

CRICKET The Setting Sun

BY: Javid Lateef

A time it was, what a time it was ... it was ...

As we draw closer to the end of 2008, the sun is also setting on some old stalwarts of Indian Cricket. *Laxman, Dravid, Kumble*, and even to an extent *Tendulkar*, are in the twilight of their careers. *Sourav Ganguly* has just been axed from the Rest of India squad that is playing the Irani Trophy, and has been told that he is no longer in contention for a spot in the Test side. What has also been conveyed to the seniors - "perform or perish!"

The Indian batting's middle order has been almost impossible to replace. During the last decade *Tendulkar, Dravid, Laxman* and *Ganguly* have racked up runs against all opposition, making it virtually impossible for any of the youngsters to nudge their way into the team. Occasionally *Laxman* or *Ganguly* fall out of favor and they try people like *Kaif* and *Yuvraj*, but nobody seems to be in their caliber.

Fast forward to the just concluded Lanka series. All the hype was about *Ajanta Mendis*, this unorthodox leggie who was gaining all sorts of accolades. The battle was the tried and tested Indian middle order against

the spin of *Murali* and *Mendis*. India lost the series 2-1. The "fab 4" as they are called could not read *Mendis* at all. He had them looking like school kids playing International Cricket!!!

For the ODIs, *Dhoni* returned as captain and the middle order reverted to a younger, more aggressive middle order. Instead of letting *Murali* and *Mendis* dictate terms, the batsmen were aggressive; *Dhoni* leading from the front here with innings after innings of calculated aggression.

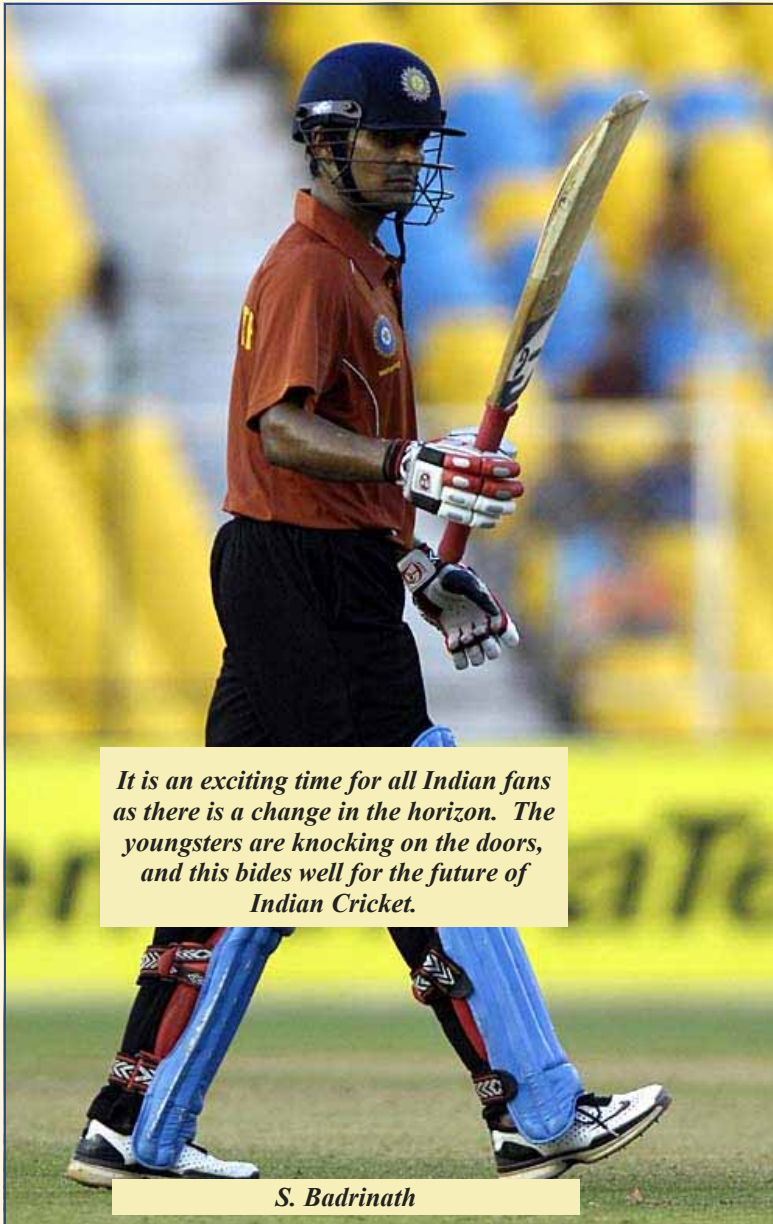
I am guessing this was as an eye opener for the selectors. *Laxman* and *Ganguly* are (were) pretty good players of spin, but they seemed too scared to use their feet against the Lankan spin attack, unlike *Gambhir* and *Sehwag* (who were the only 2 batsmen to score), who made batting look quite easy when they were at the crease. They were using their feet to get to the ball and not letting the spinners dictate terms.

Let us not forget what these guys have done for Indian Cricket though. *Ganguly* was the best Indian test captain we have seen, till now. He brought an aura of aggressive behavior around the squad that was missing in all previous teams. *Dravid* has been "Mr. Consistent" for as long as I can remember. The "Wall", as he is called, has been the backbone of building an innings for the Indian team for a long time. *Laxman*, a supreme artist with wrists so supple, a mere caress seems to send the ball rocketing to the fence, and who can forget the innings against the Aussies at Chepauk that turned the tide and won the series for the Indians.

It is a time of change and these older players will be phased out. *Rohit Sharma* and *Badrinath* seem to have the temperament to play Test cricket. Others like *Suresh Raina* and *Manoj Tiwary* are immensely talented, but will need a few longer innings in Domestic cricket to prove themselves.

It is an exciting time for all Indian fans as there is a change in the horizon. The youngsters are knocking on the doors, and this bides well for the future of Indian Cricket.

Till next time ... adios.



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S. Badrinath

