



S. Giridhar  
V J Raghunath

We are both unabashed cricket romantics and believe that however much the external attributes of cricket may have changed, the quintessential qualities of courage and nobility remain forever entwined with the game. In this essay we will describe why courage and nobility in sport is such a moving emotion and ennobling aspect of the game.

We will begin with stories of courage where the sportsmen have transcended physical and emotional pain to create immortal heroics. Courage while batting evokes much vivid imagery. Batsmen hit on the face, spitting out blood to take guard again and so on. No story of Indian batsmen grievously injured is more poignant than that of Griffith felling Contractor in West Indies 50 years ago. Grainy photographs, black and white in our newspapers, showed that Worrell the West Indies captain, was the first in the queue at the hospital to donate blood for the emergency operation. Contractor never played for India again but both of us saw him bat with undiminished commitment for West Zone after recovering from the near fatal injury.

At Chennai in 1964, India ended the fourth day, in a precarious position, having lost four of their best batsmen. On the fifth morning, Manjrekar who had broken his thumb while fielding came out to bat with Hanumant Singh. Manjrekar had to cut off the thumb part of the glove since his swollen thumb could not go into any protective covering. Injured thumb exposed, wincing with pain every time he played the rampag-

ing fast bowler McKenzie, he played his heart out for almost the entire morning session, trying to save the match. Finally, at the stroke of lunch, Manjrekar was dismissed. As he walked back, victorious in defeat, the entire stadium rose to a man.

Of the montages of courage from the 1980s, there is one story much told, the other rarely told. Mohinder Amarnath, hit by Marshall, spat out teeth and blood and had to walk away to hospital. Returning to bat next day in the same blood splattered shirt he hit the first ball – a bouncer predictably greeted him – out of the ground. Never a backward step was his motto. Mohinder's courage is folklore. But two years earlier, in Australia, India's Sandip Patil was felled by a bouncer. Carried off, and groggy for the rest of the match, he had a captain who wanted Patil to bat again. Sick and wobbly, Patil came out, battled for a few balls and was duly dismissed. Gavaskar, his captain, applauded him all the way back. For what mattered was that by coming out to bat, Patil had exorcised fear and also communicated that he had done so.



There are many stirring stories of bowlers transcending injury and great pain to bowl unbelievable spells. Indians of course will never forget a lame Kapil Dev delivering them a victory at Melbourne in 1981. The most striking story in recent times is that of Anil Kumble on India's tour of the Caribbean Islands in 2002. Jaw fractured by Dillon, strapped up tight and scheduled to fly back for a surgery, Kumble came out to bowl as he always did – with fierce resolve and concentration; he got Lara with a gem and, arms raised, walked away. However often this vignette is played and replayed, the sheer power of the episode will never fade.

The most moving and compelling story for us is that of an injured Bert Sutcliffe and an emotionally shattered Bob Blair coming together to save the test for New Zealand against South Africa in December 1953. Badly injured by a bouncer, Sutcliffe returned from hospital with a heavily bandaged head and hit seven sixes in an unbelievable counter attack. If Sutcliffe battled physical injury it was even more poignant that Bob Blair, the man who partnered him in this effort had suffered even more grievously. News had just come that Blair's fiancée had been killed in a train accident. How Blair found the courage to keep his mind in a heroic tenth wicket stand with Sutcliffe will forever be one of the most amazing stories of fortitude. Finally Blair was dismissed and only then he let the tears come. As the pair walked back, arms draped over each other, weeping and emotionally drained, there was not a dry eye that day among the South Africans.

No essay on courage will be complete unless we salute Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi. Having lost one eye in a motoring accident in England in 1962, Pataudi played almost all his test cricket with one eye. That in itself has no parallel in cricket history. But at Melbourne, in 1967 – 68, Pataudi also had to bat on one leg because he had an injured hamstring. Pataudi was resplendent in a losing cause as he produced two of the most combative innings (75 and 85) in cricket history. Listening to Alan Mcgilvray over radio and reading Jack Fingleton in *The Hindu* next morning, it was clear that one was witnessing something truly heroic. That is not all. In 1975, his powers and reflexes gone, Pataudi was smashed on the jaw by Roberts at his fastest in Kolkata. Coming back to cheers from the crowd, with stitches on his chin, Pataudi turned the clock back and exploded with a cascade of boundaries. The blazing counter attack was brief, he made just 36 but as Pataudi walked off, the Kolkata crowd knowing that they would never see him bat again, stood up to give him an unforgettable farewell.

The next part of this essay will be about stories of great sportsmanship. There is something innate, something unique about how every person is wired that determines the sporting spirit quotient of an individual.

From the time we begin to play the game expectations are set – of upholding the spirit of the game, that spirit signifying integrity, uprightness, honesty, and keeping team interest above self-interest. In this essay we now describe some of the most moving incidents of warmth, generosity and nobility seen on the ground transcending times, cultures and geographies. Many of these wonderful sporting gestures extracted their price – the games turned in favour of the opponent; some of these players lost their places in the test team but none of these considerations ever entered their mind.

Whatever we may say, one plays to compete and win and nothing exemplifies this as much as the fierce rivalry between Australia and England and their battle for the Ashes. As England beat Australia by two runs in the Ashes test of 2005, Brett Lee the Australian batsman sank to his knees in utter despair. The English players embraced and celebrated but Flintoff, the hero of England's triumph, had already slipped away to Brett Lee, to console him. The picture of Flintoff putting his hands around the disconsolate Lee is probably the most memorable one of the year.

Such spirit is not restricted to players. Certain cricket grounds are blessed with a special bond with the spirit of the game. In December 1998, all of India was disappointed when India lost to Pakistan by just 12 runs and one of Tendulkar's greatest tons went in vain. The crowd at Chennai ought to have been the ones who were most devastated. Somehow, the 60,000 people at the stadium found the nobility to rise up and give the Pakistan team a standing ovation and the picture of the Pakistan team's victory lap around the Chepauk ground is etched in memory for ever.

Captains can set the tone for such uplifting behaviour. In the Jubilee Test (1982) at Mumbai, with England tottering on 85 for 5, Bob Taylor was given out caught behind. But India's captain for the test match Viswanath pleaded with the umpires to recall Taylor because he thought the batsman was not out. Taylor returned to forge a match winning partnership with Botham. Nothing of all this ever mattered to Viswanath, because he simply did not know any other way

## Courage and Nobility in Sport – Anecdotes from Cricket

to play the game. Should batsmen walk when they are out or should they let the umpire decide, has always been a hot debate. To Viswanath it was no debate. How many times have we seen him simply tuck his bat and walk the minute he snicked the ball even before the fielders could appeal.

Among the bowlers who have been great ambassadors for the spirit of cricket, we cannot think of a better example than the West Indian Courtney Walsh. In



the 1987 World Cup match against Pakistan, Walsh earned eternal respect because in a needle situation he refused to run out the Pakistan batsman who was trying to gain extra yards by running out of the non-striker's crease before Walsh delivered the ball. Walsh re-

fused to run this batsman out and merely warned him. This sporting gesture cost West Indies the match (and they were knocked out of the tournament) but Walsh quite simply did not want to win any other way.

Sportsman spirit in cricket has usually been discussed in rather simplistic frameworks. There is a section of opinion which believes that when the game moved from amateur to professional status and then to the intense commercialisation of modern days, it lost the gentility associated with the game. The other section is of the view that because we see and hear everything on TV, we feel the spirit has deteriorated whereas it may not be really so. Both may be correct to an extent but there is much more to it. We hope that through this essay we have been able to bring out some evidence to show that magnanimous gestures have embellished modern times as much as the earlier times. In an ironic sense, perhaps modern day TV coverage might

well become the reason that the spirit of cricket is preserved, for no cricketer would want to be shown up as a boor or have his integrity questioned. From there to more voluntary acts of sportsmanship may not be such a big leap after all.

### Foot Note:

This article is an abridged version of a two part article by the authors that was published in the [espnricinfo.com](http://blogs.espnricinfo.com) magazine in February and March 2010. Those interested in more such anecdotes can read the full version at:

[http://blogs.espnricinfo.com/inbox/archives/2010/03/nobility\\_in\\_a\\_hard\\_game.php](http://blogs.espnricinfo.com/inbox/archives/2010/03/nobility_in_a_hard_game.php) and

[http://blogs.espnricinfo.com/inbox/archives/2010/02/courage\\_in\\_a\\_hard\\_game.php](http://blogs.espnricinfo.com/inbox/archives/2010/02/courage_in_a_hard_game.php)

*Giri is Registrar and also the Head of the University Resource Centre at Azim Premji University. Raghu retired as CEO of Addison Paints and is a senior training consultant. Both share a great love for test cricket. While Raghunath has played alongside many of India's test cricketers in Mumbai and Chennai league in the 60s and 70s. Giri and Raghu came together in Carborundum Universal Chennai, and played together in the Hindu Trophy and other Chennai tournaments in the 1980s. Both have combined to write a number of articles on cricket drawing upon the game's rich history for their readers.*

*They may be contacted [giri@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:giri@azimpremjifoundation.org) and [raghunathj@gmail.com](mailto:raghunathj@gmail.com).*