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Former Batsman  
Looks Back At  
1985 Match  
When City  
Applauded  
English Win



GAME ON: Former England captain delivers the inaugural K S Narayanan oration in the city on Saturday

## Chennai's cricketing spirit stumps Gower

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**Y**ou mention Chennai and David Gower's face lights up. The former England captain may have played in only two Tests at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, but he fondly recalls those matches till today. "In 1982, we drew the game against India, and in 1985 — I was leading England and we won the match by nine wickets. In the 1982 game, G R Viswanath gave an exhibition in batting when he hit a brilliant 222," reminisced Gower, who was in the city during the weekend to deliver the inaugural K S Narayanan oration.

More than the matches he played, what stands out about the city for Gower is the buzz he gets each time he pays a visit. "Chennai is a place where I feel welcomed. I have been here as a player, and even as a commentator. Many here love the game and have watched it for years, retaining facts. The enthusiasm people share for the game is overwhelming," said the 58-year-old.

On the two occasions Gower played at Chepauk, he was witness to the genuine affection people had for him and his side. "It's the standout feature for me. Not only did the crowd cheer for India, they also rose to applaud their efforts when England opener Graeme Fowler and Mike Gatting, each scored a double century in the 1985 Test. The India-Pakistan Test in 1999 which saw the visiting team get a lap of



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David Gower

honour after their win is well documented. There is genuine appreciation here for a player's efforts — irrespective of his team," pointed out Gower. He felt Chennai could give a lesson or two to many centres across the world on how to embrace the different formats of the game. "Be it Test or other formats of cricket, the crowds flock in to watch their favourite stars on

the field. One of the challenges for the game is to maintain its popularity. In places such as Chennai and most parts of India, there is a euphoria surrounding the game and the International Cricket Council (ICC) must tap into it," he said.

During his present trip to Chennai after many years, Gower felt the city had not lost any of its charm. "I have been here for a few days and 95% of the conversations with my hosts have been about cricket. People here seem to know more about my career statistics than I can remember. When you are around cricket loving public, it's almost like a history lesson," said Gower, breaking into a chuckle.

Apart from the warmth of the people, Gower has a lot of respect for the bowlers he has faced from this region. "Be it V Ramnarayan, whom I faced during my club stint in Australia for Claremont Cottesloe (now the Claremont-Nedlands Cricket Club), or S Venkataraghavan and L Sivaramakrishnan who bowled to me in international games — they were all fierce competitors and some of the toughest I played against," said Gower, who played in 117 Tests and 114 ODIs for England.

As part of his visit here, Gower interacted with players from Jolly Rovers and Alwarpet CC. "I am told the league cricket in Chennai is immensely competitive and even players from other parts of the country come in to play. I believe it's great for the game here," said Gower.