

Nightwatchers in Women's Tests

At Taunton in June 2022 Tumi Sekhukhune made her Test debut for South Africa. She had already represented her country in 24 ODI and 24 T20I, but her experience with the bat was limited having had only eleven innings. In ten of those Tumi had averaged fewer than 5 balls faced. In the week before the Test Tumi had been dismissed twice for 2 at number 11.

So far, so meagre. However, Tumi's longest white-ball innings of 34 balls came after she had joined Marizanne Kapp in the middle in an ODI three years earlier in India: they added 30 runs to lift South Africa from a parlous 128-8. This pairing proved decisive in the Test at Taunton. South Africa's first innings was rescued by a magnificent knock from Marizanne Kapp who had reached 110 when the eighth wicket fell at 227. Seeing the inexperienced Tumi walking to the crease and with the new ball just 6 overs away, England must have felt they'd be batting soon. However, Tumi relished the reunion, helping Marizanne to reach 150 while they added 49 runs. Tumi remained unbeaten having faced 39 balls when South Africa were dismissed for 284.

She had faced more than eleven overs against the new ball without giving a chance. When in their second innings South Africa fell to 45-3 towards the close of the penultimate day of the match, still trailing by 88 (England having declared on 417-8), that performance prompted the captain Sune Luus to send in Tumi as nightwatcher. Sune said,

the nightwatcher decision was taken after a discussion with the coach on how many overs we'd want them to have. That's tricky and new as we had to balance how to protect them and a batter. But the way Tumi Sekhukhune handled it was fantastic, hope she can continue well this morning.



NW Tumi surrounded by fielders facing Sophie Ecclestone (Harry Trump, Getty Images)

Continue well, she did, despite seeing her captain dismissed early in the day and then having to watch Lizelle Lee's unsettling adventures - being saved on an LBW review by "umpire's call" with the ball clipping the stump, dropped off a straightforward edge behind and just clearing a fielder with a mistimed shot. Lee was finally dismissed skying a thrash at a teasing lofted ball. That made it 118-5 and South Africa were still in danger, despite the breaks in play forced by rain. But at this point, the duo combined again to take South Africa to 181-5 and safety.

Credit must go to Kapp, following up her first-innings 150 to end 43 not out, and to a greater extent Sekhukhune, who had come in as nightwatcher with her side 45 for 3 on the penultimate evening and proved to be a veritable wall as England's bowlers tried in vain to prise her out. [Valerie Baynes, ESPNcricinfo report 30 Jun 22].

... nightwatcher Sekhukhune proved a stubborn barrier, leaving the bad balls and stoically defending the good ones, finishing not out after facing down 134 deliveries. [Raf Nicholson, Guardian, 30 Jun 2022].

Tumi, with great calmness and determination, batted for three hours, amazingly resolute. Her 33 not out is her highest score in any form of cricket since a fifty in a domestic 50-over match in January 2016. Sune Luus,

I think she's trending on Facebook as The Wall of China at the moment which is really cool. But she showed a lot of us how to bat out there and how to stay patient. In terms of her career, this was a big stepping stone. She can call herself an allrounder now. It was awesome to see the girl flourish.



A moment of aggression (Getty Images)

The number of NW who have appeared in Tests is shown in the table.

Country	Tests Played	NW	Tests/NWM	Failures	Success Rate (%)
England	100	17	5.9	3	82
Australia	78	6	13		100
New Zealand	45	1	45		100
India	40	6	6.7	1	83
South Africa	13	3	4.3		100
West Indies	12	1	12	1	0
Pakistan	3	3	1	1	67
Netherlands	1	1	1		100
Sri Lanka	1				
Ireland	1				
Total		38	7.7	6	84.2

Their male counterparts are more likely to stay in the pavilion in the evening, using a NW every 4.8 Tests. Women NW are slightly more successful than men (82%). Like the men, the first NW appeared during an England tour of Australia. Unlike the men, the women had to pay their own return passage and expenses, which turned out to be just over £90¹, roughly £8,000 in today's money. When in early 1934 they issued the invitation to England, the Australian Women's Cricket Association (AWCA) promised to pay for accommodation, board and travel in-country. That was a remarkable undertaking as the AWCA had only a few shillings to rub together (4/7, to be precise²). Masterful organisation and choice venues made the tour a great success. Several thousand more spectators attended the second Test at Sydney than the Sheffield Shield game the same week. At the end of the tour the AWCA had £422 in the kitty, much of which they used to help Australian players fund their passage for the return tour in 1937.

¹ Reported by England's tour manager Betty Green in *Women's Cricket* (Vol 6 No 1 May 1935). Each player had been advised by the Women's Cricket Association (WCA) to budget £100 for the tour in a letter reproduced in *Women's Cricket* (Vol 5 No 1 May 1934).

² Australia converted from pounds, shilling and pence to dollars in 1966.

After the AWCA's offer was accepted, New Zealand agreed in July to fund accommodation and board for a three-week visit by England. The matches in the Australian leg of the tour ran from November 24th 1934 to January 20th 1935 and included three Tests, followed by games in New Zealand from January 29th to February 20th, culminating in one Test match. Sailing took over 30 days, so the party was away from home from October to April.



England squad for the tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1934/35. Taken at the Oval in 1935 during the game against The Rest to raise money to pay for Australia's visit in 1937 (copyright WCA 2018, Marjorie Pollard's Collection)

Back row (left to right): D M Turner, M Child, M Hide, M I Taylor, J Liebert, M E Richards, M Burletsen, G A Morgan
 Front row: J Partridge, M Maclagan, B Archdale, B Snowball, B Green (Manager). M Spear & C Valentine in front.

Despite the cost, the prejudice against women, particularly wives, being away from home ("who the devil's going to cook and clean, and iron my shirts?!") and the shocking idea of an all-female party travelling abroad (and for months on end to boot), the England squad featured the best players *with perhaps the exception of one or two*, claim Heyhoe Flint & Rheinberg without naming names. The stars at the top of the order went. Openers Myrtle Maclagan and Betty Snowball were known as the Hobbs and Sutcliffe, respectively, of women's cricket. They would be the top run scorers in the four Tests, each scoring a century and two fifties: Betty with 381 runs, Myrtle with 279. As well as leading the way with the bat, these two were crucial in the field. Betty was the 'keeper (5 catches and 6 stumpings) and Myrtle was the leading wicket-taker with 26 at an average cost of 8.69.

The first two Tests, back-to-back, were won by 9 wickets and 8 wickets by England. In the two weeks before the third Test, England had four one-day country games. Meanwhile, the Australian players retired to their States (New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia) each to play three two-day games to decide the Australian Women's Cricket Championship³. This preparation steeled the home team for the third Test. Having dismissed England for 162, Australia achieved near-parity with 150: a marked improvement having conceded first-innings leads of 97 and 139 in the previous Tests.

³ These matches were first-class (FC), as were the two-day games each State played against England before the First Test, which were the first FC games England had played. The Australian annual championship, started in 1930/31 as one-day games, had moved to two-day matches in 1933/34: women's first FC cricket.

Australia's determined effort took 129 overs in five hours (England's 162 had come in three hours from 72 overs) and England faced 30 minutes batting. Betty had kept all day in Melbourne's heat and Myrtle had bowled 34 overs. They were frazzled and it was too risky to send them in. Captain Betty Archdale commented in her diary of the tour, published in *Women's Cricket* magazine⁴ (Vol 6 No 3 July 1935):

With only half-an-hour's play of the second day left, Child and I went in with the intention of keeping our wickets rather than making runs. In that half-an-hour we made 10. Our real game would have been to make as many runs as possible in the time, but the whole team were dead tired.

Mollie Child and Betty Archdale were thus the first NW. They were soon dismissed the next morning, the final day of the Test, but the move paid off, as the captain recalled:

Snowball made a beautiful 83 not out - much her best innings in Australia - and Hide an invaluable 26 in 25 minutes. At tea we were 153 for 7. I wanted to be 200 ahead but with our first innings lead of 12, we were only 164. There were two and a half hours left. Judging by English cricket a declaration seemed more than risky but, after much mental and written arithmetic, I took the plunge and declared. We very nearly did it and we took 8 wickets for 104. It was an exciting finish and Australia thoroughly deserved to draw.

The first Test of the 1937 series at Northampton saw the circumstances at Melbourne repeated. On the first day Australia were all out for 300 in 120 overs of which Myrtle bowled 30. The "Old Firm", as *Women's Cricket* put it, were protected again as Majorie Pollard reported;

England were faced with that awkward task of holding the fort until 6.30, in a bad light and after having spent a tiring day in the field. M. Hide [Molly, now captain] very sensibly sent in M. Lowe [Muriel] and M. Child [Mollie] ... [Child] she was run out when the score was 12 ... M. J. Haddelsey [Joyce] joined M. Lowe, and these two, watchful as owls, played out time.

Starting at 14-1 the next day, Joyce Haddelsey did a good job, lasting until the score was 41, but Muriel Lowe played an important innings. The week before she had been dismissed for 1 and 3 by Australia in the tour game against Midlands Women. Here she responded with a splendid 42, dismissed at 70-3. That turned out to be the second highest score of the innings, after Myrtle's 89, with no-one else reaching twenty in a total of 204. England trailed by 96 but fought back, dismissing Australia for 102. Myrtle and Betty started the run-chase of 199 with an opening partnership of 58. Betty went on to make 72, *for me, her greatest innings - she made it while the rest of the team literally fell to pieces around her* [Marjorie Pollard]. England collapsed from 103-2 to 129-7 and eventually 167 all out.

Muriel's effort as NW was wasted, but her two fine scores, in support of Myrtle's century, at Blackpool were not, as England squared the series. Recovering from an 80-run first-innings deficit England bowled out Australia for 126 to win by 25 runs. Rain ruined the final Test at the Oval with England on top after Betty's 99. Myrtle, with 315 runs, and Betty, with 191, were again the two leading scorers in the Test series for England.



Betty (left) and Myrtle walk out to open at Blackpool. Myrtle returned with 115 to her name (1937 WCA)

⁴ *Women's Cricket* was founded by Marjorie Pollard in May 1930 and ran until December 1967. Five issues were published each year, ten from 1948. All of them can be found here: <https://womenscrickethistory.org/Magazine/index.html> - a wonderful resource. As well as tour diaries like Betty A's (Nancy Joy's of the 1948 tour, for example) and comprehensive coverage of domestic English cricket, the magazine includes Marjorie's marvellous reports on touring teams' games and home Tests.

The Old Firm were the only English Test cricketers⁵ to average over 40 with the bat - Myrtle with 1007 runs at 41.95, Betty with 613 at 40.86 - until the 1960s. Clearly, they were worth protecting with NW, even if an extra one was necessary! The next English player to attain this batting average was Rachael Heyhoe Flint (1594 runs at 45.54) and she was worthy of the same sacrifice. Rachael was appointed captain for the visit of New Zealand in 1966 *despite some rumblings of opposition in the ranks* [Duncan]. Perhaps the dissent was prompted by Rachael's decidedly modest Test record? Her 12 innings thus far had brought a top score of 51 and an average of 20.27. Whatever, she promptly silenced the rumblings by winning the toss at Scarborough, deciding to bat, scoring a majestic 113 in 150 minutes and declaring at 273-6 so her bowlers could have a crack at tourists in the late evening. New Zealand, thoroughly mauled, closed on 8-2. They batted throughout the second day and into the third making 178 off 162 overs. Rachael then hit a rapid unbeaten 59 before declaring, leaving a target of 230 in three hours. Rain intervened for an hour and New Zealand survived the remainder of play. Exuberant batting and positive cricket were going to be hallmarks of Rachael's leadership.

The next Test at Edgbaston was a reprise. The captain scored 85 and declared on 275-7, a first-innings lead of 144, to put New Zealand under pressure. They fell to 187-6 but determined resistance from Bev Brentnall (whose diary of the tour was published in that year's issues of *Women's Cricket* alongside Test match reports by Netta Rheinberg) and Jos Burley took them to the safety of 300. That breathed new life into New Zealand and they dominated the Oval Test, dismissing England for 154 and then giving Rachael a taste of her own medicine by declaring on 224, leaving the hosts six overs to face. Rachael, believing her doctor's orders would be for her to stay indoors, sent in two NW in her stead as England stuttered to 5-3.

They were rescued by the tenacity of Rachel Heyhoe, June Moorhouse [batting at No. 8 and scoring 18 in an hour] and Lesley Clifford [No. 9, 32 in over two hours] ... and Eileen Vigor whose 16 not out must rank as the most valuable innings of her career at number 11 [Heyhoe Flint & Rheinberg].

Rain helped too. *One English newspaper reported, 'It is doubtful if England could have survived had 45 minutes play not been lost through rain. At close of play New Zealand could surely be forgiven for thinking that God is an Englishwoman'* [Duncan].



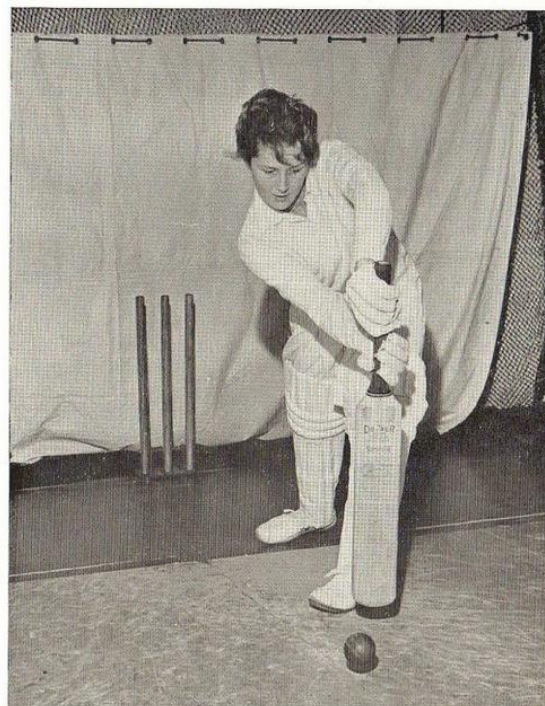
Rachael batting on the final day at the Oval: her 31 in two hours perhaps justifying the use of two NW (Getty Images)

⁵ Betty Wilson of Australia had the best Test average during this period. In 11 matches from 1948 to 1958 she scored 862 runs at 57.46. She was dubbed 'the female Bradman' which was very unfair to her as, aside from her runs, she took bags of Test wickets with her off-breaks: 68 at 11.80.

Rachael towered over the rest with the bat. Her 356 runs (at an average of 71.20) were more than twice the aggregate of New Zealand's most prolific bat, Carol Oyler with 174. Only two other English players managed to accumulate more than a hundred runs during the Test match series; Edna Barker with 142 and Lynne Thomas with 115. Rachael continued to follow her doctor's orders.

The only other time in her Test career when she was set to go in late in the day was during the third Test on the 1968-69 tour to Australia. At the North Sydney Oval she sent in two more NW. To be fair, she was under the weather when the team arrived in Sydney six weeks into the tour:

By this stage I was beginning to feel the load which often falls on a touring captain. Endless socials and parties demand our attendance, and it is always the responsibility of the skipper or the manager to say a few words, or chat with local dignitaries. I began to feel very tired, and I also contracted tonsillitis ... our reply immediately lost its lynch-pin, Enid Bakewell [16-1]. I made the 'inspired' choice of Shirley Hodges at night-watchman, only to see her out first ball! [Lynne Thomas was then sent in as second NW and England closed on 18-2]. Next morning, things went from bad to worse, and although I played a boring, anchoring 59, we were 134 for nine when Lesley Clifford [again!] and Mary Pilling came together for a salvaging stand of 60. It was enough to save the match [Heyhoe Flint].



Rachael Heyhoe (Captain) Wolverhampton and Midlands
TOURING TEAM, 1968-69

Only two of England's other leading scorers and captains have been faced with having to bat for a short time in the evening gloom. The aforementioned lynch-pin Enid Bakewell scored 1078 runs at 59.88 and took 50 wickets at 16.62 in a Test career from 1968 to 1979. Enid came from a Nottinghamshire coal-mining village. As a working-class girl, twice faced with a dirty job just before close of play, she did it herself⁶. On both occasions England wanted quick runs for a declaration.

Charlotte Edwards (1676 runs at 44.10) went in with only two overs to be bowled at Scarborough in 2004 and not much more than that at Delhi in 2005. Both were excellent decisions. Charlotte went on to make her highest Test score of 117 at Scarborough as England replied to New Zealand's 215. Just as well too, as after she and her opening partner Laura Newton had made 103 (her maiden century), the next best score was 19 as England fell away to 285 all out. At Delhi Charlotte led the way with a joint top-score in England's run-chase.

(Charlotte's Tour Diary of India on Cricinfo), ... the Indians declared on 175 for 4, leaving us with a target of 311 to win. It was a very sporting declaration and one we thought we were capable of achieving. The only downside of the day was having to bat for just four overs - sometimes I wonder why the hell I open the batting!



Charlotte batting: against South Africa in 2003 (according to Getty Images) or during her 117 at Scarborough (Sky Sports). Whichever – admire the balance.

⁶ Top bats from other countries took the same view. Belinda Clark of Australia (919 runs at 45.95) spurned a NW at Sydney in 1992, going out to fend off the last couple of overs of the day. So did her compatriot Denise Annetts who has the highest average in Tests, a fantastic 81.90 over 13 innings in which she compiled two centuries (big ones: 193 and 148 not out) and six fifties.

Lynn "Lefty" Fullston is the most successful NW with three appearances, all in the 1984-1985 Tests between Australia and England. The Peden-Archdale Trophy⁷ was inaugurated for this series in honour of the first two captains, Margaret and Betty. *Betty spun the coin at the WACA Test in Perth to kick off this Jubilee series in style* [Duncan]. This was the only five-Test series between England and Australia⁸. All of them were needed to reach a decision.

In Australia's reply at Perth, Lefty served as NW for her captain, pace bowler Sharon Tredrea (one of the three world-class pace bowlers in Australia's team) who had aggravated an old Achilles tendon injury while bowling in England's first innings. Lefty made a helpful 21 in an hour's stay. England's declaration during the final morning set a target of 282 in four-and-a-half hours. Jill Kennare compiled a brilliant century to take Australia to 191-4 but her dismissal sparked a collapse to 201-8. The game ended with arguments:

There was mild controversy as officials had some difficulty defining the rule concerning the number of overs to be bowled in the last hour; the umpires finally stuck to the scheduled 5.30pm finish. The situation changed three times, with discussions as to whether 20 overs needed to be bowled in the last hour. As it turned out the English women bowled 16 overs in the last hour. The four overs not bowled could have given England the time necessary to notch up a victory. Australia was lucky to get away with a draw [Canberra Times 17 Dec 1984].

When England were routed for 91, having chosen to bat at Adelaide, they may have felt the loss of those four overs even more keenly. Momentum seemed to be veering away as Australia closed on 84-1. Lefty was in again as NW, undefeated on one overnight. Next morning she *batting on strongly* scoring 29 in 70 minutes and helping the score onto 147-2. This looked like a very useful, even decisive, contribution as Australia took a grip of the game with a first-innings lead of 171.



Lefty writing on the Adelaide scorecard, "I did enough to win this match – twice!"

England's prospects looked grim on 150-5, but Chris Watmore (70) and June Edney (50) lifted them to 273-7 and then Janet Tedstone (Mrs Aspinall for a time) in a 95-minute stay took the score to 296.

Still, Australia needed just 126. That became considerably distant when, *in just under 50 minutes the home side were wallowing at five wickets for six runs* [Canberra Times 27 Dec 1984]. After lunch Lefty made another serious contribution – 28 over 128 minutes - as she and Karen Price took the score to 96-7, giving the hosts a whiff of a chance. Another wicket soon fell. Skipper Raelee Thompson then scored 13 but was out on 110-9. Over the next 25 minutes Australia inched to 120. Megan Lear, who opened for England in this series remembered the end during the 1997 World Cup when she was coaching the England squad:

So it ended with them needing five runs, us needing one wicket ... it was Chris Matthews, their manager here now, caught behind. It was a good ball [from Avril Starling who took 5-36] but it was outside off, she didn't need to play it. But she did, and we got it. My best memory ever. I can remember JB [Jan Brittin, fellow opener], jumping up and down ... [Davies].

⁷ The Women's Ashes were created in July 1998 at Lord's. Since then, the Peden-Archdale medal has been awarded to the player of the Ashes series.

⁸ Rachael Flint's tour report is in *WCA News* Vol 1 No 1 Spring 1985. Similar in content to *Women's Cricket*, the *WCA News* (1985 – 1993) usually had three editions each year: <https://womenscrickethistory.org/News/index.html>

Now Australia had cause for regret. The third Test was an uneventful draw, Janet Tedstone a successful NW for England. In the fourth Test Australia closed their first innings on 232 at the end of Day 1. Jan Brittin and Megan Lear began the reply encouragingly with an opening partnership of 66, but after they were dismissed in quick succession England crumbled to 103-9. Janet Tedstone (28*) and Avril Starling (9) fought hard, adding 37 for the last wicket in over an hour. Australia were in a similar situation in their second innings, 99-8 (despite another NW appearance from Lefty), but the tail wagged again allowing the hosts to declare on 153-9. That effectively ended England's hopes. Despite Jan Brittin's 65 the tourists could manage only 128 in slipping to a 117-run defeat. After a bright start in the final Test, England's batting again fell away. Australia remained on top for the rest of the four days to complete a fine comeback.

One of the most remarkable NW is Pakistan's Sajjida Shah. Pakistan's women's cricket was started by sisters Shaiza and Sharmeen Khan⁹ who were educated in England and played cricket for Leeds University (Shaiza as captain) and Middlesex Women. In 1993 they were inspired by watching the World Cup Final at Lord's and encouraged by the election of Benazir Bhutto: if Pakistan could have a female Prime Minister, why not a women's cricket team? Suffering death threats, prejudice and squabbling between rival domestic cricket boards, they managed to thwart a government prohibition from leaving Pakistan to realize their ambition of competing in the 1997 World Cup in India.



Pakistan's squad for the 1997 World Cup. Thirteen players with captain Shaiza Khan centre of middle row and Australian coach Jodie Davis (copyright Kiran Baluch, who was vice-captain, standing extreme left)

They lost all their matches, but by taking part Pakistan became a Full Member of the International Women's Cricket Council (IWCC) and, as such, could arrange Tests with other Full Members. In 1998 that group included Sri Lanka, the Netherlands, Denmark and Ireland. Four months after the World Cup ended, Pakistan played their first Test in Sri Lanka. Despite these achievements and positive media coverage, the ban prohibiting Pakistan from playing at home remained in place. The Khan sisters, whose father bankrolled the team's overseas trips¹⁰, arranged a tour in 2000 to play a Test against Ireland. *Siobhan McBennett, former manager of Ireland's team recalled, "we too were trying to get the men to take some responsibility for women's cricket, and they had little interest. We felt [playing a Test] was a tick box, so that we could say, 'Of course we've done that!'"* [Raf Nicholson, "Remember when Ireland played their first Test?" *The Cricket Monthly* 9 May 2018].

Sajjida Shah was selected for the tour of Ireland but her parents refused to let her go. So, Sajjida starved herself for a week until they relented. If that sounds like a tantrum from an adolescent, it's precisely because it was: Sajjida was 12 ("and a half, almost", as she probably would have been quick to add). She was selected as a lower-middle order all-rounder. In the three ODI preceding the Test in Ireland, Sajjida made the fatal mistake of twice batting for 45 minutes. She didn't score many runs, but was secure, offering few chances. These were ideal qualities when, in the Test, Pakistan had to begin their second innings just ten minutes before the close of play and captain Shaiza Khan was looking for two NW to open. Sajjida was a natural choice. She was successful, although her fellow NW failed and a third one had to be sent in.

⁹ *Strong arms: The story of Pakistan's Women's Cricket* by Kamila Shamsie, *The Cricket Monthly*, 16 October 2019:

<https://www.thecricketmonthly.com/story/1202296/the-story-of-pakistan-women-s-cricket-from-the-khan-sisters-to-sana-mir>

¹⁰ Including the tour to New Zealand and Australia in January and February 1997 so Pakistan could play the three ODI games necessary for them to qualify to play in the 1997 World Cup. Sri Lanka hosted Netherlands in November 1997 to the same end (Netherlands were already a member of the IWCC, having played their first ODI in 1984 and appearing in the 1988 World Cup).

Of course, Sajjida will remain the youngest-ever NW, but her greater feats ought to be mentioned. The tour to Ireland was influential. The ban on playing at home was lifted and an invitation sent to Netherlands to visit Pakistan to play a series of seven ODI in April 2001.

Miraculously, the PCB allowed the women to play in the National Stadium in Karachi and promised television coverage for the first time. They failed to follow through with the coverage and sponsorship, however, and Shaiza's and Sharmeen's hugely generous father had to pick up the tab [Duncan]. Perhaps the PCB withdrew television coverage through fear of embarrassment: Netherlands were regarded as much the stronger team. Sajjida made sure Pakistan's debut home game finished in victory:

Pakistan Women beat the favourites Holland by one wicket in a cliff-hanger of a match, played under lights at Karachi's National Stadium, to take a 1-0 lead in the seven-match series ... Requiring 157 in the allotted 50 overs, Pakistan Women struggled initially, losing wickets at regular intervals. However, Sajjida Shah, the 12-year-old ["13 and two months, if you please"] middle-order batswoman, kept her cool in these adverse circumstances and saw her side home safely. She added 50 for the 6th wicket with Khursheed Jabeen (16) to take the side to 137 by the 41st over. However, at this juncture the visitors seemed to be running away with the match, taking four Pakistani wickets for the addition of just eight runs. Huda Ziad (1) safely saw off the remaining overs from one end, whereas the valiant Sajjida kept scoring from the other, until the target was reached on the second ball of the last over ... Sajjida Shah was declared woman of the match for her excellent match-winning knock of 28. [Mahmood Ahmad, 9 Apr 2001, Cricinfo match report]*



Sajjida enroute to 74 against Scotland in a World Cup Qualifier at the grand age of 20 (ICC)

Pakistan went on to win the series 4-3. Three years later, in March 2004, they played their first home Test against West Indies, also at Karachi National Stadium. Sajjida along with captain and vice-captain from the 1997 World Cup, put in terrific performances. West Indies won the toss and fielded ... and toiled ... for getting on for six hours ... wicketless. With two overs to play, Pakistan had reached 241-0 with Kiran Baluch 138 and Sajjida 98. Perhaps anxious to get her century before the close Sajjida then fell. Next day Kiran went on to make 242, still the highest score in a Test match. West Indies were made to follow on but dug in to draw, despite Shaiza Khan's match figures of 7-59 (including a hat-trick, only the second in a Test) and 6-167 which remain the best in a Test.

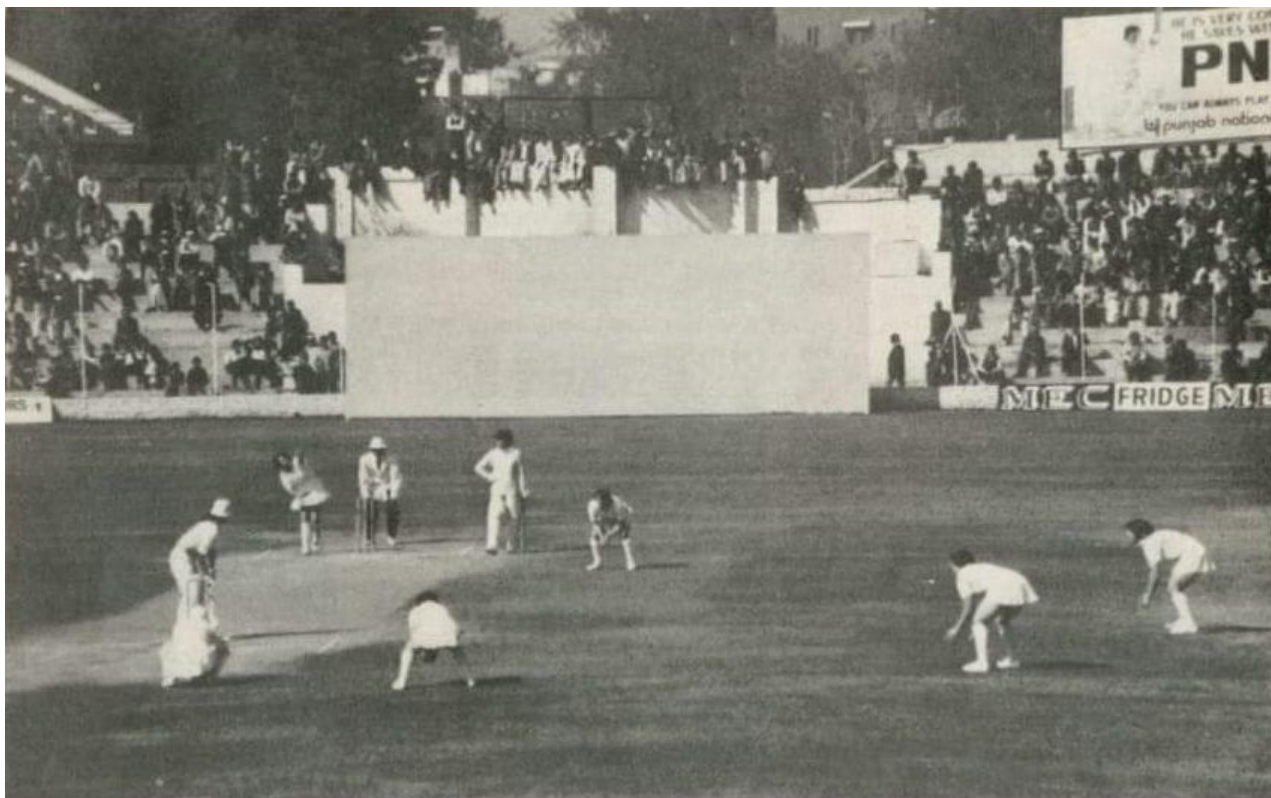
A year earlier Sajjida had achieved the best bowling figures in an ODI, during the IWCC Trophy tournament in Netherlands in July 2003. Chasing 182, debutants Japan had reached 21-0 when Sajjida was brought on as third-change bowler: an inspired, if somewhat belated, decision by captain Shaiza. In eight overs of her off-breaks, Sajjida took 7-4 as Japan were dismissed for 28.



Fifteen-year-old Sajjida routing Japan (Rizwan Tabassum AFP)

India's series with England have been exciting hard-fought affairs, sometimes touched by controversy and featuring notable NW performances. England and India contested their first Test series in 1986, but five players on each of those teams remembered each other from the Young England tour of India in January and February 1981, when the sides played five 3-day 'Tests'. The tour was very popular. Jan ('JB') Britton:

I remember huge crowds of over 20,000 at Eden Gardens in Calcutta and even in rural districts stands collapsed because there were so many spectators. The atmosphere is terrific - chanting, enthusiastic and appreciative. I'll never forget scoring a century in Delhi. I was mobbed when I came off the pitch and covered in garlands of flowers [Cathy Harris, Electronic Telegraph 10 Nov 1995].



First 'Test' India v Young England at Feroz Shah Kotla, Delhi: Sarah Potter (daughter to Dennis) bowling, on her way to 6-59 (Izu@outof22yards on X)

JB's unbeaten 100 and Sarah Potter's fine bowling at Delhi set up an exciting finish with India closing on 102-7 chasing 130. In the second 'Test' India, having set a target of 248, reduced Young England to 78-9 and seemed set for victory. Denise Leary joined Jane Powell and survived for the last 40 minutes to escape with a draw.

The third 'Test' turned Young England's way thanks to a brilliant NW innings from Janet Tedstone. India declared on the first day on 205-9, leaving the tourists a short time to bat. Janet was sent in when opener Julie Pritchard fell and finished the day safely with a run to her name. The next day Janet batted for 155 minutes, scoring 64 to take Young England to 125-4. The match ended with her mates Julie Pritchard and June Edney making a valiant effort at chasing 202, finishing on 161-1. The final two 'Tests' ended in draws.



Janet (left) with the cause of her NW appearance, Julie Pritchard, waiting for skies to clear for a Young England match in 1980 (Ken Kelly, Popperfoto/Getty Images)

By the time ten of the players met again in England in 1986, India had never been beaten in a multi-Test series. There was speculation that the players had been told by the Women's Cricket Association of India (WCAI) that their funding would be withdrawn if they lost any of the Tests in England. That was refuted by captain Shubhangi Kulkarni, *there was no such mandate from the association* but the previous captain Shantha Rangaswamy (both veterans of the 1981 series against Young England), acknowledged that *if we had played badly in our early games, women's cricket wouldn't have picked up at all in India, just like women's football failed to [Narayanan]*. The funding that was provided by the WCAI seems paltry: the team often had to stay with Indian fans in England and Kulkarni recalled: *We had been told we would be expected to cook our food and wash our clothes when we toured abroad, but this elderly couple not only got their Indian friends to cook for us, they also washed and ironed our cricket-wear in between games [Narayanan]*. England's funding wasn't much better, the team had to buy their own kit and captain Carole Hodges recalled, *we even had to buy our own Test caps. we were given a sort of shield shaped badge that we had to sew onto the front of our cap. That was highly entertaining. As far as I'm concerned, I'm not a sewer*" [Fiona Tomas, *The Telegraph* 13 Dec 2023].

The first Test at Collingham CC culminated with England being set a target of 254 to win. They were missing ace batsman Jan Brittin who had suffered a broken finger while fielding and wasn't able to bat in the match. Nevertheless, Carole Hodges and Lesley Cooke put on 149 for the first wicket. Thereupon a storm broke over Wetherby:

India unashamedly started whinging about being dazzled by windscreens of parked cars and bowled just eight overs in the penultimate hour of the match. They then wasted an agonising amount of time readjusting the field to the left- and right-handed England openers. The batsmen, meanwhile, stated that they were not remotely bothered by any glare but it didn't make a jot of difference. The Indians then parked their backsides on the pitch and refused to budge until all the vehicles in the car park had been moved ... For their part, the substantial crowd made their feelings clear about such poor sportsmanship, and the Indians were roundly booed [The Times reported that only 7 overs were bowled in the final hour and although England tried hard, they ended 25 runs short] ... Slow left-armed Gill McConway summed up the intense irritation felt in the England camp:

'We were robbed. We had all sorts of gamesmanship from India – the imaginary glare and what have you. It was frustrating: we should have won. The umpires lacked the experience of dealing with individual situations and I felt very, very, very frustrated – but at least it gave us plenty of space in the newspapers' [Duncan]

England's chairman, Cathy Mowat was critical after the match and in her report of the tour:

The Indians were a severe disappointment in their attitudes on and off the field ... defeat meant failure and disgrace, so all efforts were concentrated on achieving a draw ... this approach was displayed at its very worst in the 1st Test at Collingham ... As individuals, the players, coach and manager were charming, but the top leadership ... brought a negative influence on the party as a whole [WCA News Vol 1 No 6 Summer 1986].

The pitches for the final two Tests were full of runs and the matches were drawn. When the sides next met a decade later England's funding continued awful, indeed shambolic. A mere two weeks before the World Cup in 1993 was due to start, huge holes gaped in budgets:

Fortunately, the Foundation for Sport and the Arts came to the rescue with a £90,000 grant and a number of high-profile individuals chipped in with generous gifts. Finances were still tight though, and the players themselves had to roll the wicket and remove the covers at Ealing, a disgraceful way to treat any national side. The media largely ignored the competition but once England had made the final, staged at Lord's, the country sat up and took note ... England won and it was a sharp wake-up call for the administration of the women's game [Duncan].

Sarah Potter, who had by-the-by risen to England vice-captain, described the situation. In doing so, Sarah pretty much summarised the state of affairs that had prevailed since the beginning of international cricket, and which would remain until the 21st century:

'Progress has been held back by lack of hard cash and column inches [Sarah was personally to put that right as the Times cricket correspondent] and buckets of male condescension. The sport in England staggers along in unnoticed crisis. Tours teeter on the edge of humiliating cancellation; players selected for their country are expected to have deep pockets, sympathetic employers, squeaky clean shoes and an inordinate patience about the sweet old dears who mostly run the game' [Duncan].

In contrast by the time England visited in 1995 India's position had been transformed, as England's manager Shirley Taylor noted:

*They're well ahead of us in terms of support, sponsorship and interest and there was incredible coverage by the media. It is a cricket-mad country and in addition to the newspaper and radio coverage there was live television throughout most of the tour [Cathy Harris, *Electronic Telegraph*, 22 Dec 95].*

With support comes pressure. The opening Test was drawn; rain curtailing first day and washing out the next. In the second Test England (196 & 194) set India (263) only 128 to win. The hosts were going well at 105-5, then Debbie Stock took a novel hat-trick; bowling Arati Vaidya, gaining an edge behind from Pramila Bhatt and running out Renu Margrate. India collected themselves and over the next 25 minutes progressed to 124-8¹¹.

[Then, recognised bat Sangita] Dabir turned a ball from Stock off her legs to backward square leg where Jo Chamberlain was fielding and ran one. She then tried for a second but was sent back by Laya Francis. Chamberlain threw to [wicketkeeper Jane] Smit who in turn threw to the bowler's end and hit the wickets direct with Dabir yards out. 125-9 with two overs to go.

[Captain Karen] Smithies then turned to Chamberlain, her fastest bowler for one last effort. All England's players were willing her to bowl a straight fast yorker to the number 11, Neetu David ... David turned the first ball off her legs for a single. Two to win. The second was played down by Laya Francis as the England fielders converged on her. No run. The third ball was a low full toss which clipped Francis on the pad and ran away to fine leg. Pandemonium, as is customary, now broke out as the Indians shouted at their batsmen to run, England fielders shouted at [Sue] Metcalfe at fine leg to get the ball in quickly and Chamberlain shouted at the umpire for LBW.

It seemed to take a long time for the umpire to make up his mind, but when he did raise his finger, it took some time for the England players to notice this, but when they did they engulfed Chamberlain. Chamberlain may have been suffering from a sore groin before, but she was probably suffering all over by the time the England players let her go.



The fearsome sight of Jo Chamberlain in action which Indian tail-enders had to face at the death of the second Test at Jamshedpur in November 1995.

This photograph of Jo's action was taken during the 1993 World Cup (Patrick Eagar/Popperfoto)

¹¹ The description of the closing stages of play is taken from the report by Mike Daniels, brother of Barbara (England's No. 3 for this series). Mike did some commentary for Indian television during the tour. His report appears in *England in India 1995-96 Wicket Women: Indian Tour Edition*: <https://womenscrickethistory.org/WicketWomen/index.html> along with the tour report by Shirley Taylor. Picking up the baton from *Women's Cricket* and *WCA News*, *Wicket Women* ran from 1994 to 2003 with three or four issues a year.

An Indian umpire in India?? Signalling defeat for the National team??! Surely not! According to Cricket Archive neither of the (male) umpires officiated another game. Their knees jerking The Suits, now in the media glare, showed “they were doing something” by sacking the Indian captain Purnima Rau despite the objections of vice-captain Pramila Bhatt:

I was called in and told I needed to take over. I said, ‘Look we are midway through the series, let’s finish the series and then if we want to consider changing the captaincy, given the fact that Purnima has gone through quite a bit [Purnima’s husband had died from a viral infection shortly before the series], maybe it’s better to change the captaincy after the series.’ I was told that if you don’t do this then there will be someone else leading the team [Witney].

The Suits must have been congratulating themselves over prawn sandwiches at the final Test at Hyderabad when India, having set a notional target of 303, took three wickets in a bunch to reduce England from 131-4 to 138-7. Among the clatter fell opener Jan Brittin. Her staunch defence over more than four hours had threatened to deny India. Her dismissal must have seemed decisive. Debutant Clare ‘Connie’ Connor recalled:

Jan Brittin was in the dressing room and I was only nineteen, she’s my secret hero, it was my first Test match – and she just said quietly, ‘You can do it, kid.’ We had to bat three hours to save it, with three wickets left ... Your first Test. Sticks in the mind, that.’ [Davies]

Jo Chamberlain fell but Connie survived until tea. Just after tea she fell, having batted for almost an hour. That brought in Yorkshire’s Clare Taylor at No. 11 to join Debbie Stock. They needed to survive for almost the whole session. The prognosis was grim, as Clare recalls;

I was coming out and expected a bit of a brief from Connie about what the different bowlers are doing, and she just went ‘Oh it’s awful out there’ and walked past me. Cheers Connie, that’s great. I knew people on the sidelines would just be packing their stuff up going, ‘Clare won’t stay there for that long because she hasn’t got the patience’. It was almost a game within a game for me because no one will be thinking that I can do it [Witney].



There is a photograph [in a montage over Witney’s Wisden article] of Clare surrounded by close fielders, “I’m supposed to be a slogger, me” [Davies].



Clare's usual instincts with the willow; repressed for two hours in Hyderabad (Don Miles, Women's Cricket)

Two hours later, Clare was still at the crease having scored nine off 95 balls. At the other end, Debbie Stock was also on nine, off 136 balls, having batted for over three hours. There was very little time left.

I remember leaning on my bat thinking it's the last over and Stocky was facing it. I was just saying 'No run', thinking, 'Stocky is a better batter than me and she'll sort it out'. She played the last ball and I fist-pumped in the air thinking we'd done it just as the umpire walked past saying 'Time for one more over' [clearly, a much better choice of Indian umpire]. I was just going 'You're having a laugh mate, you cannot be serious,' and all the Indians were going, 'Get her'. The second-to-last ball, I edged it through the slips [Witney].

Clare, perhaps frozen in horror, failed to exploit the chance to put Debbie on strike for the last ball. She managed to repel the final delivery to complete an incredible rearguard action – the most remarkable in all Test match cricket. The Test was saved and the series won for England, dealing India their first home series defeat

On the other side of the coin, in her first Test as captain, the partnership was a nightmare for Bhatt. "That was one of the most frustrating cricketing moments of my life, because we thought we had won the game and then we dropped so many catches in the slips. We literally threw that game away. You come off the field thinking, where did we go wrong?" [Witney]

England came off the field with rather different feelings – indeed, as if they had won ...



... The *Wisden* montage includes this photograph, which shows (I think) Debbie Stock being hugged by a teammate and Clare (with hair flowing) in the foreground.

The teams put on another enthralling match at their next meeting at Shenley in July 1999. Purnima Rau's 5-24 off 20 overs stemmed England's scoring on the penultimate afternoon but the hosts felt confident enough to declare during the final morning, setting a target of 252 off 83 overs. Scoring had been sluggish from the start, a shade over 2 runs an over, so this seemed safe enough. India's opening stand reduced that equation to 120 off 40 overs and home spectators to nervousness. England tightened their bowling, inducing poor shots and three run-outs. Four wickets in three overs late on left India fretting on 219-8, but the last ten minutes were negotiated safely.



India take the field at Shenley in 1999 (cricketpix.com)



India v England Test, Lucknow, 2002 (cricketpix.com)

Poor weather ruined the Test at Lucknow in January 2002 where Mithali Raj's only innings on debut was wrecked by a four-ball duck at the hand of Dawn Holden's slow left-arm spin - a kind of *Benjamin Button* version of Bradman's career. If England anticipated further cheap dismissals, Mithali soon disabused them. The next time she saw them - seven months later at Taunton - Mithali made the English bowlers pay to the tune of 214.



Mithali Raj, during her 214 (then the best score in Tests) at Taunton, August 2002 (Getty Images)

Which after a long (but hopefully entertaining diversion) brings us back to NW. Mithali is the only international captain or leading bat to share Rachael's dislike of gathering shadows in the evening. Twice Mithali has been scheduled to go into bat with only a short time to the close. Each time she sent in a NW. The first occasion, at the end of the first day of the first Test at Grace Road, Leicester in August 2006, proved a brilliant decision.

Mithali had lost the toss, but India had the better of the day, bowling out England for 223. Fourteen overs remained when the openers began the reply. When Karuna Jain was leg before with ten minutes or so to play, Mithali looked around for a sacrificial lamb. Her choice of Jhulan Goswami, India's ace pace bowler, was sound. In four Test innings for India against South Africa, New Zealand and Australia and in four FC innings for Air India batting in the tail, Jhulan had averaged 9 with a top score of 12. However, her Test scores against England batting the end of the middle order had been 1*, 62, 24 and 34*.

At Leicester, Jhulan escaped an early scare to continue her great form against England and justify her captain's faith:

Jhulan Goswami, dropped on nought on the first day when she came in as nightwatchman, was the mainstay of the innings, which put India 15 ahead with three wickets in hand [Sarah Potter, Times 10 Aug 2006].

There's no doubt that Jhulan's knock of 69 over almost five hours saved the Test for India. Having enabled her side to gain a first-innings lead of 75, her contribution initially looked potentially match-winning, but England roared back. They scored 345 runs at almost 3.5 an over, declared and, with a little over an hour-and-a-half left in match, razed India to 74-5. Sarah's comment in the *Times* is perhaps tinged with her experience of the glare-off-windcreens debacle at Wetherby (where the grim memory of being thwarted after she had scored an unbeaten 86 and taken 5 wickets must be offset by fond recall of her century in the Test at Worcester):

Rumeli Dhar and Amita Sharma fiddled with their gloves, pads and pony-tails to slow the game but they played some fine shots, too, each registering maiden Test half-centuries [Sarah Potter, Times 12 Aug 2006].



Jhulan in fine form (Getty Images)

If Jhulan felt aggrieved that her team-mates had failed to exploit her innings – the highest by a NW – she took matters into her own hands in the second (and final) Test in Somerset. With some hullabaloo it was announced during the first day that Taunton was now “The Home of Women’s Cricket”. India proceeded to wreck the house-warming.



Mithali driving at Taunton (Getty Images).

Captain Mithali Raj (65), with Anjum Chopra (98), led India to 307 and then threw the ball to Jhulan. Returns of 5-33 and 5-45 paved the way for a tense 5-wicket victory: Mithali scoring the winning runs with just eight balls remaining in the match. Jhulan could be seen jumping for joy on the player’s balcony. She had a wonderful twelve months and was named ICC Women’s Player of the Year in September 2007. In addition to her bowling in Tests (average 12.40) and ODI (21.80), her NW innings of 69 was cited.



Jhulan strikes, repeatedly, at the foundation of England’s new Home (*Wisden*)



ICC Player of the Year (Getty Images)

Taunton was India's first Test victory over England. The next time they met, in August 2014 at Wormsley, didn't look promising for a repeat. Three months previously, 18 England players had been awarded central contracts and lucrative sponsorship deals as the professional era dawned for women's cricket. India had been on a downward spiral for some years through BCCI neglect. Although many of the players held government jobs, for example as ticket clerks for the railways, which allowed them time off for training and competition, this semi-professional status was a world away from the facilities and opportunities now available to the England players. Of the 15 India players visiting England only Mithali Raj, the captain, Jhulan Goswami, and Karuna Jain had played Test cricket. Among the debutants was allrounder Shikha Pandey:

I hadn't been picked despite doing well in the selection games, so I went back to work at my Air Force base [Shikha, a qualified engineer, was a Flight Lieutenant]. Three days before the team's departure, I got a call from the BCCI asking me to report to the British embassy the next day in New Delhi ... Once my visa was issued, I went to Mumbai first and then made a quick dash home to Goa to sort out my cricket gear and essentials ... All this happened in the space of two days, so it was a roller-coaster ride ... By the time I boarded the flight to London, I was sleepless, exhausted, and excited all at once [Ghosh & Kishore].

Few gave India a chance, but the hosts offered something of a life-line, if they could win the toss:

The ECB requested a livelier pitch at the ground after the one used for the Ashes Test last summer made runs hard to come by and extremely hard work for the bowlers [Cathy Harris, Times 14 Aug 2014].

Faced with a green pitch, Mithali won the crucial decision and inserted England. By lunch Nagarajan 'Ninja' Niranjana had run through the top order with figures of 10-5-11-4 to leave England on 49-5.



Shikha snaring Tammy Beaumont, the fifth wicket to fall before lunch on the first day at Wormsley and one of the four to be leg-before (Steven Paston/Action Images)

That became 92 all out. India fared little better as Jenny Gunn with 6.3-4-6-4 reduced the tourists to 64-6, but the Indian opening bowlers Nagarajan and Jhulan added 31 in 24 overs and India eked out a 22-run lead. The pitch was not easing that much as England slumped to 84-6, whereupon Jenny Gunn continued her one-woman-rescue act, initially with an exhibition of defence. In the 17 overs remaining in the second day, she and Sarah Taylor added 26, Jenny contributing 2 from 47 balls and England closed on 110-6.

The third day of the Test was on August 15, India's Independence Day. We were fired up. We hoisted a flag. We were determined to keep fighting. The wicket had eased out a little, but there was still some seam movement. [Sarah] Taylor batted really well ... Gunn walked in to bat with England struggling ... in a stonewalling innings against a fired-up attack, she batted close to four hours [Shikha in Ghosh & Kishore].

Sarah fell early on Day 3, prompting Jenny to take on the run scoring while Anya Shrubsole dropped anchor. Over the next 25 overs, they added 58 precious runs.

Our bowling did really well. It was a green track. Bowling first, we had the advantage ... We always knew that as the Test progressed the wicket would ease out. That was very visible when England batted the second time, and the partnership that Shrubsole had with Gunn kind of took the match away from us [interview with Shikha by Subash Jayaraman, 16 Feb 2016]

Jenny shepherded a further 21 from the last two wickets - 17 coming from her bat - to finish unbeaten on 62. England's 202 set India a target of 181. The chase started well: 76 for the first wicket and then 112-2, but two wickets fell quickly and Shikha was sent in as NW to join her captain.

When the third day's play ended, I was on 0 not out ... We had lost three quick wickets that day in the last session. Mithali di told me, "Just play out. Don't take any balls on the pads." As you know, we had set a world record of 20 lbws in that match [As former bowlers the sympathies of the umpires Billy Taylor and David Millns were manifest in hair-trigger fingers]. She told me to see the ball and get in line to play it. I'd always wondered what it would be like for a batter to remain not out overnight and bat the next day, and I actually felt it! There were butterflies in my stomach [interview with Shikha by Subash Jayaraman, 16 Feb 2016]

The last four overs were seen out safely and India closed on 119-4, Mithali on 20 and Shikha yet to score.

India's requirement of a further 62 may have looked relatively simple, particularly with six wickets in hand on a flattening pitch, but in the context of this low-scoring match it was no surprise that Raj admitted to feeling nervous overnight [Farrell].



We began the day needing 60-odd, and it was tense. The plan was to just occupy the crease and take our time. I won't say the wicket had eased out; a few balls were still doing a little off the pitch, but Mithali guided me through ... If we'd lost a few more wickets, probably we would have got into a slump [Ghosh & Kishore]

Shikha guides a ball wide of the slips (Christopher Lee, Getty Images)

As the runs started being wiped off, people in our dressing room got edgy and superstitious. I found out much later that Ninja stood near a window next to the washroom all morning, because that is where she was the previous evening when we put together a partnership and remained unbeaten. She didn't want to break that [Shikha in Ghosh & Kishore].

After getting on for two hours Shikha hit the winning runs, a cover drive for four off Nat Sciver. Her 28 and her captain's unbeaten 50, added 68 runs, taking India to 183-4.



Mithali during her unbeaten 50 at Wormsley (Getty Images)



Mithali Raj and Shikha Pandey (right) at the moment of victory at Wormsley (Getty Images)

Shikha celebrated with a huge smile and flourish of the bat

When Pandey dispatched Nat Sciver through the covers to pass the target her team-mates were halfway to the wicket before the ball had crossed the rope, mobbing their captain in delight as they celebrated victory in a format that is so rare [Farrell].

'My partnership with Mithali di did the trick for us', Shikha received a stump as souvenir from her captain with the inscription: "It was nice to have a match-winning partnership with you. Here's to many more" [interview with Shikha by Subash Jayaraman, 16 Feb 2016].



Shikha mobbed by team-mates (Getty Images)

There was far more at stake here than a winning total on a scorecard ... It was a team whose players were on foreign soil, most of them experiencing English conditions for the first time and, ultimately, adapting better than their opponents. And it was a team that must be aware that, by beating a well-resourced and highly fancied England side, questions should be raised as to why the world's richest cricket board is lagging behind their less wealthy counterparts in rewarding their players. 'Once you start playing well, you will get more support,' Raj said. 'I'm sure that if we start winning matches and bigger series the BCCI will someday take up this issue of payment.' [Farrell]

The day after India triumphed at Wormsley, 40 miles away at the Oval India's men were shot out for 94 to complete a humiliating defeat by an innings and 244 runs – their third in a row and by ever increasing margins (first by 266 runs at the Rose Bowl followed by an innings and 54 runs at Old Trafford). The abrupt collapse of a team which had had generous central contracts for 10 years compared to the fight of tyros at Wormsley provoked the BCCI to see sense - although it took over a year for light to dawn: in 2015, the BCCI decided to give women cricketers central contracts.

NW	Score	Date	Opponent	Ground	Comment
Jhulan Goswami (Ind)	69	Aug 2006	England	Leicester	Jhulan's highest FC score until her 100 and 120 for Bengal in the Inter State Women's Cup in 2007.
Muriel Lowe (Eng)	42	Jun 1937	Australia	Northampton	Muriel's highest FC score until the next Test at Blackpool when she scored 57, which she matched in Aug 1938 for the Home Counties vs The Rest.
Tumi Sekhukhune (SA)	33*	Jun 2022	England	Taunton	This was Tumi's only FC game. Her highest score in all cricket is 63* for Easterns in a 50-over game in Jan 2016.
Lynn Fullston (Aus)	29	Dec 1984	England	Adelaide	Lynn's best FC score was 52* for South Australia in Dec 1983.
Shikha Pandey (Ind)	28*	Aug 2014	England	Wormsley	Shikha had already made three FC fifties, top score 96, for Goa in the Inter State Women's Cup in 2009. She added a fourth with 80 for South Zone in the Inter Zone 3-day Competition in 2017.

Highest NW scores in Tests

After virtually every Test in the last decade (only 13 have been played), the captains and leading players have called for more. Their pleas will find deaf ears at the ECB. The ECB Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director England Women has said, “*In the time it takes to prepare for a women's Test match, and play it, you could play a five-match T20 series, sell out five grounds, attract a new audience to the game*” [Raf Nicholson, *The case for women's Tests*, *The Cricket Monthly*, ESPNcricinfo, Feb 2016]. The calendar is littered with short-form white-ball matches. The point is that the full range of cricket skills is developed only in the red-ball game. Surely cricketing authorities have a responsibility to encourage that?

Counties tendering for Tier 1 status are unlikely to propose any red-ball cricket. England has never had a FC championship¹². Aside from Tests, FC games in England have been either tour matches or Test trials. Perhaps the latter could be resurrected with some of the ECB's many millions? An annual series of three 4-day matches England v The Rest played at different grounds around the country? Of course, that won't make sense unless there are more Test matches. The ICC could use some of their billions to sponsor a Women's Test Championship. Hmmm ... Well, India's crushing victories over England and Australia in December 2023 might help. All India victories on the cricket pitch are astonishingly popular across the Indian nation and, thus, potential gold-mines. The glint of lucre rarely escapes the attention of the BCCI and where the BCCI goes, the world of cricket follows.

Stop Press: Encouragingly, the BCCI announced on the 1st March (the day this note was finished) that domestic red-ball cricket will return. The Inter Zonal competition which ran for four seasons from 2014 – 2018 will recommence in March and April 2024, with games played over three days. Hopefully this is just the first step, with FC State cricket and more Test cricket to follow.

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¹² Australia and New Zealand each had an annual FC championship from the 1930s to the 1990s, West Indies and South Africa each ran one for two decades and India for the seasons 2007/8 and 2008/9, and 2014/15 to 2017/18 (only some of the finals of their national championships which ran from the 1970s to the 2000s were two-innings matches, the rest of the championship games were contested over a single innings).