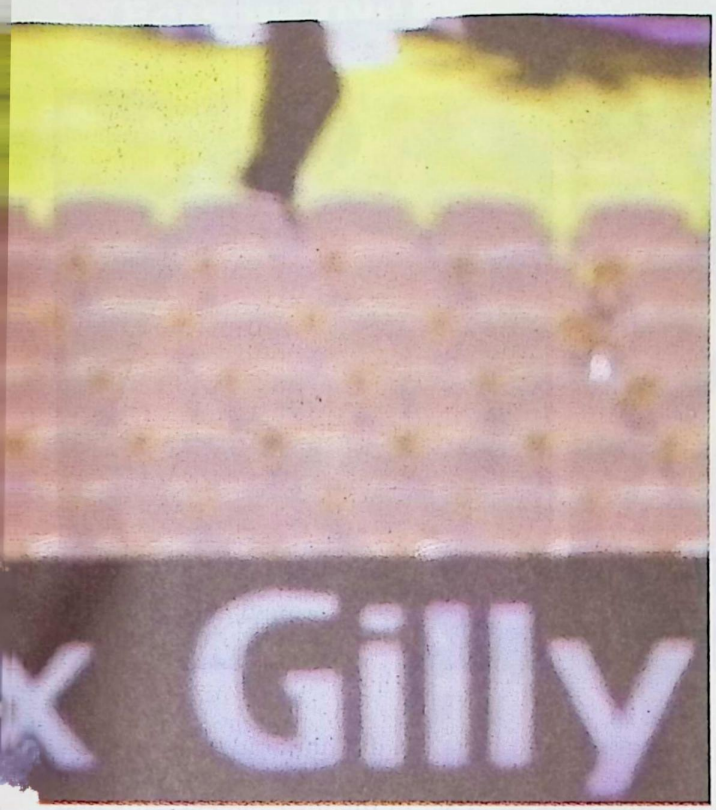


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rescued by one Adam Gilchrist. He walked up, put an arm around me, and asked if anyone was giving me any trouble. I vaguely remember hearing them laugh, as I shook my head in disagreement. I held out my autograph book as they took turns to sign it, he rubbed my head and ruffled up my hair and left.

A year after that he was officially declared one of the deadliest batsmen in the world and would pick up his first of three World Cup medals. In the final of '99 he smote a 33 a ball fifty to round off an unbelievable performance from Australia, after having been on the brink of elimination they stormed through to take the title proving that they were the premier side in international cricket. By then Australia had built up the reputation and aura of invincibility in the One Day game, they were fast approaching that status in the longer format of the game as well. At the end of the year Healey stepped down from the test spot and now Gilchrist had to prove there was more to his game than simply a blazing knock. Healey's last test against Zimbabwe was the first in a world record streak of 16 consecutive test match victories for Australia, thus it would be quite a while before Gilchrist knew the bitterness of defeat.

On his debut he stroked a fluent 81 and it did not take too long before he showed his mettle. In his second test against Pakistan at Hobart Australia were left chasing a monumental 369 to win and at 126 for 5 the game looked as good as gone. In stepped Gilchrist and he proceeded to take the Pakistani bowling to the cleaners. In only his second test he racked up a sublime 149 off only a 163 balls in a 238 run partnership which went along at over four runs an over, a scandalous run rate at that time. Little did the world realise that the run rate and the aggression with which they chased would dominate world cricket for the next decade. My diehard Pakistan supporting friends cursed him, he should have been given out early on in his innings but was not, I told them to appreciate an innings of quality and to this very day they still give me that "I don't care" stare back at me when I say that. I remember the innings vividly it was something I won't soon forget.

He was soon blazing double centuries and scoring runs galore thereby reshaping world cricket. He epitomised what it was to be a modern cricketer, aggressive, fast scoring and always on the move. Every keeper in the world paled in comparison to him, he was quite simply the ultimate package and redefined what it meant to be a keeper/batsmen. No longer could one get away with simply being a good keeper, one had to be an outstanding batsmen capable of holding his place if one was truly to be accepted. Gilchrist changed how the word all-rounder was used, once the bastion of simply the bowlers and batsmen he was readily being called the best all-rounder in the world. In 2002 in three tests against South Africa he had scored a double hundred, a hundred and ninety and was on top of the world rankings for batsmen. I fondly remember that time watching him invent batsmenship with shots like the uppercut played when on both knees on the ground guiding a shortish ball over the slips. He was a sight to behold and with his performances Australia kept their winning juggernaut rolling along that was until 2001 when their streak of 16 wins in a row was ended when he scored his first pair in that unforgettable match at Calcutta. After seeing him smote an 84 ball hundred in the first test of the series I was determined to watch him in Calcutta, eventually I could not make it but I still remember that match like it was yesterday. Gilly's first flop and Australia loses, it was easy to seewhy he was so important to the team.