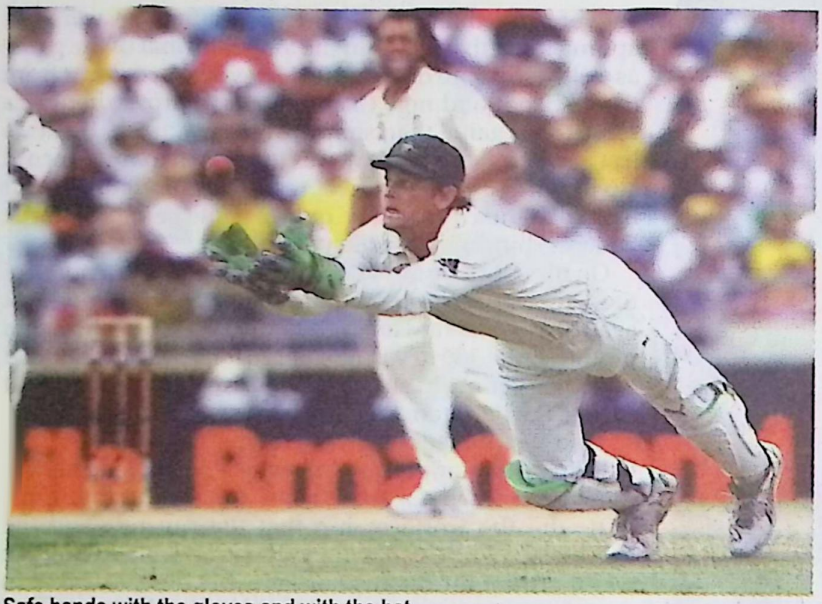
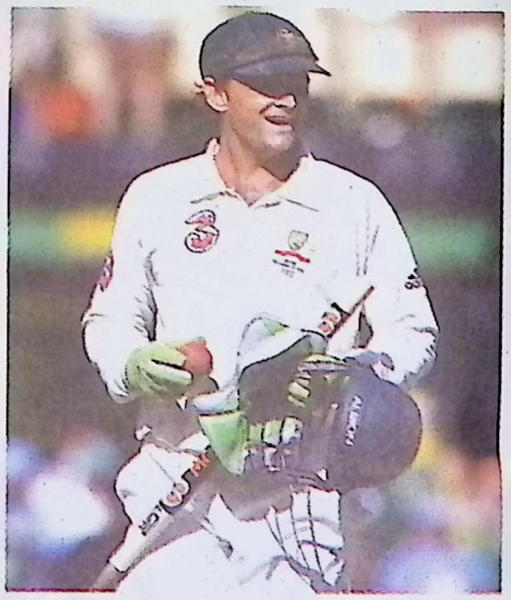




Safe hands with the gloves and with the bat.

The next few years he continued to plunder attacks all over the world including a startling run of form in early 2005 when he scored three centuries in consecutive matches against Pakistan and New Zealand. By then his average was still well over 50 and his keeping remained impeccable. But 2005 was to be a tough year for him, Australia went though a tough Ashes campaign where his slanted back lift was taken apart by Andrew Flintoff. He seemed a shadow of himself and what I remember best from that English summer is him collecting a leg bye against Bangladesh at Cardiff and hurling that ball back for a run out. Bangladesh had beaten the mighty Australians, I still cant get that image out of my head, Mohammed Rafique scampering back to win the match and Gilchrist trying in vain. He would have his revenge on us soon enough but after a torrid Ashes his confidence was shot to pieces.

His One Day from went through a patchy spot as well and it all started to show in his keeping. His normally safe hands were prone to a miss every now and then, something unheard of just a few months ago. When Australia came to Bangladesh in 2006 people were predicting two day test matches and absurd score lines, they were right in one way or another. Gilchrist played one of the finest knocks in test cricket when he scored 144 in an innings so good even the partisan home crowd gave him a standing ovation. After Bangladesh had managed over 400 in the first innings, Australia was in deep trouble at 93 for 6, a follow on looked very likely and did an embarrassing test defeat to Bangladesh. Out of the next 176 runs scored Gilchrist scored 131 to be the last man out in an innings of sheer class. He did not hold back from his attacking style as he placed many a ball over the midwicket stands. I sat in the bleachers cursing him with my friends, but I could not take my eyes off him. We were so close to success and the dividing line was his broad bat, I cursed him over and over again. But the innings was a thing of beauty, which even I could not deny. Australia went on to win the match and within a few weeks that innings was forgotten.

While the runs did not dry up altogether his form became patchier as his average dipped below 50. In his final two seasons he only scored two more international centuries and what fine knocks those were. There was a 57 ball blitzkrieg against England, the second fastest test century of all time and a sublime 149 in World Cup final last year. When the dust has finally settled Gilchrist will retire with over 800 international dismissals, nearly 15,000 international runs and 30 centuries, staggering figures from one of the modern greats. But his place in cricket cannot simply be measured through statistics, he is the standard by which all future keepers will be measured by.

There was a time when I was on the phone all night, every night, arguing over what the best all time test XI would be and for me only two names were automatic choices Bradman and Gilchrist. People may disagree with me, they may say Tallon, Grout, Knott, Dujon, Marsh and Healey but all I'll ever say is Gilly, he is simply better that anything that has come before him and probably better than everything that will follow. It is hard to admit, but I'll miss him and for now at least I guess the gloves are off. ■