	1995-2004	78	12	11
MJ Hoggard	Eng	2000-08	92	14	11
N Lyon	Aus	2011-	137	15	11
JN Gillespie	Aus	1996-2006	93	10	9
IDK Salisbury	Eng	1992-2000	25	10	9
I Sharma	Ind	2007-	142	12	9
DW Headley	Eng	1997-99	26	9	8
SMH Kirmani	Ind	1976-86	124	9	8
PL Harris	SA	2007-11	48	9	8
D Bishoo	WI	2011-18	61	9	8
DW Steyn	SA	2004-19	119	10	8
EAS Prasanna	Ind	1962-78	84	7	7
PJ Wiseman	NZ	1998-2005	34	7	7
WPUJC Vaas	SL	1994-2009	162	8	7
DL Vettori	NZ	1997-2014	174	12	7
Saleem Yousuf	Pak	1982-1990	44	6	6
H Carter	Aus	1907-21	47	6	6
PI Pocock	Eng	1968-85	37	6	6
RC Russell	Eng	1988-98	86	6	6
WW Davis	WI	1983-88	17	6	6
A Kumble	Ind	1990-2008	174	7	6
N Wagner	NZ	2012-	74	7	6

⁵ Three of James Anderson's failures arise from needlessly exposing the recognised batsman at the other end who was then dismissed. All other failures in the table are due to the night watchman being dismissed before close of play.

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