

Lara or Tendulkar?

On the week of Brian Lara's hallowed 375 and one week to Sachin Tendulkar's birthday, the Daily Star's Shafin Majid examines an endless debate; who is the best of them all?

Brian Lara scored 375 and 400\*, Sachin Tendulkar has scored over 50 centuries. To date, Tendulkar averages 55.44, Lara averaged 52.88. Debates as to who is the greater Test batsman have never completely died out. Who is greater Lara or Tendulkar?

Tallying each player's strengths and concluding the one with more is the greater player would be like counting the teeth of the two most dangerous lions in the world and concluding the one with more is more dangerous to deer. Both have more than enough strengths for the business of scoring runs aplenty. More interesting weaknesses. From this perspective, Tendulkar comes out ahead.

Lara had difficulties against fast bowling. He never scored a Test hundred against the outstanding fast men of his time Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis or Allan Donald and never looked likely to. In 1997/98 on the flat wickets of Pakistan he failed to reach 50 in 6 completed innings. His high back lift made it difficult for him just to get the bat down in time to meet the ball fast ball.

The short pitched ball also caused Lara much grief and the bowler did not even have to be off the highest pace to ruffle those princely Trinidadian feathers Lara jerking his head out of the ball's way at the last second or desperately fending off rising deliveries was a common sight, and it also led to his dismissal often enough to be called a genuine (as opposed to purely aesthetic) weakness.

The high back lift also contributed to Lara's difficulties on worn wickets.

In later stages of the match, the ball's bounce and pace become less regular, and the high back lift made it difficult for Lara to adjust to anything unexpected off the wicket.

Lara's celebrated footwork that looked so pleasing brought with it a fair share of troubles as well. By going so far across, he left his leg stump exposed and increased the chances of a glanced catch to the keeper, as well as being bowled behind his legs. Furthermore, it

obliged him to play at balls wide of the off stump that most batsmen would leave. Also apparent was a disinclination to come forward to the pitched up ball. Lara's bat-work in defence was less than ideal. A typical Lara defensive shot sent the ball to point or even backward point (by contrast Tendulkar's more solid effort

Tendulkar has had far fewer exploitable chinks in his armour. Occasionally, he gets in the temporary habit of missing angled bat strokes to straight balls, and thus leaves himself open to an LBW dismissal. Recently, the sweep shot to straight balls has put him in a similar position. For the most part however, Tendulkar is able to adjust his game

example, Lara played spin bowling better than Tendulkar, but nobody in their right mind would claim that the Indian had a "weakness" against spin. By contrast, Tendulkar played fast bowling better than Lara, who had a legitimate weakness against express pace.

Some rate Lara higher on what we might call the "glamour" factor. He was a faster scorer and a more thrilling player to watch than Tendulkar. Such judges tend to suggest that the weakness of Lara's team mates make his achievements greater than Tendulkar's and they site his ability to play his best in pressure situations.

How much weight one chooses to give such romantic notions is purely a personal choice. Saving a game by playing solidly is at least as important as the ability to tear into an attack in the test arena. Tendulkar is undoubtedly ahead in the former category, while Lara claims the top spot in the latter. The only-class-player-in-a-weak-team argument is at best a two edged sword: Ted Dexter has noted that in such situations, the bowling side usually focus their efforts on dismissing the weaker batsmen, thus actually making it easier for the one class player to score runs. The claim that Lara single-handedly won matches for his team and played well in pressure situations is a starry-eyed view usually based mainly on (understandably) sentimental recollections of Lara's mind-bending innings of 153\*.

One innings, however great, out of 232, does not make a clutch player. The more practical facts of the matter show that Lara averages 61.02 in wins, to Tendulkar's 66.59. That Lara and Tendulkar are both great players is indisputable. The difference in quality between the two is infinitesimal. One could put Lara in Tendulkar's place in a team, or vice-versa, and there would probably be no change in the team's results. From the perspective of weaknesses and given that the strengths of the two players can be taken for granted, however, Tendulkar comes out comfortably ahead of the West Indian champion.



BRIAN LARA V SACHIN TENDULKAR

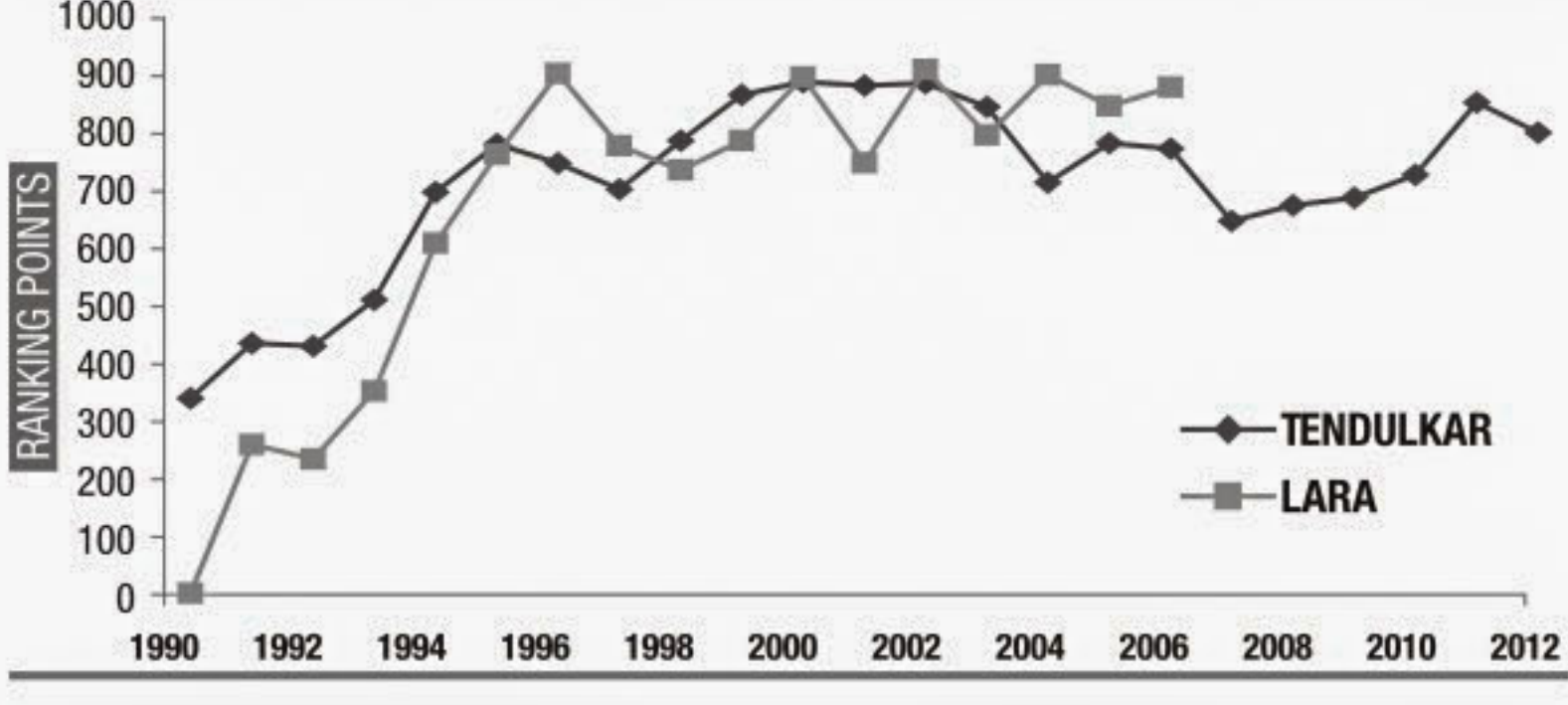


Table with 3 columns: Player, 3RD INNINGS, 4TH INNINGS. Rows for Lara and Tendulkar.

tended to go to cover or mid off).

A combination of poor judgement outside the off stump, not coming forward, and soft bat-work in defence led to Glenn McGrath regularly dismissing the West Indian by doing little more than putting the ball in the right area. Tendulkar, by contrast, has never had a particular 'bogey' bowler.

if his approach is not working. In Australia in 2004/05, he cut out the off-side shots that were giving him trouble for 3 matches, and proceeded to score 300 runs in the last match without being dismissed.

There are of course, areas where Lara is Tendulkar's superior, but the essential point is that Tendulkar has far fewer genuine weaknesses. For

Clarke

FROM PAGE 16

Sammy, though, still had his sights firmly set on an unlikely win and launched into an attack on Hilfenhaus, striking him for two boundaries and a six over long-off.

He reached 30 not out from 26 balls with his team still needing another 162 runs to win when the weather brought an end to the contest.

"Sixty overs was enough. We thought we could get the runs. Our plan was to see how far we could get by tea and then reassess after that," said Sammy, who believes his team are still capable of levelling the series.

"The guys believe now that we can not only compete but we can win matches against top opposition and we go into every game thinking we can."

Sammy's optimism was boosted by seeing fast bowler Kemar Roach bag another five wickets to become first West Indian since 2005 to take 10 wickets in a match.

2nd Test edges to draw

FROM PAGE 16

Edwards finally took his first wicket of the match in his 10th over of the second innings.

A short ball to Ricky Ponting had him playing one of his favourite hook shots but he failed to keep the ball down.

It went straight to Powell on the square leg boundary and Ponting was gone for 41 off 85 balls, an innings which featured three fours.

The highlight of the morning came in Sammy's second over.

He had dropped a sitter at first slip earlier in the innings but now took an excellent catch off his own bowling to remove his opposite number Clarke.

The delivery seemed to stop a bit off the pitch and Clarke was through the stroke a little early before

Sammy thrust out his right hand to take the chance.

Mike Hussey and Matthew Wade took Australia through to lunch at 123 for five with a lead of 177 before the pace was stepped-up after the interval.

West Indies paceman Kemar Roach took two more wickets to give him his second five wicket innings in the match as he finished with 5-41.

He became the first West Indian bowler to take 10 wickets in a match since 2005 and not since 1993 has it been achieved by the home side against Australia.

Before play started, it was announced that Australian fast bowlers Peter Siddle and James Pattinson, who played here, would be returning home with back injuries.

The final Test starts in Dominica on Monday but Australia have two other pacemen in their squad -- Ryan Harris, who played in the first Test and left-arter Mitchell Starc who last played in the Perth Test against India in January.

Table with 5 columns: Player, Runs, Balls, Fours, Sixes. Rows for Shillingford, Roach, Sammy, Deonarine.

Table with 2 columns: Team, Innings. Rows for West Indies Second Innings, Barath c Clarke b Hilfenhaus, Powell lbw b Hilfenhaus, Sammy not out, Bravo not out, Extras, Total, Did not bat, Fall of wickets, Bowler, Beer.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

FROM PAGE 16 over Faridpur Muslim Mission High School at the Manikganj venue yesterday. Sagar scored two goals while Al Amin, Mithu and Selim scored one each for the winners. Nasir scored a consolation goal for the losing side.

The other qualifier from this zone will be decided tomorrow with the final between Dolairpar High School of Dhaka and Sherpur's Fasih Ul Ulum Dakhil Madrasa at the Gazipur venue.

Siddikur

FROM PAGE 16 England stroked a flawless four-under-par 68 to take the second round lead at 11-under-par 133.

The world number three holds a dominant five-shot lead over Kieran Pratt of Australia who posted a sparkling 65 at the Royale Jakarta Golf Club.

Zaw Moe of Myanmar was on eight-under through 12 holes before play was abandoned at 5.27pm local time due to lightning threat. Play was also suspended earlier in the day for two hours and 20 minutes for the same reason.

Rampaul back in frame

CRICINFO, Port of Spain

Ravi Rampaul may be in line for a recall to the West Indies team for the third Test in Dominica. The hosts' captain Darren Sammy revealed that Fidel Edwards was complaining of back soreness after rain curtailed a tantalisingly poised second match in Trinidad, making Rampaul's inclusion a distinct possibility.

Having missed selection for the limited overs-portion of the tour due to dengue fever and a shoulder problem, Rampaul returned to the squad ahead of the first Test in Barbados but was lacking in conditioning and match rhythm. However he has trained consistently with the hosts over the two weeks and is now ideally placed to reinforce the XI that acquitted themselves well at Queen's Park Oval on a slow, turning pitch.

"So far we've been using the same combination and it's worked for us," Sammy said. "Fidel has a slight pain in his back so we'll monitor that. If not then Ravi comes in and I know Ravi will do the job for us."

Sammy noted that West Indies' bowling had steadily improved in its discipline and perseverance over the past 18 months, Kemar Roach providing the best evidence of this development by taking 10 wickets for the match in Port-of-Spain, a sterling achievement on any surface but particularly meritorious on a pitch that saw spinners take the new ball in three innings out of four.

NATIONAL TENNIS Amol, Ranjan win doubles title

SPORTS REPORTER

Amol Roy and Ranjan Ram maintained their supremacy in the doubles of the National Tennis Championship when defeated Anwar Hossain and Alamgir Hossain pair in 6-1, 6-0 sets at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna yesterday. This was the fourth national title for Bangla-desh's best tennis pair.

Amol will have his chance to win a double when he competes in the singles final against Biplob Ram at the same venue today. Sharmin Alam Sarda and Isheta Afroz will vie for the women's throne.

Meanwhile, Delwar Hossain Sajal claimed the boys' U-16 title beating favourite Rubel Hossain 6-4, 3-6, 6-1 in the final while Ayesha Sultana defeated Afrana Islam 6-4, 6-7, 4-2 to win the girls' U-16 title. Kawsar Ali won the boys' U-14 title while Rebeka Sultana won the girls' U-14 title.

Mizanur

FROM PAGE 16 second wicket before Mithun and Anamul added 80 for the fourth. The day ended with an unbroken 112-run stand between Taposh Ghosh and the man of the day.

It was his second successive century for Anamul, who struck a century during that controversial Abahani-Victoria game on March 28.

His two prior centuries in this tournament were against Sylhet in October and Rajshahi in November. When asked about his excellent adjustment in the different formats, he said, "I really enjoy this adjustment and I think it doesn't really trouble me."

"I have my eyes on the double-century, something that I have not done ever in my career. But I must tell you, this is the longest I have batted in my life," added Anamul.

SCORES IN BRIEF

RAJSHAHI: First innings 291-4 in 90 overs (Jahurul 87, Mizanur 105, Sabir 31 not out; Enamul 2-94) vs SYLHET. KHULNA: First innings 388-4 in 90 overs (Imrul 87, Anamul 178 not out, Taposh 60 not out; Asif -143) vs DHAKA METRO.

City pray for a favour

AFP, London



Manchester City will be hoping Everton can improve their 20-year Old Trafford jinx this weekend as they aim to stay in touch with Manchester United in the Premier League title race.

After the bitter disappointment of last week's FA Cup semifinal exit to Liverpool, Everton travel to United on Sunday daunted by the knowledge that they have not won at the home of the champions for two decades.

Since a 3-0 win at Old Trafford back in 1992, the Toffees' record reads played 18, lost 15 and drawn three.

Yet City's ex-Everton defender Joleon Lescott is backing his former club to get a result against United that could potentially have a pivotal effect on the final few weeks of the battle for the title.

Lescott revealed he has been cajoling his former teammates via text message this week in a light-hearted attempt to motivate the Toffees.

If Everton avoid defeat at Old Trafford in Sunday's early kick-off, City will have the opportunity to cut United's lead at the top to either three or two points when they travel to bottom club Wolves later in the day.

That would in turn set up a potential title decider at Eastlands on April 30 when United travel across Manchester to face City, who rediscovered their best form last week with a 6-1 thrashing of Norwich at Carrow Road.

Lescott believes the return of Carlos Tevez, who struck a brilliant hat-trick has contributed to City's revival. The unpalatable truth for City however is that a United victory against Everton will raise the prospect of Sir Alex Ferguson's side clinching the title at Eastlands when the two sides meet later this month.

Elsewhere this weekend, the nip-and-tuck race for Champions League qualification could become clearer if third-placed Arsenal beat Chelsea in Saturday's early kick-off at the Emirates.

A win for the third-placed Gunners would leave Chelsea 10 points adrift of their London rivals with four games remaining.

Arsenal winger Gervinho said the club were determined to bounce back after their bid for third place -- and automatic qualification for the Champions League -- suffered a jolt in a 2-1 defeat at home to Wigan on Monday.

Chelsea manager Roberto Di Matteo has indicated he plans to rotate his squad ahead of next week's Champions League semifinal return leg against Barcelona.

Tottenham meanwhile face a tricky away tie at Queens Park Rangers on Saturday hoping to bounce back from last Sunday's 5-1 mauling by Chelsea in the FA Cup.

Having looked assured of automatic qualification for the Champions League in early February, Spurs are now clinging on to fourth place, where they lead Newcastle on goal difference.

দরপত্র আহবান. Table with 2 columns: Details, Amount. Includes information about the 2011-12 financial year and the 2012-13 financial year.

Berdych takes down Murray

Tennis

AFP, Monte Carlo

Tomas Berdych staged a fightback to deny Andy Murray a third semi-final in four years at the Monte Carlo Masters, with the Czech squeezing out a tight 6-7 (4/7), 6-2, 6-3 win on Friday to reach the final four.

Berdych, seeded sixth, will face the winner from top seed Novak Djokovic, playing on despite learning on Friday of the death in Serbia of his grandfather, and Dutch surprise Robin Haase.

Murray could only be frustrated with himself after a performance in which Berdych managed 16 break point chances and converted on five. Murray had one opportunity on the Czech's serve but was unable to take advantage.

"There are a lot of things I would have liked to have done better, it takes a lot of time for me to do it (well) on this surface," said Murray. "It doesn't come straightaway."

"It takes time for me to understand the way I'm needing to play."

"At some points today I did well; some points I didn't do so well. It's going to take me a few weeks. Today is a good match to learn from because I was playing a top player who played very, very well."



Czech Republic's Tomas Berdych hits a return against Andy Murray of Britain during their Monte-Carlo Masters Series match on Friday.