

Dennis Lillee

Dennis Lillee, considered by many to have been "the complete bowler", was the heart of Australia's attack for more than a decade. Through a combination of ability, showmanship and sheer hard work he won the loyal following of the nation's crowds, who often roared his name as he ran in to bowl. And Lillee repaid their faith with interest - he was the type of character whom captains could rely on to bowl "one more over" at the end of a long spell, and often made breakthroughs when success seemed unlikely. Armed with a copybook action, Lillee broke Lance Gibbs' world record of 309 Test wickets and finished with 355 dismissals from just 70 matches to underline his status as one of the all-time greats. Since retirement he has also retained a high profile through his commitment to developing new generations of fast bowlers.

When Lillee came on to the international scene, he bowled with frightening pace. In December 1971 he decimated a powerful World XI side in Perth, taking 8 for 29 from 7.1 overs in the first innings, and went on to claim 31 Test wickets at 17.67 during the 1972 Ashes tour. Many believed his career was over after he broke down with spinal stress fractures the following year. However, Lillee made a famous recovery following a regime of intensive physiotherapy.

In the mid-1970s Lillee was teamed up with express paceman Jeff Thomson. They became the most feared bowling pairing of the era and inflicted greatest damage on England: rattling the tourists' batsmen in the 1974-75 series in Australia; and then setting up (with Max Walker) an away series win a few months later in the first Test at Birmingham.

Throughout his career, Lillee also had a superb partner behind the stumps in wicketkeeper Rod Marsh. The dismissal "caught Marsh, bowled Lillee" appears 95 times on Test cards, a record pairing which has yet to be seriously challenged.

After a match-shaping performance in the 1977 Centenary Test against England, Australia's Test team temporarily lost Lillee's services to World Series Cricket. During this time, Lillee continued to work on his fitness, and honed the efficiency of his approach and delivery action.

Further fine performances after his return to Test cricket and through to the early 1980s reflected Lillee's increased ability to outwit batsmen. He had lost some of the pace of his youth but continued to exploit batsmen's weaknesses utilising clever variations in length, pace and movement.

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His best Test figures were achieved in a remarkable match against the West Indies in 1981. To the delight of the MCG crowd, Lillee sent opener Desmond Haynes and night watchman Colin Croft back to the pavilion late on day one, and then bowled Vivian Richards to leave the tourists stunned at 4 for 10 at stumps. Lillee - who passed Gibbs' wicket-taking record with Larry Gomes' dismissal the following day - ended up with 7 for 83 in the first innings and 10 wickets for the match, and Australia recorded a famous upset win.

Lillee, who was named in Australia's Test Team of the Century and the Hall of Fame, now has an international reputation as a fast bowling coach. Until recently he also continued to bowl for the ACB Chairman's XI against touring sides, and remained a challenge to Test-class batsman. In 1999-2000, the 50-year-old bowled out of these matches in befitting fashion, with Dennis and his son Adam taking three wickets apiece against a Pakistan touring side.

(thanks to SAHOF for bio)



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