

Golden jubilee of a win in which India dared the impossible

DIFFERENT STROKES SUNIL GAVASKAR



Sunil Gavaskar and Gundappa Viswanath, the heroes of the 1976 Port of Spain win. (Picture sourced from Facebook)

Today happens to be exactly 50 years to the day when India beat the then world record score in a fourth innings win by chasing down a target of 403 (406/4) against the West Indies at the picturesque Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Firstly, a little background. This was the third Test of the series, with the West Indies being one-up in Barbados and the second Test in Port of Spain being drawn. The Indian caravan had moved to Guyana for the third Test. We were welcomed by torrential rain, so the game against Guyana was washed out. The rains didn't stop. With the Bourda Oval flooded, the prospect of the Test match happening looked

remote by the minute. Frantic parleys took place between the West Indies Cricket Board and the Indian team management about moving the Test match to Barbados or Port of Spain, where India had played barely a week earlier.

Having lost in three days in Barbados, we weren't too keen on going there again, and with the large number of Indian-origin supporters in Trinidad and having had a good, albeit drawn Test match there, we were only too happy to get back there.

The West Indies took a big lead in the first innings and Clive Lloyd waited for Alvin

Kallicharran to get to his century and then declared, giving us four-and-a-half sessions to survive for a draw.

Yes, when we went into bat in the fourth innings of the match, we were not thinking of the target but just survival. By the end of the day, we were just Aunshuman Gaekwad's wicket down with 134 on the board. Since I didn't want to know how many runs I had got till I was out and didn't look at the scoreboard, I wasn't aware that I was on 86 when the stumps were pulled out for the fourth day.

There are some patches of

batting that stay in the mind and that knock was the most fluent one of my career. I say most fluent because the next morning I scratched around for an hour to get another 16 runs before being both caught and stumped off the left-arm Raphick Jumadeen.

Gundappa Viswanath

joined the steady Mohinder Amarnath and they kept the scoreboard ticking at a good pace. Vishy was simply Vishy, as he rocked on to the back-foot and, with the super-short bat handle of his, was cutting the ball to the boundary faster than it came on to the bat. When Michael Holding

and Co. tried to bang it in shorter, he was up on his toes, flicking off his chest to the square-leg fence.

Mohinder, as stoic as ever, was defending solidly and, as always, running smartly between the wickets, though ironically, he got run out as we neared the target set by Lloyd. It was around this stage that we started thinking a win was possible, but needed Vishy to bat a little longer. He too was run out, but at that situation, it was our game unless there was a sudden collapse. That didn't happen as Brijesh Patel and Madan Lal played some sparkling shots and took us home with a few overs to spare.

Remember, this was the time when a day's play was five-and-a-half hours with a

90-minute post-Tea session. On the last day, it was the mandatory 20 overs of play starting half an hour after Tea.

We were over the moon now as the series was level with one Test match left to go. The scenes in the change room were incredible, but we were conscious that the Windies team could hear us as a wall separating the teams. Later, we were told that we had overtaken Sir Don Bradman's Aussie team's record of 404 runs in the fourth innings to win a Test match.

Some wins stay in the mind more than others and this one certainly does. It brings a smile or two. It was from this win that we started believing anything was pos-

sible and thereafter, during my career, we nearly pulled off 400-plus targets a couple more times.

In 1978, Australia set us 493 to get in the fourth innings in the deciding last Test in Adelaide with the series locked 2-1. We ended up with 445, with not one batsman getting a century. Then, a year later, we nearly got 438 set by Brearley's England, again in the last Test of the series. The match was drawn with India short by 9 runs and two wickets in hand.

Our record chase has been broken a couple of times since, but 50 years down the road, the memories of that unbelievable win are still fresh in the minds of all those who played in it.

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