



DEFYING THE YEARS

It's a cliché in sport, but never has it been more true than in the case of James Anderson: he really is getting better with age.

by Richard Asher

Four years ago, when England last visited our shores for the Ashes, we wrote in these very pages that it was “more than likely the Australian swansong” for Jimmy Anderson.

Although we did the journalistically prudent thing of leaving the door open, we honestly didn't really feel like there was any doubt. The man was 35: a venerable age for any international cricketer – never mind a fast bowler with nothing left to prove. He wouldn't be back.

Yet here he is again, raring to go. The 506 wickets Anderson had at the start of the 2017-18 series have now swollen to 632. In that time, he has overtaken Courtney Walsh and Glenn McGrath to become the leading Test wicket-taker among fast bowlers. Only two spinners lie ahead of him on the list, and the next target, aptly, is an Australian. One against whom

he played on his first trip here in 2006-07. A certain SK Warne.

The idea that Anderson could reel in the Victorian's 708 poles before he retires seems a little less preposterous with every Test the Lancashire man gobbles up like a ravenous twenty-something. The notion that he will ever retire is beginning to look a little presumptuous, come to think of it. With his 40th birthday just a few months away, the guy is breaking every rule in the book. We won't be making any big statements this time.

NO TIME TO REST

While Anderson's Test bowling abilities have been lauded for years and need little introduction, the respect commanded by the relentless right-arter has gone to a new level in recent times. Anybody who knows the aches and pains that come with having four decades under your belt ▶



cannot help but doff their hat to a man whose motivation, performance and fitness at the very highest level suggest he never got the memo from Mother Nature. Cricket aficionados have begun to appreciate that they are lucky to be alive at this time: the grandkids will be hearing about Jimmy Anderson.

In England, of course, the adoration runs riot. A no-nonsense northerner who always produces the goods and

doesn't like a fuss... what's not to love? With every season that passes, the delirium with which they sing his name in the stands seems to crank up a notch. It's as though they can't quite believe their luck: he's still turning up and he's better than ever!

You can see where they're coming from. This English summer gone, in an era of 'rest and rotation' no less, Anderson was impossible to leave out. He didn't miss a single one of England's six home Tests, and only a brave soul would have bet against him being rested for the seventh, that Test-that-never-was series finale against India on his home patch at Old Trafford. Where they've already named a stand after him – a rare honour for an active sportsperson.

If there was any fear that Anderson was past his best, his double strike at the first Test of the India series in Nottingham blew that right out of the water. With India 1-104 in their first

ABOVE: Anderson celebrates capturing the wicket of South Africa's Faf du Plessis in Cape Town, 2020

innings, and England up against it after a weak first knock, Anderson found the notoriously elusive edge of Cheteshwar Pujara. Next right-hander to take guard? India's talismanic skipper and perennial danger ▶



JAMES MICHAEL ANDERSON

BORN: 30 July 1982

HOMETOWN: Burnley, England

ROLE: Bowler

BATTING: Left hand

BOWLING: Right-arm fast medium

ASHES DEBUT: 2006

ASHES APPEARANCES: 32

TEST APPEARANCES: 166

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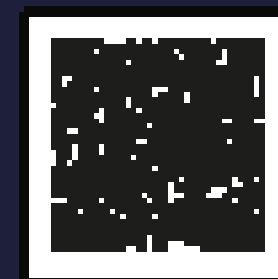
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ABOVE: Anderson acknowledges the crowd after claiming his 600th Test wicket – that of Pakistan’s Azhar Ali – in August 2020

man, Virat Kohli. He nicked his first ball. Trent Bridge went nuts.

Following that up with a five-fer at Lord’s, Anderson ticked over like clockwork throughout the series, ripping out the same pair when England routed the opponents for 78 at Leeds. It’s often like that with Anderson in these wily latter years – he may not take the most wickets, but he’ll cook up that perfect nut he needs to get big top-order scalps.

ON THE ROAD

Still, it’s that age-defying hunger of his that keeps the whole thing going. Nothing underlined that better than the second Test against Sri Lanka in Galle early in 2021. He had been left out of the first under the rotation policy – and emerged from drinks-carrying like a man possessed. He performed the staggering feat of taking 6-40 in 29 overs on a deck not known for its kindness to fast bowlers. This in mercilessly tropical conditions, and while dealing with quarantines and bubbles. Though he could

“On his home patch at Old Trafford, they’ve already named a stand after him – a rare honour for an active sportsperson”

easily have stayed at home, he chose to come and settle a score with an island where his record wasn’t all that rosy.

That was less than a year ago. And Sri Lanka is one thing; Australia is another altogether. Anderson’s record here is worse than that in any other nation. He averages 26.62 in Test cricket; his average against Australia

is 34.56, and his average in Australia is slightly worse at 35.43. That said, he hasn’t faced Australia since 2019, and he hasn’t played a Test on our soil in almost four years.

Now, as he embarks on a remarkable fifth Ashes tour, will he settle a score with another little island far from home? Only a fool would bet against it. ●



ASHES BOWLING RECORD

- MATCHES: 32
- INNINGS: 59
- OVERS: 1,175.1
- MAIDENS: 285
- RUNS: 3,595
- WICKETS: 104
- BBI: 6-47
- BBM: 10-158
- AVERAGE: 34.56
- ECONOMY: 3.05
- STRIKE RATE: 67.7
- 5W: 5
- 10W: 1



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