The Gloves are Off

NADER RAHMAN



The sign says it all.

Usually when it comes to Australian cricketers I keep my thoughts to myself, being a diehard West Indies fan I am used to the sort of humiliation they can dish out and thus I have found it easy to treat them with disdain. But this week with the announcement that Adam Gilchrist was retiring from all forms of cricket I found it surprisingly easy to pay homage to the archetypical modern cricketer, aggressive and multi talented with a never- say-die attitude he was one for the ages and I am embarrassed to say I will grudgingly miss him.

My memories of Gilchrist are a collage of images from the last decade, the impregnable decade of Australian dominance. Like most other Australian cricketers he did not burst on to the international scene as a tear away youngster, he had more than a few seasons behind him by the time he eased himself into the national team. By the mid nineties the tiniest of cracks in Ian Healey's armour were beginning to show. Missing that crucial stumping of Inzamam off Warne's bowling against Pakistan in Karachi in 1995 is the one that sticks in my memory. It sealed a one wicket win for the hosts, in the most heartbreaking circumstances. He was never blamed for the defeat nor should he have been, but that was when the talk of two separate teams for ODI's and Tests was first being heard and Healey's position in the shorter version of the game looked most as risk. He held on to his dual positions for another two years before Gilchrist was first sighted.

By the end of '96 it was time for change and there seemed to be only one contender for Healey's position and it was Gilchrist. He slowly made his way into the ODI team with a few scattered matches but by the Ashes summer of '97 he was well and truly Australia's first choice ODI wicket keeper. On May 24 1997 Ian Healey played his last ODI as Gilchrist played his 9th and that day was more than a formal changing of the guard, at the home of cricket Gilchrist flayed a 50 ball 53 in a counter attacking innings that would be the hallmark of his batting and the sport which he helped change. Healey was still good enough to keep his place in the test team, but the rate at which the game was changing he would do well to hold off a charge from Gilchrist.

By 1998 he was reasonably well known having thrashed two ODI centuries in three matches against South Africa and New Zealand, the latter making a mockery of a rather good attack. Yet he was still not considered a 'force ' in the international game. That year I framed my first real memory of him. The mini world cup had brought every test nation to Dhaka and barely into double figures, I parked myself outside their hotel scrapping for every autograph I could get. As it so happened, a family friend was asked to interview Clive Lloyd and I tagged along to add to my burgeoning autograph collection. As we stepped into the hotel the Australian team was leaving for a net and I found myself all of four and a half feet tall standing between the colossus like Matthew Hayden and the Glen McGrath. I was well and truly star struck, twirling a Australian rules football on his index finger McGrath looked down and asked me more politely than he has ever done to any international batsmen "what's up?" I had no answer, my mind went blank and I was only