



# A legend. A maverick. A CHAMPION.

Many know Warne after “the ball of the century” in 1993. The big spinning leg-breaks on bouncy tracks in Australia were unheard of before Warne regularly produced such deliveries. Then came the flipper, the zooter and the slider. Truth be told, not many batsmen knew what was happening when Warne was in his elements.

MOHAMMAD ISAM

In an attempt to put these words together, I went through every living memory of Shane Warne. The difficult part is obviously to put my thoughts into words; Warne entered my senses when cricket started to excite me at the age of ten. A whole lifetime of religiously following his playing career, post-international IPL career and then the commentary and punditry. The cricket fan in me takes centre stage when Warne was in front of me. Childhood ended for me when Bangabandhu National Stadium stopped hosting cricket. Warne's death marks the end of an era of cricket following for the absolute love for the game.

Warne pricked the senses of a ten-year old me in the 1990s with his theatre. Staring down the batsman like a fast bowler, the ball flicking from one hand to the other, the walk, the action, the flick of the wrist. Turn, spin, overspin. He had it all.

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Warne was in the thick of things in six Ashes triumphs from 1993 to 2007, losing only once in the epic 2005 series in England. He was part of the Australia side that wrested back the Frank Worrell Trophy in 1995. He won the World Cup in 1999, and one of his final big achievements was playing a vital role in Australia's 2004-05 Test series win in India.

He finished on 708 Test wickets at 25.41 average, bettered only by Muttiah Muralidaran who overtook him in numbers. The pair were immortalized when they were named in the Australia-Sri Lanka Test series trophy some years ago.

Warne was a handy batsman lower down the order, most famous for bailing out Australia in a 2001 Test against New Zealand with his 99, his highest score. He made quick runs as an ODI pinch-hitter a few times.

But it was his fielding that often surprised many. Warne was simply world-class at the slips for many years. When Mark Taylor retired, he took up the first slip position. Around the outfield too, he was athletic and powerful. Little details that often got lost in his overarching Hollywood persona.

Warne was embroiled in a match-fixing scandal, got banned for a year for using a banned substance. He had his personal life pasted in the tabloids in the UK quite regularly. Warne even got caught pinching a cigarette when he was promoting a nicotine-substitute manufacturer. But it all faded away in front of his mastery.

Warne was keenly aware of what he meant to the game. He was an out-and-out cricketer, and a revolutionary leg-spinner. Before him, the likes of Abdul Qadir and Richie Benaud had been successful leggies. Qadir, like Warne, was also a maverick, famously growing a goatee so that he looked like a French magician. Imran Khan thought it would add to his mystique. Benaud was the straight cut guy. He was the famous Australian captain from the 1960s who was more of an allrounder.

Warne's story touched everyone. He had the talent to play Australian rules football for his beloved St Kilda Club in Melbourne, but he went into cricket. The initiation wasn't great: he ran away from the Australia Cricket Academy. Thought it was too much hard work.

His Test debut was another relatable experience. He got smashed by Ravi Shastri, Sachin Tendulkar and co, famously taking just one wicket in the game.

Terry Jenner, Warne's leg-spin guru, dragged him out of his house literally, and retrained him as a bowler. Warne's rebirth

as a leg-spinner was also the rejuvenation of cricket's most difficult art.

Warne being pitted against Sachin Tendulkar in the late 1990s gave cricket fans of that generation its first big rivalry. Ahead of the 1998 tour, Tendulkar famously trained harder for Warne, who was quietly struggling with a shoulder injury. Tendulkar had the wood over Warne for most of his career, but the nature of the rivalry stood out. It didn't have the brutality of the Don Bradman-Harold Larwood battles, or the combustibility of the Dennis Lillee-Viv Richards skirmishes. When Warne bowled to Tendulkar or Lara, it was cricket at its best. A mesmerizing artist confronting two masters with the willow.

Warne never left cricket even after his celebrated retirement in 2007. He was always going to be a hot property in T20s. He led Rajasthan Royals to the inaugural IPL triumph, famously promoting the likes of Ravinder Jadeja and Yusuf Pathan into starring roles. Warne was always known as a natural leader and in the few occasions he led Australia, he gave glimpses of his aggressive captaincy. Rajastishan gave him the blank canvas to draw up what he wanted to do.

Perhaps Warne's greatest legacy is the unbelievable number of leg-spinners who now rule the roost in T20s. Rashid Khan, Imran Tahir, Adil Rashid, Adam Zampa and Yuzvendra Chahal are just some of the names that come up in everyday conversations. The progress of the left-arm unorthodox spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Tabraiz Shamsi is Warne's contribution to cricket: now cricket coaches, analysts, orgainers and team owners trust leg-spin.

As I search for the final words, thousands swim around but only three probably describe Warne the best.

A legend. A maverick. A champion.

*\*\*The writer is Bangladesh Correspondent for ESPNcricinfo.*

“[Mike] Gatting has absolutely no idea what has happened to it ... he still doesn't know!”

RICHIE BENAUD on Shane Warne's 'Ball of the Century' in 1993.



## A peek through Warne's looking glass

The way people still wonder about how the pyramids of Giza and other giant stone block megalithic structures were built around the world, new generations of cricket fans down the line will look back at Shane Warne's 1001 Tests and ODI wickets, those magical moments under pressure, and scratch their heads the same. Blessed with a stellar cricketing brain, Warne was more than a great leg spin bowler, if not the greatest bowler ever. Arrived on the centre stage with 'the ball of century' and left with a bang as well, however, without a warning. Gone too soon, left a huge void, but the hottest of stars die young, as they say. Warne would undoubtedly remain a lighthouse in the ocean for not only aspiring leg spinners but bowlers, cricketers and sportspeople in general. Arguably the most influential cricketer of his generation, Warne's life's arc, on and off the field, makes the human side of his towering personality stand out above all else in the end. Below is a brief compilation of quotes from the legend himself, curated by The Daily Star, which sheds some perspective on his career and life.



### ON HIMSELF:

I am no dummy, mate, that's for sure.

### ON CRICKET:

To me, cricket is a simple game. Keep it simple and just go out and play.

### ON BOWLING SPIN:

Part of the art of bowling spin is to make the batsman think something special is happening when it isn't.

### ON THE BEST BATTER OF HIS TIME:

Sachin Tendulkar is in my time the best player without doubt - daylight second, Brian Lara third.

### ON HIS

### ACHIEVEMENTS

### AS A CRICKETER:

I'm proud of what I've achieved in cricket, as once I didn't think I was good enough.

### ON FANS' EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS SPORTS:

We've just got to be careful - with all sports, let alone cricket - I think there's so much emphasis on doing the right thing all the time, but I think the public want to be entertained when they come to watch sport.

### ON CRICKET PHILOSOPHY OF THE AUSTRALIAN TEAM:

With Australians we're saying we're going to win before we start playing and pretty much keep on saying that.

### ON LIFE:

You can't afford to live your life with regrets.

### ON HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH TENDULKAR AND LARA:

With Sachin Tendulkar and Brian Lara, it was better to be friends and make them smile rather than wind them up.

### ON MAKING MISTAKES AND HIS SCANDALS:

People make mistakes and I've probably made a few more than others, but unfortunately, mine is also a bit more public. That's the way it is. You've just got to get on with life. After all, it's not a rehearsal.

### ON ACTING CHILDLIKE:

The problem is there's still a big kid inside me who likes to have fun. I am passionate about my cricket and I love my family, but I'm also a kid and maybe I need to grow up... And maybe I don't.



## ‘His bowling will continue to inspire generations’

MAZHAR UDDIN

The current generation of youngsters may have not witnessed Shane Warne, who retired from cricket in 2007 after cementing himself as the greatest leg-spinner in cricketing history, but his legacy and aura are things that cannot be ignored.

The news that the 'King of Spin' was found dead at his Villa in Thailand on March 4 at the age of just 52 shocked everyone. But while he may have left sooner than anticipated, he influenced innumerable youngsters to chance their arm across the world and an example of his impact can be seen in the cricket academies in Dhaka.

16-year-old Rafin Ahmed is one of those examples. He joined Ankur Cricketers Academy at the Abahani Club ground in Dhanmondi under former Bangladesh leg spinner and prominent coach Wahidul Gani.

“I never watched Warne play live because he had retired from international cricket when I was one or two years old. But since I have been following cricket since childhood, I



used to hear a lot about him. I developed an interest in his bowling. I started to watch his old matches on YouTube and it was love at first sight. I decided to become a leg-spinner right away,” Rafin said.

Another example of the legacy that Warne left behind could be observed at the outer nets of the Abahani ground, where a youngster

was bowling leggies with an action identical to Warne's. That young man was Asif Alam, who plays first division cricket and dreams of representing Bangladesh given the fact that the national team is in desperate search for a leg-spinner.

“I dream of representing the national team because we have been searching for a leg-spinner. I want to

be someone like Shane Warne, who changed the dimensions and the art of leg-spin. It is outstanding how he made everyone fall in love with this art. I was amazed to see the 'ball of the century' from Warne. Since then I have always wanted to bowl like him,” Asif said.

Wahidul is one of the very few specialist leg-spin coaches in Bangladesh and has been coaching for over three decades now. The veteran informed that many parents had come to him over the years urging him to groom their child as the next Warne.

“Leg-spin is a difficult art to be honest and it's tough to master. Although the new generation may have not seen Warne during his playing days, there was a time when many youngsters were keen to become leg-spinners after watching the Australian great. Warne left a lasting legacy and I think even though he is no longer with us, his bowling will continue to inspire many more generations in the coming days,” said Wahidul.



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