

## SPORTING LEGENDS: IMRAN KHAN

**SPORT: CRICKET**

**COMPETITIVE ERA: 1971 - 1992**

Imran Khan (Mohammad Imran Khan Niazi; born November 25, 1952), was a Pakistani cricketer (1971-1992) and captain of the Pakistani cricket team. He is currently a member of the National Assembly, the lower house of the Pakistani parliament.

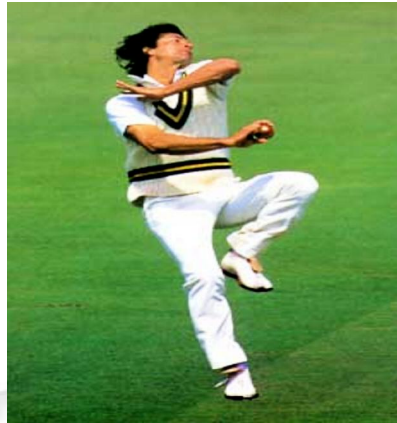


Imran is a Pashtun/Afghan of the Niazi clan. Imran went to school in Lahore and then attended the Royal Grammar School Worcester and Keble College, Oxford where he was also Captain of the Oxford University Cricket team in 1974. He comes from a cricketing family, with two of his cousins Javed Burki and Majid Khan also having played test cricket for Pakistan.

Imran is seen as one of the finest ever all-rounders, along with Garfield Sobers, Kapil Dev, Ian Botham and Richard Hadlee. He was one of the fastest bowlers of the world during the late 1970s and early 1980s and in the later half of his career, one of the best batsmen in the Pakistan team. More significantly, as a captain, he transformed the Pakistan team, otherwise notorious for infighting and "choking" in close matches into one of the best sides in the world.

Imran made his Test debut against England at Birmingham in 1971 at the age of 18. His performance was unimpressive as his wayward medium pace bowling proved short of what was required at that level. By the end of the series, the senior cricketers in the team had written him off as a test-standard cricketer.

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Khan's graceful bowling action was highly effective.

Imran returned to the Pakistan cricket team briefly in 1974, but didn't do well enough to become a regular in the team. It was not until end of 1976, following a successful season with his county club, Worcestershire, that he was picked again for the national squad. His opponents were New Zealand, which included two of his former teammates from Worcestershire, John Parker and Glenn Turner. Imran picked them out for some hostile bowling, to prove to them that they were incorrect in their earlier assessment of his potential as a fast bowler.

In the beginning of 1977, Imran still reckoned himself to be a better batsman than a bowler, a point of view not shared by others in the team. This changed drastically in January 1977, when in a matter of few days during the three test series in Australia, he transformed from an erratic medium pacer to a fast bowler of genuine pace. Pakistan scored an expected win in the deciding match of the series, thanks largely to his 12 wickets haul.

Following the Australian series, he toured the West Indies, where he met Tony Greig who signed him up for Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket. The two years of intense cricket at World Series Cricket moulded him into a more complete fast bowler.

This new action helped him mix his stock in-swinging deliveries with the one that left the right hand batsman. His credentials as one of the fastest bowlers of the world were further established when he finished third at a fast bowling contest at Perth in early 1979, behind Jeff Thompson and Michael Holding, but ahead of Dennis Lillee, Garth Le Roux and Andy Roberts.

As the 1980s progressed, he began to reverse swing the old ball significantly, an art that was known to very few bowlers at that time. This was a skill that he passed on to his successors, Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis, at the end of the decade.

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Khan's captaincy helped lead Pakistan to a great World Cup victory in 1992.

Imran took over the captaincy of the Pakistan team from Javed Miandad in early 1982. Many who thought that this would adversely affect his cricket as had happened to Ian Botham, were skeptical about this move.

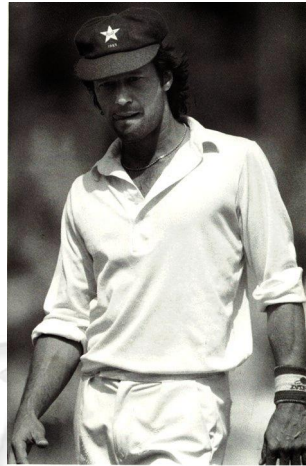
His first year as the captain was the peak of his career as a fast bowler as well as an all-rounder. Imran topped both the bowling and batting averages against England in the three test series in 1982, taking 21 wickets and averaging 56 with the bat. Later the same year, he devastated the formidable Indian batting on the flat Pakistani wickets by taking 40 wickets in six tests at an average of 13.95.

By the end of the series against India in 1982-83, Imran had taken 88 wickets in 13 test matches over a period of one year. His career took a severe blow towards the end of the the test series against India, as he suffered from a stress fracture in the shin which kept him out of cricket for more than two years. An experimental treatment funded by the Pakistan government helped him recover by the end of 1984 and he made a successful comeback to international cricket in the later part of the 1984-85 season.

From 1985 to the early 1992, Imran led Pakistan to its first series win in England and India, as well as to three creditable draws against the West Indies. He was declared the "man of the series" for the series wins in England and India, as well as two of the drawn series against the West Indies, further strengthening his image of reaching his peak against the strongest opposition.

As a captain Imran's focus was on taking a lot of responsibility on himself or "leading from the front" as he described it, thereby setting standards for others to follow. This was contrary to the widely accepted norm of a good captain being more of a strategic planner, like England's Mike Brearley.

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Khan possessed great levels of concentration, and was extremely focused during games.

His approach was very successful in getting the best out of the younger players of the team and the Pakistani cricket team achieved unprecedented success during this period, despite not having as brilliant a set of players as in the 1970s or the 1990s. However, he was often criticised by some in the media, as well as a few former players for being "authoritarian".

Imran was also notable for being the first cricketer to argue fervently in favour of neutral umpires. He led the initiative by asking for neutral umpires for the home series against West Indies in 1986-87 and 1990-91, as well as the home series against India in 1989-90. Imran's ultimate moment of glory as a captain and cricketer came at the end of his career, when he led Pakistan to victory in the World Cup Cricket 1992.

The highlight of this win was the fact that Pakistan recovered from a very poor start, thanks largely to some young players in their team who had barely been heard of prior to the World Cup.

A combination of a shoulder injury that he carried through the world cup as well as differences with some senior members over the fact that many of the prizes (or rewards) were being garnered by Imran's charity hospital led to his retirement after the World Cup.

Khan was inducted into the Hall of Fame on August 7, 2005.

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### Scott Burton's Final Thought

Imran Khan was a fantastic all-rounder, but it was his great influence as a inspirational captain that he should be remembered for.

Many of Pakistan's great victories during his era stemmed from his never-say-die attitude to his team-mates.

Pakistan's 1992 World Cup victory is testament to this.

His bowling was technically very efficient, and his fitness levels were among the best of his peers.

He always seemed graceful with the bat, even when under intense pressure. He could generate tremendous power off the back foot without seemingly making much effort.

He had a fierce determination to win, and that helped to establish his greatest legacy.



Highly influential to his team, Khan inspired a generation of Pakistani cricket stars.