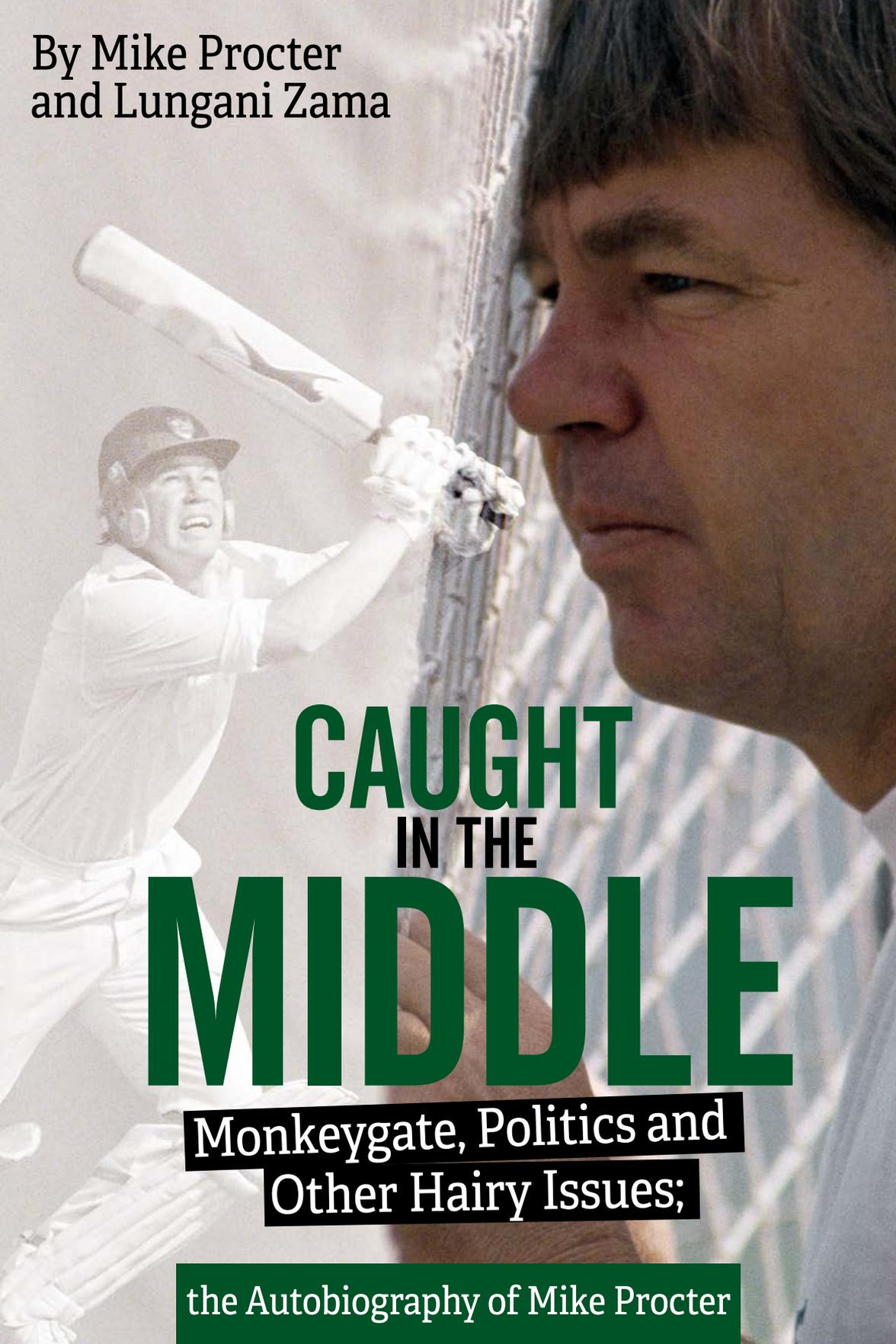


By Mike Procter
and Lungani Zama



**CAUGHT
IN THE
MIDDLE**

**Monkeygate, Politics and
Other Hairy Issues;**

the Autobiography of Mike Procter

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Chapter 1

An untimely blast

THE DAY of 8 May 2002 will always sit in my memory as one of the most surreal of my entire life. On the face of it, that Wednesday morning should have been just like any other, save for the fact that the second Test between Pakistan and New Zealand was starting that day in Karachi.

Pakistan had won the first Test quite easily, with Shoaib Akhtar producing some of the fastest bowling I had ever seen. The Black Caps, managed by Jeff Crowe, were expected to make a stiffer fist of it in the second Test. As it turned out, they never got the chance, and were on the plane back to New Zealand before the end of one of the most dramatic days of my life – and I have had a few!

It was just after 8am that morning when things took a wicked turn for the worse. Pakistan has always been one of my favourite cricket nations; all the people are fanatical about the game, the weather is hot – a bit like Durban, where I played most of my cricket – and their national team always seems to find a way to be entertaining.

This was my first tour as an international match referee, and completed a career in the game that had started as a player, then

coach, international team manager, commentator and now, match referee. Cricket had been my life for just about all of my life, and I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

The one-day series had preceded the Test matches, and aside from a bit of crowd disturbance which had been sorted out with the help of the home skipper, Moin Khan, things had gone along pretty smoothly. After a long and mostly fruitful association with the sport, I had figured that being a match referee was going to be the least frenetic of tasks, aside from the comfort of the commentary box, of course!

How wrong I was. At around 8:15am, having just finished breakfast with the match umpires, I was in my room on the sixth floor of our hotel, when an incredible noise froze me in fear. The force of the blast shattered the glass from my window back into the room, and the whole building felt like it was shaking for a few seconds.

As we were to later find out, a suicide bomb had gone off in a car outside the hotel next to us, tearing apart a bus and, such was the force of it all, it really felt like it had come from somewhere below us, in the same building. Luckily, none of the players or the officials were too badly hurt, as everyone was just preparing to go downstairs to the buses that were waiting to take us to the ground.

I distinctly remember walking down the stairs, as we couldn't take the lift, and passing someone who had apparently suffered a mini heart attack. Thankfully, they had been attended to by then, but things were significantly worse outside. On the street, the scene was like something out of a war movie. There were body parts strewn all over, as well as parts of cars and the hotel building itself. It was horrific, but as the match referee, I had to try and take some sort of control of the situation, and ensure the players' safety. The Kiwis were pretty shaken up. Their physio, Dayle Shackel, had been struck by bits of glass because he was standing

too close to his window at the time of the blast. Having consulted the International Cricket Council (ICC), I then called a hasty meeting with the team managers and captains, and informed them that the tour had been abandoned.

New Zealand, understandably, were in no state to continue, and that left Pakistan with very few alternatives. I can still remember how distraught the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) director at the time, Brig Munawar Rana, was. He kept on apologising, saying that he had let everyone down. Of course, it wasn't his fault at all. You can plan for most things in the world, but you can never predict the evil thoughts of a few rotten apples.

That entire morning was such a blur, and I still couldn't tell you how long the time lapse was from the moment the bomb went off, to the time we were on our way to the airport, instead of the ground for the first morning. Everything whizzed by, but there was simply no way that we could have stayed a minute longer. By the time we got on the plane, we had been informed that 11 French nationals, working on submarine projects, had been killed.

The entire incident had nothing to do with cricket, but it immediately changed the face of the game. To their great credit, and the relief of the Pakistan people and its cricket board, New Zealand returned in the 2003/04 season to fulfil their tour obligations. Sadly, that 2002 incident wasn't an isolated incident, and the 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore meant the end of tours to Pakistan.

Sitting on the plane going back to South Africa, it was all still sinking in. Whatever ideas I had about match refereeing being a nice way to end my long love affair with the game had been violently shaken out of me and, in hindsight, I guess my very first tour as an international match referee should have been a warning for what was to come over the next five years on the job.

Having enjoyed a playing career of nearly 20 years, where I often had little time to consider consequences and played purely

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on instinct, I was soon to learn that it wasn't just impulsive batsmen who could be caught on the fence. As a referee, you were always in the middle, and the decisions you made sometimes had huge implications.

As I have gone on to find out, some implications actually stick with you for life.

Chapter 2

India, a place for new beginnings

1991 WAS a historic year for South African cricket. After decades of being dormant, we got the recall from the International Cricket Council, thanks to the sustained efforts of Dr Ali Bacher and his team. It was incredibly exciting, and the next big thing for us was to go off on the first tour abroad, to India. There were to be no Test matches, but it didn't matter one jot to us. We were travelling somewhere as representatives of South Africa, and that alone was huge. We were replacing Pakistan as opponents at the last minute, of course, and it was funny to see some tickets that still stated India–Pakistan on them. Their cancellation was a godsend to us, of course, and we took it with both hands.

For some reason, I remember being a little concerned about what kit we would be wearing for the trip to India. It was the first time a South African touring team had come together in two decades, and it would have been the last thing on anyone's mind to design one. In the midst of getting passports and visas, never

mind actually picking a team, worrying about kit was probably a bit random, but it certainly sticks in my mind.

Of course, the real headache for me as a coach was what team was going over to India. Immediately, I wanted Clive Rice to be my captain, and Ali agreed completely. Ricey was perfect for the situation; he was experienced, and he had the respect of all of the players. As an all-rounder, Ricey could also contribute to the cause with bat and ball and, though he had lost a yard of pace, he was still canny enough to look after himself in the middle. His exploits for the 'Mean Machine' of Transvaal were well known amongst the squad, so there was no objection to his leadership.

Because the tour was in November, it didn't give us too much time to see what players were in form domestically. We went with the guys we knew had done well over a couple of seasons and, considering the hasty turnaround, I thought we did okay. It doesn't happen too often that a team full of debutants has quite so much experience, but we managed to get stalwarts like Jimmy Cook, Ricey, keeper Dave Richardson, and then the excitement of a young attack that included the really fast Allan Donald, and the swing of Richard Snell.

Adrian Kuiper was one of the hardest hitters of a ball I had ever seen, and he bowled some handy medium pace, too. We ticked a lot of boxes, and we had left-armed Tim Shaw as the spin option. Getting to Calcutta, as it was known then, was an adventure in itself. A lot of us were taken out of our comfort zones. India, as many will tell you, is an attack on all your senses. The minute you land there as a tourist, you are taken aback by the sheer vastness of it all.

What's more, as cricketers, you are immediately elevated to a lot more than just another tourist. It is a country that lives for cricket, and whether you are in the breakfast room, in a cab, at a restaurant or the airport, there will be the obligatory piece of

advice from a local. South Africa has always had a mix of sports, different seasons that dictated what was played.

In India, it is cricket. And then more cricket. To be in a place that lived for one sport was quite the start for our team of newbies. But it was more than just the cricket. We certainly had no idea what traffic meant, and the sheer volume of people on the streets, around the hotel, at practice, at the welcome press conference, it was all pretty overwhelming.

But all those people were nothing compared to the 90,000 that crammed into Eden Gardens on 10 November 1991 for our very first one-day international. The rumour was that they were trying to break the world record, but they were not sure if they pulled it off. Whether or not they did, they certainly had more firecrackers in a sporting venue. The smog that greeted Cook and Andrew Hudson when they walked out to bat was incredible. It was very early, a 9am start, but already the stands were absolutely crammed.

We had been told that India truly loved their cricket, but we had no way of being able to comprehend it without seeing it for ourselves. They cheered at the mere sight of their players, and wickets and boundaries were greeted with huge roars. It was, in a sense, an intimidating scene, but we were too busy pinching ourselves about the fact that it was happening. I can still remember Ali, smartly turned out in a suit, clapping on the openers.

How he managed to stop sweating in a full suit, in the cauldron that was Calcutta, was really remarkable, but the pride on his face told quite a story, too. He was immensely proud, and quite justifiably, too. He would later describe it as the greatest day in his life, which was saying a lot. If you consider that Ali had captained (albeit briefly) a team regarded as one of the best on paper for his country, and then all he achieved in his personal capacity, to rank our first day back in the international fold as the best said just how much South African cricket meant to him. This

had been a long time coming, and now it was finally happening. I want to say it didn't matter that we got beaten in the first match, but it did. We were a proud team, and were well aware that the world was also looking on with intrigue at what we would bring to the table.

In the circumstances, scoring 177 for 8 was never going to be enough. Kepler Wessels scored a battling half-century, and he got some support from Kuiper, but our top order hadn't fired. India were in early trouble, thanks to Donald's burst with the new ball, but their ship was steadied by a youngster by the name of Sachin Tendulkar.

We had already heard about this teenage sensation, who had made his Test debut when most people were still at school, and on that day he showed what the fuss was about. It wasn't that he blew us away, but rather the fact that he took charge of the situation, and calmly repelled everything that our attack threw at him. He was very correct, very still, and he struck all of us as a star in the making. Quite how big a star he would be was to become apparent as the years rolled on. Tendulkar's fifty, and another by debutant Pravin Amre, saw India home by three wickets. Though it sounds closer on paper, it was a lot more comfortable for the home side.

In the post-match presentation, Ricey illustrated exactly why he was the perfect choice for captain. Asked how it felt to be on the losing side, he noted that he knew what Neil Armstrong had felt like when he walked on the moon. It pretty much summed up the mood in the dressing room. Playing that first game felt like achieving the impossible, but now we wanted to show that we could play as well.

Though the cricket was very important to us, a real highlight of the tour for everyone was the chance to meet one of the world's most respected figures. Mother Teresa was one of those iconic leaders whose example of peace and goodwill resonated globally. We had seen her in pictures from around the world, and we had

heard of her remarkable work, but the chance to go and meet her as a squad was overwhelming.

I remember all of us being very aware of the need for protocol. We were hushed, respectful and in awe of the entire experience. As sportsmen and women, there are certain privileges that are handed to you that are beyond words. We knew that there were people in India who would travel thousands of miles, most of them by foot, just to say they saw Mother Teresa. So, to be given the chance to meet her was definitely something we cherished.

If travelling to India had felt like a bit of a spiritual experience, that day fully confirmed it as such. Our trip was about a lot more than cricket, and the friendliness of our hosts showed us just what we had been missing. Another terrific experience for us was the day trip to the Taj Mahal. Again, much like the visit to Mother Teresa, it was something that caught us completely off guard. We had heard the legend of the Taj Mahal, but none of us had figured that we may get the chance to go there on a whirlwind tour.

But, as Ali kept on mentioning, our maiden trip to India was about a lot more than just cricket. When we were told that we would be going to see one of the wonders of the world, it hadn't dawned on us just how far we would have to travel to get there. Bear in mind that the roads in India at that time were not as good as they are now. We went in between the second and third one-day matches, and when we were told that it was a trip of close to 200km, we figured it would be a couple of hours. Of course, it proved to be about double that, as we weaved through the endless traffic.

But, all agreed that it was time very well spent. The trip itself may have been uncomfortable at times, but once you saw the magnificence for the first time, it was awe-inspiring. The sheer size of it is staggering, and then there are the thousands of people who are there on a daily basis. Many apparently come there often, to find peace or to try and rekindle love. You can

see why, too, because it is a place of great peace, even amidst the chaos. Once you are inside, it is like a library, and everyone has to leave their shoes outside. There were a few nervous glances from the boys, but touring teaches you to be respectful of customs around the world. We had already been jumped to the front of a very long queue, so we couldn't really complain!

The drive back to Delhi was possibly even longer, but the bus was quiet and reflective for a very long part of the journey. Who knows what was going on in each mind? I do remember thinking that excursions like that, to see Mother Teresa and the Taj Mahal, were massive for team-building, because it reminded us that we were part of a bigger picture. The scenes and sights of India outside of cricket break your heart, because it reminds you just how fortunate you are. Sure, we had problems in South Africa, but a massive part of the population in India was living in conditions that left us speechless. By the time we eventually got to the hotel, we were all exhausted. It had been a long day, but one that would stay with each one of us for a very long time.

Even though we were learning much away from the game, we still hadn't properly acclimatised to the conditions on the field. It was a baptism of fire in that respect, because the conditions were just unlike anything we had played in before. That was in no way an excuse, but we were learning on the job. India was also the first time we had encountered proper reverse swing, and the mystery of how it suddenly came about. Prabhakar and Kapil Dev were almost unplayable at times, and we were baffled as to how they were getting the ball to do so much, when we were just working with conventional swing.

The surfaces in India had a lot to do with it. They were dry and abrasive; perfect for scuffing up one side of the ball, and priming the other side for a touch of reverse swing. As a batsman, you could always prepare for conventional swing. You knew that the new ball would go a certain way, and you made the necessary

adjustments. Reverse was a different kettle of fish, though. It made even great batsmen look silly, and the very best exponents could literally make the ball bend around corners. It was humbling, but also something that was annoying, because it felt like an uneven playing field. During the second one-dayer, we got to a point where we felt that there must be some ball-tampering going on, because the bowling suddenly became unplayable.

For that second one-day match, we handed Mandy Yachad and Clive Eksteen their debuts. Mandy came in for Andrew Hudson, who was unlucky, but it was a short tour. Eksteen, a left-arm spinner of some promise, was one we hoped could exploit the dry conditions in Gwalior, venue for the second game of the series.

We needed a good start, but India won the toss and elected to bat first. The match had been reduced to 45 overs, and their opening pair of Kris Srikkanth and Navjot Sidhu looked intent on batting all the overs themselves. It was tough in the heat for our boys, and poor Eksteen was targeted by the well-set pair. That is the problem with cricket sometimes; you can make all the plans in the world, but you never really know what the opposition is going to throw at you out in the middle.

Again, we had Donald to thank for at least slowing things down. Our spearhead came back with three late wickets, and our target was set at 224, nearly five runs to the over. This became an especially tough task when we lost Jimmy Cook in the first over. It was the second time we had lost an opener right away, and it is always hard to bounce back from that.

Kepler's Test experiences with Australia continued to show, as he again led our scoring. His second consecutive half-century came at a much better scoring rate, but he again lacked support. We had come into the second match hoping to square the series, but ended up losing our way completely. We limped to 185 for 8, with their spinner Raju cleaning up the middle order, after our

top order had again been blown away. These were tough lessons for us to take, but they were necessary. We still felt strongly enough about the ball that we had instructed our number 11, Allan Donald, to try and get a close look at it when he went out to bat. As an opening bowler, we figured Allan could tell a bit more about these things, and could at least give us a viewpoint. As it played out, he never got to the crease, because the ninth-wicket stand was unbroken!

By the time the final game came around, we had decided to go back to our traditional strengths. The pitch in Delhi looked a good deal firmer, and the weather itself was actually a lot cooler than the other parts of India we had been to. When we were informed at the hotel that Delhi had a genuine winter, we were even more surprised. It turns out you learn new things all the time.

The final match of the series was a day/night affair, which meant we had a hard white ball to bowl with, and an even more partisan crowd to drown out. India had won the toss and elected to bat first, no doubt buoyed by the fact that they had put a lot of pressure on us in Gwalior. What they hadn't reckoned with was the mood in our camp. You couldn't tell that we had lost the series, and everyone wanted to leave the series on a positive note. Before the match, the two captains released doves into the sky, as a symbol of the peace and the friendship between the two countries. It was another nice touch, and no one who went on that trip will ever forget what India did for South African cricket.

We went in without a spinner, backing our pace attack and our all-rounders to see us home. When India pummelled almost 300 off us, it didn't look too clever. Ravi Shastri and Sanjay Manjrekar both hit fine centuries, in a massive partnership for the second wicket. At times, the noise from the stands made it hard to hear what we were saying to each other in the dressing room. I could only imagine what the din was like in the middle. There are a few

grounds in the world where it is no fun to be chasing leather from the home side. Australia has a few, and grounds like Headingley and The Oval in England get quite lively. But the wall of noise in India can sometimes feel like it is never-ending. I am sure that they thought the game was over, even before the lights took effect for the second innings. But, they had forgotten about Kepler, who had already notched two fifties. Somehow, he outdid himself again in the last game, with a terrific 90. He deserved a hundred, and even to hit the winning runs, but fell just short.

The key to our success, which was achieved with more than three overs to spare, was a good start. Kepler and Cook added 70-odd for the first wicket, and that foundation allowed Peter Kirsten to come into a situation where India were defending, rather than surrounding him. Our silver fox took centre stage, and struck the kind of knock that showed what the world had been missing. 'Kirsy' always had a lot of time to play his shots, and he was exceptional that night. The flicks off his leg, and his driving off the back foot were top-class, and we noted more than a few ripples of applause from the appreciative crowd.

That knock from Kirsten certainly helped in the debate about him going to the World Cup, once we were told the wonderful news that we were in. That night, in Delhi, he showed that his appetite for the big stage was still as strong as ever, and we would certainly need that x-factor in crunch games. Our win was clinical, and Kepler was rightly judged as joint man of the series with India's Manoj Prabhakar, whose probing spells with the new ball were a real thorn in our side throughout the series.

Though our time in India was brief, it had been incredible. The matches themselves had given us plenty of food for thought, and we could see that there were certain areas that we lacked. There were some quality players on the Indian team then, and they very quickly showed us where we stood in the world pecking order. For a long time, we hadn't had a proper gauge, but the likes

of Kapil Dev, Prabhakar and Tendulkar, of course, revealed much to us.

The day-night in Delhi was very good homework for the World Cup, as the combination of a good pitch, the white ball and a capacity crowd gave us a glimpse of what we would have to face in Australia. The fact that we had come out on top was heartening, even if it didn't help in the series. Some may say it was a dead rubber but, in our minds, there was no such thing as a dead rubber, especially in those first few years back in the international fold. Every game was a slice of history, a chance to do what we hadn't done for a long time.

India had been a beautiful blur, and something we could never forget. As I sat on the plane, two things occupied my mind. Thankfully, kit was no longer one of them. We still didn't know if we were going to the World Cup, because the ICC, and key members within the structure, still had reservations about the political landscape in South Africa. Ali and Mr Tshwete still had to prove that we were representing a country now united, and there was a referendum that was pending a nation's approval.

The second thought was a lot more optimistic. If we did go to the World Cup, I was certain that we would surprise a few teams. The rapid emergence of Allan Donald as a strike bowler was exciting. I had a feeling that Warwickshire would have tried to convince him to try and play for England if South Africa hadn't returned to international cricket, so the timing of our comeback was very good for him. Of course, Allan went on to take over 300 wickets in Test cricket, and provided South Africans with some fine memories. He had certainly used his time in the UK to bulk up a lot from the scrawny, wild kid I had seen in Bloemfontein just a few years before.

The other intriguing prospect for me was the form of Peter Kirsten and Kepler Wessels, our two most senior batsmen. Kepler had been toughened up by playing for Australia for a few years, but

had wasted little time in availing himself to his country of birth when the door was opened again. He was a fighter – not always the prettiest batsman – but he found a way to score runs. At the other end, Peter was like an old pro. Some of his contemporaries just missed out on even a brief international career, but he at least got a few years to show what he could do.

Besides those two, we also had several players who were unknown, and gaining confidence all the time. Richard Snell's swing bowling was a potent threat, especially if we bowled under lights. I felt he could break a game open, working in tandem with Allan's speed at the other end. We had quite a few all-rounders as well, and they would be a lot more comfortable on Australian pitches, which were not dissimilar to ours. All in all, India had been a perfect opportunity to introduce us to real cricket, way out of the comfort zones we knew, and we were a lot better for it. Certainly, it helped the team spirit, because we had to stick together as one team. No longer could we say we were Natal players, or Western Province players. We were all South African, and the objective was to be the best South African team possible. That was a happy new thought.

The tour, though hastily arranged, had been a success. Even though we lost the series, we had managed to get some invaluable experience on and off the field. I thought the trip had also proved why Ali was the man to lead South African cricket through the waters of transition. There had been some bumping of heads with the Indian board over issues during the course of the trip. Ali had dealt with them swiftly, and though he never appeared out of joint to us, he must have had stressful times. We were still new kids on the block, and it would have been easier to just bend to every demand made of him as the team manager.

As a former international player himself, he was acutely aware of the need for players to be left alone to their thoughts ahead of a game, and he made sure that there were no unnecessary functions

the night before a match. Those small touches meant a lot to the coaching staff, and we were chuffed to get at least one win under the belt. We had shown that we had the ability to perform and compete in the first two games, but nothing speaks louder than a win.

The once-in-a-lifetime meeting with Mother Teresa, and the trip to the Taj Mahal, were all particular highlights for us. Mother Teresa is a global icon, and to spend some time in her company had a profound impact on the team. The picture of Ricey standing next to her, his hands together in religious respect, remains one of my favourite memories.

The Taj Mahal, magnificent and grand, was also incredible. Just to try and imagine the hours and hours of painstaking work that had gone into it was mind-blowing. We had never seen anything like it, and it was certainly worth the trek.

The whole trip to India, as sudden as it was, had been worth all the effort. We were back in business.