

Kapil's 175 an epic knock, insist his '83 Devils

Kapil Dev's heroic 175 at Tunbridge Wells will always remain a mystery to all those not fortunate enough to be there at the picturesque Nevill Ground on that historic summer day 25 years ago -- to be precise June 18. But his '83 batchmates swear that it is an all-time great knock, one that instilled self-belief in a bunch of no-hopers who had gone on to turn that World Cup on its head.

When Kapil walked out to bat at the smallest ground on the county circuit in Kent, India were nine for four and soon 17 for five against Zimbabwe. India were all but out of the World Cup. A win alone could have kept them afloat and Kapil single-handedly kept them alive, hammering a 138-ball unbeaten 175 with 16 fours and six sixes at a rate of 127 runs per 100 balls. India won that match by 31 runs and the rest, as they say, is history.

Little did the 23-year-old Indian captain know that his innings would change the destiny of world cricket.

"The man who showed us the way was our captain with that gutsy innings," recalled senior pro of that side Sunil Gavaskar.

"Can you imagine that India, no-hopers before the tournament began, went on to show the world that they are world champions. It could not have been possible but for him (Kapil)," Gavaskar said at the felicitation gathering of the big boys of the Summer of '83 here Sunday.

"That Tunbridge Wells innings of Kapil was the best innings I have seen. I do not think people understand what a remarkable innings it was."

"The top order was not able to put bat to the ball and here was a man who comes in and start hitting them to the distant corners of the ground."

Gavaskar recalls how the whole team disappeared when Kapil returned to pavilion at lunch.

"There was nobody in the dressing room when Kapil came. We were all hiding our faces because our captain has showed us how to bat. It was from there that India took-off and we started believing in ourselves. That knock was an inspiration to the entire team."

But Kapil's knock, then the ODI record, will forever remain part of cricketing folklore for a handful of spectators and the two teams present at Neville ground, which till that game was a venue for only week-end festival matches.

Alas, there is no video footage of that great innings as British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) staff was on strike that day.

"There is no footage of that innings. Had it been on tape, it would have been the hottest property today." said Ravi Shastri.

Yashpal Sharma, who played a crucial knock in the semifinal against England, said that every time they went in to bat in a crisis situation after that Kapil's innings, they thought if the captain could do it, so could the entire team.

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