

SACHIN @50



CELEBRATING A MAESTRO

SARAFAN DINDA 23,

SHYAM SRINIVASAN

Dear Sachin,

Happy 50th Birthday! Well, that's definitely not all that I want to say.

Exactly 25 years back, on your birthday, I watched you live in Sharjah as you scored your second ton in three days. It was difficult to wrap my head around what I saw in that stadium, one youngster stood ground like a knight fighting goliaths, and I knew I was watching a star who would soon be in the pantheon of legends. I don't remember when you were first hailed as the 'God of Cricket' but I knew after the match that the moniker was for a lifetime. Ever since I've been watching, from a non-striker's end, all your duels.

Every match that we see is in the physical context. But there must have been so much going on mentally. Before, during, after the match and as you tour in return of their visit, nothing is conclusive. I've seen that while there is respect among the players, there is also fierce desire to win. While many got into slugfests which have had their own expiry dates, you have never been someone to chest thump, we have only ever seen a composed Sachin. Many a time, even when the decision was not in your favour, I don't recall any 'pitch-rage'. You just walked, maybe made a point or two. You were absolutely sure of how you wouldn't want to conduct yourself. Staying unfazed is a take-away for all of us. Why expend emotions when the media and the medium have eternal memory. When I look back at your conduct on and off-field, I think you just strode down with grace and

humility. Sachin, you've shown us what it means to be a true leader, to inspire others through your actions, and to always stay true to your values. You have taught us that sometimes it's important for us to tuck our bat and simply walk away, knowing that we will be back.

Over the years you became a legend from a prodigy, saw the game change and even changed the game! A memorable innings which probably demonstrated to us all that the playbook can always be rewritten, was your 200* against the Proteas in Gwalior. Everyone finally believed that every impossible can be reached and breached. Cricinfo, the website, had crashed when you were on 198* as 5.5 million people had logged in to see the first double ton in history. And while you turn 50 you still hold the highest number of half centuries—264, a record which probably be never broken. The sheer longevity of your career offers a deep insight about how incredibly and maniacally focused you were about each innings of yours. This passion is a lesson in endurance for every soul, whether they follow or don't follow the game—stay long at the crease and things will happen. And I genuinely believe Sir Viv had the comment that explains you the best: 'He has been a genius when it comes to ability, a Trojan when it comes to work ethic and manic when it comes to his focus.' Neither did a bloodied nose stop you, nor did the tennis elbow. Both were impactful injuries and could have changed the course of your career. There surely are many more, but these two stand out, since you must have taken a step back, rethought of your strategy and made a significant comeback. Through your resilience you've inspired generations to chase their dreams and to never give up, and for that, we can't thank you enough!

How can I write about you and not mention the teary-eyed innings you played after the Mumbai siege. It was a moment that changed the country's sentiments and brought people together in a way that few other things could. Life as we know cannot be lived backwards but our memories make up for such moments which we want to re-live. We have memories, we all do—individually, with friends and families; but if we ask every Indian of a marquee memory they have, which overlaps with a billion more—only one name would emerge and that is yours! You were the link which gave a billion souls moments in their lives and a hope that India can never lose with Number 10 at the crease.

And when Anjali said, 'I can imagine cricket without Sachin, but I can't imagine Sachin without cricket,'—neither could I. But then I see your videos when you step out of your car and play some galli-cricket and spending a lot more time on things you love doing—family, travel, and so much more, I realize that from the maidans of Mumbai to a global icon, nothing changed the humble Sachin Tendulkar. Only your immeasurable love for the sport changed the sport immeasurably!

Batting at the crease and taking fresh guard:

S.R. Tendulkar – 50* | India – 75*

This is once in a life-time score. Wishing you the best for your chase of the next 50*.