

A CENTURY OF SPORTING TIES

Celebrating unity through sports
between New Zealand and India



Asia New Zealand
Foundation

Te Whītau Tūhono |

In association with



NAMASTE, HAERE MAI

Celebrating
100 years of
sporting ties
with India

1981

Inside cover: New Zealand vs India at the
Basin Reserve, Wellington
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

2019

Front cover: Kane Williamson and India's Rohit
Sharma, Eden Park, 8 February 2019
Supplied: Photosport



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Comment from the Chief Executive

Sport holds an important place in the heart of New Zealanders, whether that be as a player, fan, passing observer or professional athlete. It also plays an increasingly crucial role in our international partnerships.

International sporting ties are valuable in so many ways. They give countries a common language when one is not necessarily spoken and provide sports fans with a shared bonding experience – but they also help to broaden and deepen relationships between countries and people.

Our research shows that a vast majority of New Zealanders who follow Asian sports teams or competitions say that doing so has helped them to learn more about Asian countries and cultures. A quarter of New Zealanders report that following sports in Asia helped them better understand traditions, customs and religions, while others say that sport has informed them about a country's etiquette, protocols and values, as well as its geography.

Perhaps more so than in any other of New Zealand's international connections, sport has long been a cornerstone of the New Zealand-India relationship and has been a symbol of close partnership between our countries. Given its importance, it seems only right that we take the opportunity to formally celebrate 100 years of sporting ties.

While the sports relationship officially began with the Indian Army hockey team's 1926 tour of New Zealand, it deepened significantly with the mountaineering links forged by Sir Edmund Hillary. These links in turn helped grow broader diplomatic and philanthropic ties between New Zealand, India and Nepal.

But today it is undeniably cricket that forms a key pillar of the New Zealand-India relationship. Cricket is New Zealanders' most followed



sport in Asia, well ahead of football, rugby and basketball. When asked why India is seen as a friend to New Zealand, New Zealanders frequently point to a shared love of cricket. Such findings show that the importance of sport – and sports diplomacy – cannot be underestimated.

This report traces the evolution of the New Zealand-India relationship through hockey, mountaineering and cricket, as well as more recent sporting connections, such as squash, kabaddi and tennis.

What emerges is a story that has grown much bigger than sport itself. It is a celebration of community, camaraderie and collaboration that has underpinned a century of growing ties between New Zealand and India. I hope you enjoy learning about this history as much as I did.

Suzannah Jessep

Chief Executive
Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono

2022

Left: Joelle King and Paul Coll at the Commonwealth Games
Credit: New Zealand Olympic Committee



HOCKEY

A century of sporting ties

2015

Left: Black Sticks Men player Arun Panchia during their 2015 South Island Tour game between the New Zealand Black Sticks Men versus Indian hockey player Chandanda Nikkin Thimmaiah, Saxton Turf, Nelson, 6 October 2015
Supplied: Photosport

The 1926 hockey tour that began it all

Hockey was the vanguard of sporting contact between New Zealand and India, where a relationship that is now celebrating its centenary all began.

The 1926 Indian Army team tour of New Zealand was a landmark event, being the first Indian sports team to tour Aotearoa. It was also the first Indian hockey team to make an overseas tour.



1926
Far left: The hockey stick used by Captain Cox in the Indian Army team's 1926 tour
Supplied: The Hockey Museum

1926
Top left: A crowd of 15,000 gathers to watch New Zealand play the Indian Army team
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

1938
Bottom left: The New Zealand side vs Prince of Manavadar (a princely state in Gujarat) at the Basin Reserve
Credit: Wikimedia Commons



The New Zealand Hockey Association took considerable financial risk in bankrolling the tour to the tune of 500 pounds, but it proved an overwhelming success in promoting hockey as a sport and attracting an unprecedented number of spectators. Some estimate that 25,000 attended the third and final test between New Zealand and the Indian Army side at Eden Park – a record crowd to this day for a hockey match in New Zealand. Notably, the selector of the New Zealand team at this time was Sidney Holland, who would later go onto become the first National Party prime minister in 1949.

The style of play and stick work of the Indian side had a profound impact on the way hockey was played in New Zealand over the following decades. Dhyan Chand – regarded by many as the ‘Don Bradman’ of hockey – was a member of the side and regularly singled out for his prowess.

New Zealand played a hard-hitting, physical game, whereas the Indian visitors employed a short passing game with flair and panache. Although they were unable to match the Indian team in terms of skill and style, New Zealand managed to draw the three-test series 1-1.

India won the first test in Christchurch at Lancaster Park 5-2, New Zealand took the second at Eden Park in Auckland 4-3, while the third, also at Eden Park, was drawn one-all.

William Havilah Down, a stalwart of New Zealand Hockey, umpired that series and five of his grandsons – Barry, Selwyn and Chris Maister, along with Peter and Brent Miskimmin – went on to play for New Zealand.

That same year, the Indian national hockey side won gold at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games – the first of six straight Olympic hockey gold medals.

1926

Top left: Indian Army team
Supplied: Hockey New Zealand

1935

Right: Hockey legend Dhyan Chand who was a key player in the Indian national hockey team
Credit: Istock



The style of play and stick work of the Indian side had a profound impact on the way hockey was to be played in New Zealand over the following decades. Dhyan Chand – regarded by many as the ‘Don Bradman’ of hockey – was a member of the side and regularly singled out for his prowess.

1930s: Inspiration and expansion

Hockey continued to be the conduit for sporting contact over the 1930s with an Indian national side coming to tour New Zealand in 1935.

Indian hockey ruled supreme at the time – winning gold medals at the 1928, 1932 and 1936 Olympic Games. (It is estimated 2 million people were playing hockey in India in 1936, a country that at the time included present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh.) India won all 28 games and beat New Zealand 3–0 in the test series. India was complimentary about the quality of New Zealand play but less so about the quality of the fields.

A year later, the India side were again crowned Olympic champions, winning gold at the 1936 Berlin Games after beating Germany 8–1 in the final.

According to Selwyn Maister, a member of New Zealand's 1976 Montreal Olympic gold medal team and a hockey historian, "Dhyan Chand is supposed to have said 'had the New Zealand men's team gone to Berlin they probably would have got second'. He really rated them."

Following the success of the 1935 tour, another Indian team toured in 1938, albeit not an official international one. The Prince of Manavadar's team played 31 games in two and a half months. The team also played two cricket games – quite likely the first cricket matches between the two nations at any level – taking on Flaxmere Cricket Club in Hastings and an Auckland XI made up of local hockey players. This was still 20 years before New Zealand was to play India in an official cricket test.

The touring Indian hockey teams of 1926 and 1935 not only proved a great boon for the sport in New Zealand, they were also a source of inspiration for New Zealand-based Indians and New Zealanders of Indian heritage.

The tours led to the formation of Indian sports clubs – the first in Wellington in 1935, followed by similar organisations in Auckland and Christchurch in 1936.

Over the following decades other regions followed suit, with a national body, the New Zealand Indian Sports Association, established in 1962.

Ramesh Patel was the first New Zealander of Indian heritage to play hockey for New Zealand, making his international debut in 1973 and going on to play 126 games for the Black Sticks. He was a member of the 1976 Olympic gold medal winning side and went on to become the chief executive of Hockey New Zealand.

Ramesh remembers his parents, who had emigrated to New Zealand from the Gujarat region of India, discussing the touring Indian sides of the 1920s and 1930s. "When the first Indian migrants came here, [New Zealand] probably wasn't that welcoming to be fair. Then those Indian tours started in 1926 ... and it broke the ice a little bit."

"The way the Indian teams handled themselves and definitely the way that they played with such wizardry – it fascinated the crowds and I'm sure the population of New Zealand suddenly thought these [guys] are not a bad team," he recalls.

"[The way the Indian side conducted themselves] probably made the Indians that had migrated here earlier feel a little bit better about themselves and encouraged them to play hockey."

Patel says the way the early touring sides from India played the game still resonates in New Zealand hockey today with the Black Sticks playing a short passing game similar to India.

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1935

Top right: The first New Zealand women's team to travel internationally
Supplied: Hockey New Zealand

2002

Bottom right: The Black Sticks Men took home silver in the Manchester Commonwealth Games
Supplied: Hockey New Zealand



“It’s really interesting reading the newspaper reports of 1926, 1935 and 1938 tours and the emphasis on the fantastically skilled players they had, like Dhyan Chan. But it was the team game they played, the accuracy of the passing, the fact that they were using back passes, which was something a lot of New Zealand hockey teams weren’t using.”

1940s and 1950s: war and first encounters

The Second World War limited sporting contact for the first half of the decade. In 1945, the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force hockey side, made up of New Zealand servicemen, toured India and became the first New Zealand team to play in the sub-continent. The team played 30 games all up, winning 19 and losing 11.

The 1950s also saw the New Zealand and Indian women’s hockey sides meet for the first time. In 1956, the New Zealand women’s hockey team competed at the International Federation of Women’s Hockey Association tournament in Sydney – the forerunner to the World Cup. It was just the second time New Zealand had competed and marked the first time the New Zealand and Indian women’s sides had squared off in a test match. New Zealand finished third, beating India 2-0 in their third game of the tournament.

1970s: Commonwealth and Olympic crossroads

New Zealand hockey’s greatest moment to date came two years later at the 1976 Montreal Olympics when against all odds the New Zealand side won Olympic gold, beating arch-rivals Australia 1-0 in the final.

New Zealand and India’s paths didn’t cross during the tournament, but New Zealand did play two games against the reigning world champions in the lead up, both of which New Zealand lost. Yet those matches were seen as crucial in New Zealand’s subsequent Olympic success.

Patel believes hockey, rather than cricket, saw a greater number of players of Indian descent participating during the 1960s, 70s and 80s because of those early tours, but also work commitments.

“When they moved to New Zealand finding work wasn’t easy and there was not a lot of free time so hockey fitted into that on Saturday afternoon ... it didn’t take as much time to play as cricket and so I think that was the reason why hockey was favoured in those earlier years. It’s a lot different now.”

Sports historian and associate professor at Massey University, Geoff Watson, believes the impact of India on New Zealand’s hockey development – and ultimately the success at the 1976 Montreal Olympics – is not well known by those outside of hockey circles.

“It’s really interesting reading the newspaper reports of 1926, 1935 and 1938 tours and the emphasis on the fantastically skilled players they had, like Dhyan Chand. But it was the team game they played, the accuracy of the passing, the fact that they were using back passes, which was something a lot of New Zealand hockey teams weren’t using.”

“When I was playing, even in the 70s and 80s, [back passing] was looked on a little bit askance,” he says.

“And so that sort of game had a huge influence on people like [legendary coach] Cyril Walter, who ... very much adopted and preached the Indian style of play, which became the dominant style of play for Canterbury. The players he coached then went on to be hugely influential in the 76 Olympic team.”

Almost 20 years after their first international encounter, the New Zealand and Indian women’s hockey sides met for just the second time at an international tournament in Scotland in 1975. New Zealand won the match in Edinburgh 6-1 and finished third at the IFWHA tournament.

The two sides met again in 1979 at the IFWHA tournament in Vancouver, Canada, with New Zealand winning 4-1.

In 1983 the Indian men’s hockey team toured New Zealand with the hosts beating India for the first time in a test series. Just two tests were played with New Zealand winning the first in Whangārei 3-0, while the second in Auckland was drawn 2-2.

New Zealand and India met regularly during the 1980s at the Champions Trophy and Olympics in several tight fought encounters – it was a similar story through the 1990s.

2022

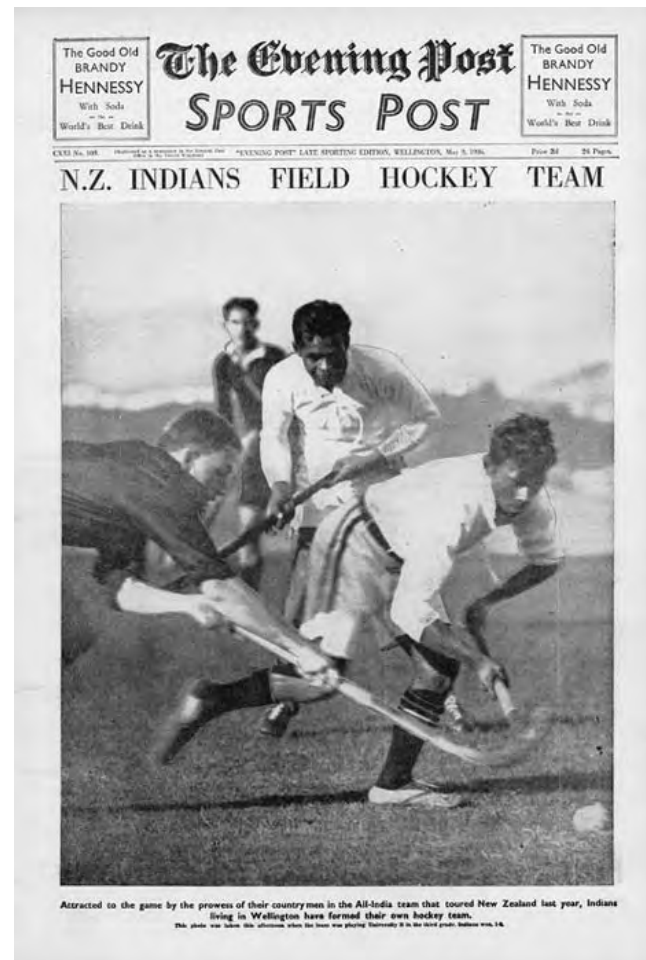
Left: Shilaroo Hockey Stadium, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India
Credit: Dibbendu Koley

1936

Top left: The first New Zealand Indian hockey team
Supplied: Alexander Turnbull Library and Stuff

1998

Bottom right: The Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur
Supplied: Hockey New Zealand



The strength of Indian men's hockey in New Zealand was on display in 1983 when the New Zealand India Sports Association played its first game against an Indian Hockey Federation National Men's team at Mount Smart Stadium in Auckland. The visitors won that match 2-0.

The 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur marked the first time hockey was included on the programme – and New Zealand had hopes of finishing with a medal in both the men's and women's competitions.

The men came up against India in the bronze medal match and while the scores were locked at 1-1 at halftime, India had much the better of the second half going on to make the podium with a 3-1 victory.

New Zealand and India also squared off for the bronze medal in the women's event, with the Black Sticks comfortably winning 3-0.

The Commonwealth Games hockey rivalry resumed in Manchester in 2002 with the two nations facing each other in the semi-finals of

the women's competition. Late in the match there was controversy with the scores locked at one-all. The umpire awarded India a penalty stroke with 10 minutes to play but then extraordinarily refused to let India take it, ruling they had ignored the instruction to take the shot. This only fired up the Indian side who scored in the dying minutes to win 2-1 and advance to the final where they beat England to win gold. New Zealand finished fourth, losing to Australia in the bronze medal playoff. The New Zealand men's team took home silver that year but did not face India in any of their games.

India inflicted more Games misery on the New Zealand women's team four years later in Melbourne in 2006. The Black Sticks lost to India 1-0 in the semi-final, with India advancing to the final and finishing second while New Zealand again finished fourth.

In Delhi 2010 the Indian men's hockey team won silver and the New Zealand bronze, while in the women's tournament New Zealand took home silver.

The hockey tussles at the Commonwealth Games continued in 2014. The Indian men's team denied New Zealand a chance to play off for the gold medal when they came back from 2-0 down to win the semi-final 3-2. India won silver and New Zealand finished fourth.

At the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, the New Zealand women's hockey team reigned supreme, winning gold. The New Zealand men's team turned the tables on India from four years prior with a 3-2 semi-final win. The team went on to win silver, while India took fourth place.

In 2022, at the Birmingham Commonwealth Games, India had the better of the hockey. The Indian men's side won silver while the Indian women's team won bronze, beating New Zealand in a penalty shootout to claim third.

While the New Zealand men's hockey team has had a strong representation of players of Indian heritage over the past five decades, it wasn't until 2003 that a female player of Indian heritage – Priya Bhikha – made the New Zealand side.

Born and raised in Wellington, Bhikha's grandparents came to New Zealand from Gujarat. She is, understandably, incredibly proud of being the first woman of Indian heritage to play for the Black Sticks.

"I probably value it more now ...[just] how rare it still is. I still get emotional even now, I sort of will tear up, thinking about it and talking to you about it."

"One of the benefits of being in the Indian community or being of Indian descent in New Zealand is I feel like I grew up with just this huge, huge community behind me," she says.

"Family and extended family and family friends and the [Indian] sports club community and the wider Indian community who all wished me well and supported me, coached me and took me to trainings or just called me to come and have a hit."

"So, it kind of felt for me like it wasn't just mine ... it was my parents and our families and the extended family and the community at large that I was representing. The people who had got me there."

But why did it take so long for a woman of Indian heritage to make it into the Black Sticks given the strong Indian male representation in the men's national side?

Bhikha puts that down, at least in part, to traditional Indian culture.



“There was quite a stark difference, in my opinion, in gender roles,” she explains.

“I grew up knowing all about the talented male players and Olympians of Indian descent.”

“My dad was obviously able to go and play hockey as much or as little as he wanted whereas mum, on the other hand, wasn’t allowed to play unless all the chores were done, like the cooking, the cleaning and the housework.

“And a lot of her friends weren’t allowed to play at all, purely because they were female and their parents kind of viewed their roles as being in the home and domestic and that they shouldn’t be playing sport.”

Bhikha is grateful for her parents’ less traditional approach. “My parents didn’t raise me like that so by stark contrast, I was encouraged to follow my dreams and do whatever it was I wanted to do ... Looking back mum probably still kept towing the load at home ... so that I could do the things that I wanted to do.”

“I’ve become more aware of it as I’ve gotten older and become a mother and reflected.”

“When I was growing up, you know, I just felt like a normal, you know, kind of Kiwi kid, because there were no gender roles forced on me by my parents ... So I just grew up probably quite oblivious ... but we never really spoke about it a lot either.”

Bhikha is undoubtedly a trailblazer but perhaps only accepts the mantle when she ponders her achievements.

“It is important to younger girls and men that this is something women can do,” she says.

“When I talk to younger girls, they are like, ‘Wow, you played for New Zealand that’s so amazing’ and will ask questions.”

A hundred years on from the arrival of the Indian Army team in 1926, hockey remains one of the most enduring threads in the sporting relationship between New Zealand and India.

What began as a pioneering tour that introduced New Zealanders to a new style of play evolved into something far greater, inspiring generations of players, fostering New Zealand’s Indian sporting community, and forging connections that stretched well beyond the hockey field.

Few sporting relationships can trace their origins back 100 years – from Dhyan Chand’s artistry and New Zealand’s Olympic triumph in Montreal, to Priya Bhikha breaking new ground for women of Indian heritage. As the two countries look toward the next 100 years of sporting ties it is fitting to remember hockey was where it all began.



“One of the benefits of being in the Indian community or being of Indian descent in New Zealand is I feel like I grew up with just this huge, huge community behind me,” she says.

2003

Above: Priya Bhikha playing for the Black Sticks Womens
Supplied: Hockey New Zealand



CRICKET

A century of sporting ties

2019

Left: Daryl Mitchell and the Indian side at the Twenty20 match in February 2019
Credit: Photosport

How cricket transformed New Zealand and India into more than rivals

When New Zealand and India first met on a sporting field in 1926, it was hockey – not cricket – that brought them together. Yet a century on, it's cricket that has come to define the relationship.

What began as a distant, formal contest between two countries on opposite sides of the world has evolved into something far deeper – a connection shaped not just by matches and milestones, but by people, migration and shared identity. Over the past 100 years, cricket has mirrored the changing relationship between the two nations, moving from imperial-era encounters to something more personal, more intertwined and increasingly shared.



1990

Far left: Maia Lewis' batting gloves
Supplied: New Zealand Cricket Museum

2026

Centre left: Matt Henry celebrates during the New Zealand tour of India in January
Supplied: New Zealand Cricket

2026

Top right: Jasprit Bumrah bowls during New Zealand's January tour of India
Supplied: New Zealand Cricket

1968

Bottom right: The ball used during the February 1968 game between India and New Zealand. The ball is signed by the New Zealand team
Supplied: New Zealand Cricket Museum



Cricket became part of the relationship in 1955. Two years after Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay stood atop Everest, the New Zealand men's team toured India for the first time. The opening Test in Hyderabad ended in a draw before India secured the five-match series 2-0.

For New Zealand, the results were secondary to the experience. Touring India meant confronting unfamiliar pitches, oppressive heat and vast, passionate crowds. It was a world away from the quieter, more modest cricket grounds of Christchurch or Wellington.

There were, however, early moments of defiance. Bert Sutcliffe's unbeaten 230 in Delhi – just the second double century by a New Zealander – stood as a defining innings of that tour. It was a reminder that while India held the advantage at home, New Zealand possessed the resilience and skill to compete.

Through the 1960s, the relationship deepened as tours became more frequent, and familiarity grew. In 1965, New Zealand returned to India and produced one of the most remarkable individual debuts in Test cricket history.

In Kolkata, Bruce Taylor scored 105 and took five wickets for 86 in the same match – a feat that remains unmatched. It was a performance that captured the resourcefulness of New Zealand cricket in an era when it was still establishing its place in the global game.

Three years later, India toured New Zealand for the first time. In Dunedin, the Indian team claimed its first-ever Test victory outside the subcontinent, a breakthrough moment that signalled its growing strength. New Zealand responded in Christchurch, recording its own first Test win over India, built on Graham Dowling's 239 – then a national record.

Neither side dominated the series, but something more important was taking shape: respect.

As former New Zealand spinner, Dipak Patel would later reflect, the two sides shared a common understanding.

"I think they had a bond," he said. "They weren't seen as part of the top tier at that time."



1955

Left: A 40-page illustrated, official souvenir programme, "New Zealand Cricketers Tour of India 1955-56", published by the Board of Control for Cricket in India. Supplied: New Zealand Cricket Museum

1977

Far left: Trish McKelvey being run out, New Zealand vs India Test, Carisbrook. Supplied: New Zealand Cricket Museum

2026

Right: Glenn Phillips bowls during the New Zealand tour of India 2026 1st one-day international in January. Supplied: New Zealand Cricket

That sense of shared experience – of being just outside cricket's traditional power centres – helped build a relationship.

In 1966, Narotam "Tom" Puna became the first player of Indian heritage to represent New Zealand at cricket. He arrived in New Zealand in 1937 and settled with his father in Hamilton. He made his first-class debut for Northern Districts in 1956 but would only step up to international cricket 10 years later when he was in his late-30s.

At the time, it was a quiet milestone. In hindsight, it marked the beginning of something much larger – cricket as a bridge between cultures. By the late 1970s and into the 1980s, both nations were beginning to assert themselves more confidently. The relationship between them continued to evolve, shaped by competition but also by familiarity.

Women's cricket added its own chapter in 1977, when New Zealand and India met for the first time in Dunedin. Although all six Tests played between the two sides ended in draws, they were significant in establishing a parallel relationship that would grow rapidly in the decades ahead.

In 1978, India hosted the Women's World Cup, with New Zealand among the competing teams. Matches drew large crowds, underlining the country's deep connection to the game. By 1982, when New Zealand hosted the tournament, the two nations were regular opponents on the global stage. In 1985, India secured its first international win over New Zealand in a one-day series in Indore – another meaningful milestone.

Neither side dominated the series, but something more important was taking shape: respect.

The era of the allrounders

In the men's game, the 1980s became the era of the allrounder. New Zealand had Sir Richard Hadlee; India had Kapil Dev; England had Sir Ian Botham; Pakistan had Imran Khan. It was a golden period, where individual brilliance could define matches.

Hadlee summited an Everest of his own and cemented a place in Test history in Bangalore in 1988 when he dismissed India's Arun Lal to claim his 374th Test wicket. In doing so, he surpassed Botham as the most successful Test wicket taker of all time. Recalling the achievement in an interview with *Stuff* on the 30th anniversary of the feat, Hadlee said the moment was "sheer delight and relief. This wicket had been contemplated for so long, it was there for the taking and all of a sudden, it became a reality."

"To be a pacesetter, and a New Zealander to do it which was unheard of, and to manage to hang onto it for another five or so years ... to be the one for others to chase was significant in my career."

Veteran cricket commentator Bryan Waddle was in Bangalore covering the test and vividly remembers the milestone 38 years on.

"It was a moment that we were awaiting. It was an expectation that Hadlee was going to be able to take that world record.

"It was in the first half hour [of play]. I was commentating and we were just sitting in an old tin hut doing the commentary with Jeremy Coney."

"It was a special moment. You don't often get to call those."

His call – that the "Rolls Royce of fast bowlers opens a new page in cricket history" – became part of New Zealand cricket folklore.

Years later, Kapil Dev would surpass Hadlee's record. It felt less like a rivalry and more like a continuation – two players from different nations pushing the boundaries of what was possible. "Kapil Dev was one of the very best," Waddle says. "Someone who could turn a game."

If the 1980s were about respect, the 1990s introduced something more complex: identity.

Dipak Patel's story sits at the centre of that shift, with his international career running from 1987 to 1997. Born to Indian parents, raised in both Kenya and England, and later moving to New Zealand after playing a couple of first-class seasons here, he became just the second player of Indian descent to represent the Black Caps. His journey reflected a changing world.

"I was only 16 or 17 when the invitation came from Bishan personally. He'd seen me grow up through the grassroots of English cricket and I played against him and in county cricket, so he obviously saw something there to try and entice me to go to India."

However, turning down that opportunity wasn't difficult, says Patel.

"It wasn't a tough decision. I'd have been going into a tough environment that I wouldn't have been used to whereas I had come through the English system and represented my county."

When he eventually represented New Zealand, it carried mixed emotions.

"My parents were born and bred in India [Gujarat]. My father just adored Indian cricket. He worshipped Indian cricketers; they were his idols. So, for me growing [up] my heroes were the likes of Sunil Gavaskar and Bishen Bedi."

Patel said playing two decades later than Narotam "Tom" Puna – the first player of Indian descent to play for New Zealand – meant he had a different perspective on the sport in Aotearoa. "I got to meet Narotam Puna ... and we had good long chats about his time in cricket," says Patel.

"We talked about when he first came over and the difficulties of playing at first class level. He was obviously a fine cricketer and through good performances he got accepted into the first-class scene and then getting selected for New Zealand was a huge achievement."

"Tom was a little bit more apprehensive to start with until he actually got in the team and got used to the regime and he appreciated the players did care about him and he was accepted ... that makes it so much easier."

The dual identity of heritage and nationality would become increasingly common.



2022

Top: India's Shikhar Dhawan collides with New Zealand wicketkeeper Tom Latham as he takes a quick run during the 1st one-day international cricket match between New Zealand and India at Eden Park in Auckland, 25 November, 2022
Supplied: Photosport

2022

Bottom: New Zealand's Kane Williamson and India's Deepak Hooda during the New Zealand v India 2nd Twenty20 International cricket match, Bay Oval, Mount Maunganui, 20 November, 2022
Supplied: Photosport

Years later, Kapil Dev would surpass Hadlee's record. It felt less like a rivalry and more like a continuation – two players from different nations pushing the boundaries of what was possible.

India's rise as a global cricket powerhouse

At the same time, India's rise as a cricketing powerhouse was gathering pace. At its core stood Sachin Tendulkar, known as the "Little Master".

For New Zealand, Tendulkar's brilliance was often experienced firsthand. His 82 off 49 balls in Auckland in 1994 reshaped India's one-day approach. His unbeaten 186 in Hyderabad in 1999, alongside Rahul Dravid, powered India to 376 for two. Earlier in that year, Tendulkar's 163 in Christchurch had already demonstrated his dominance.

Yet it was not just the runs that left an impression – it was the scale of India's cricket culture both on and off the field.

Waddle distinctly remembers the scenes at a hotel they were staying at in Hyderabad. "There were thousands of people outside just trying to catch a glimpse of Tendulkar," he says. "You couldn't even get out of the lift without going through security."

For the New Zealand players, it was a glimpse into a different world – one where cricket was not just a sport, but a national obsession.

The turn of the century marked a defining shift. In 2000, New Zealand defeated India in the ICC Champions Trophy final in Nairobi, with Chris Cairns producing a match-winning unbeaten 102. It remains one of New Zealand's most significant victories over India.

But the more profound transformation came off the field.

Later that year, former New Zealand captain John Wright was appointed coach of India – the first foreigner to hold the role. It was a bold move and not universally welcomed. "There was opposition," Wright recalls. "There was an element of, 'Who is this New Zealander taking our boys?'"

What followed was one of the most influential partnerships in modern cricket. Working alongside captain Sourav Ganguly and a core group including Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Anil Kumble and VVS Laxman, Wright helped reshape India into a team capable of winning overseas.

"I'll never forget asking Anil Kumble how many Tests had he won overseas? He'd played something like 60 Tests and he said just one!

And I couldn't quite believe it because they were so talented. So, we set about changing that," says Wright.

"But it was challenging and I remember one incident early on when someone came up to me and said, 'John have you got good ears?' And I said, 'um, I think so, but why?'"

"He said, 'So you can hear the knives going in your back.'"

Wright reflects that it took him a year or two to figure out how Indian cricket politics works. "Cricket in India is big. It goes right to the top, but it is much loved and I still believe the [Indians are] the most passionate cricket fans in the world."

Despite some initial growing pains, Wright describes his experience as an overwhelmingly positive one. "I had many wonderful experiences with some very talented players, tremendous young men and I found them a wonderful group to coach."

Under his leadership, India reached the 2003 World Cup final and secured landmark victories abroad, including a historic series win in Pakistan in 2004.

It marked a shift in the relationship. New Zealand was no longer simply an opponent – it was contributing to India's cricketing evolution.



The Indian Premier League (IPL) transformed cricket into a global industry, bringing players, coaches and cultures together in a way never seen before.

For New Zealand, it created new opportunities. Former Black Caps captain Stephen Fleming became one of the most successful coaches in the competition's history with the Chennai Super Kings, forming a long-standing partnership with MS Dhoni. New Zealand players became regular figures in the tournament, gaining exposure to the scale and intensity of Indian cricket.

The same transformation would later occur in the women's game. After decades of operating on the margins, Indian women's cricket underwent a significant shift in the mid-2000s when it came under the control of the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket India).

That paved the way for increased investment, professionalism and, eventually, the launch of the Women's Premier League (WPL).

The WPL has quickly become one of the most influential competitions in the global women's game – providing financial security, visibility and opportunity on a scale previously unseen. For New Zealand players, it has opened doors similar to those created by the IPL.

2016

Bottom left: SS TON bat used by Luke Ronchi on the New Zealand tour of India in 2016
Supplied: New Zealand Cricket Museum

2019

Bottom right: A fan watches the Black Caps versus India Twenty20 International match at Eden Park on 8 February 2019
Supplied: Photosport





2025

Top left: Mitchell Santner plays a shot during the India versus New Zealand ICC Champions Trophy 2025 One Day International in Dubai
Credit: New Zealand Cricket

World Cups and shared wins

In 2019, the Black Caps and India met in a dramatic semi-final in Manchester. Played over two days due to rain, it swung repeatedly. New Zealand's 239 for eight looked modest. But when India collapsed to 24 for four, the match shifted dramatically. A fighting partnership between MS Dhoni and Ravindra Jadeja brought India back before Martin Guptill's direct-hit run-out of Dhoni – by the narrowest of margins – turned the game again, with New Zealand holding on to win.

Four years later, at the 2023 World Cup in India, the tables turned. India defeated New Zealand in the semi-final, powered by centuries from Virat Kohli and Shreyas Iyer, and a seven-wicket haul from Mohammed Shami. It was a reminder that the rivalry remained as competitive as ever.

By the 2020s, however, the relationship had evolved from rivalry into something more intertwined.

New Zealand's victory over India in the inaugural World Test Championship final in 2021 stands as one of the country's greatest achievements. Yet it was a moment later that year that perhaps best captures the modern connection. In Mumbai, Ajaz Patel – born in the city, raised in New Zealand – took all 10 wickets in an innings against India. Only the third bowler in the history of the game to do so.

"It's quite poetic," Patel says of being a New Zealand cricketer of Indian heritage, achieving one of cricket's rarest feats in the city of his birth and against the country of his ancestry.

As he approached the milestone, Patel observed the crowd's reaction shift. "I certainly felt like I was embraced as one of their own." It was a moment that blurred the boundaries of nationality, identity and belonging.

That theme is now central to the relationship. Players such as Jeetan Patel, Rachin Ravindra, Ish Sodhi and Ajaz Patel represent a generation shaped by migration and dual heritage and who are comfortable in both worlds.

In the women's game, that story is still unfolding.

Nensi Patel's emergence as a White Fern represents another step in that evolution – a sign of how New Zealand cricket continues to reflect its changing population.

Through competitions such as the Women's Premier League, the connection between the two nations continues to deepen. New Zealand captain Melie Kerr now plays alongside India's Harmanpreet Kaur for the Mumbai Indians.

"The first year you don't really know what the outcome is going to be," Kerr says. "But it exceeded expectations – and it just keeps getting bigger and bigger."

With that growth has come increased pressure.

"There's more sponsorship, more media, more expectations," she says. "Your performance is your currency – runs and wickets."

The intensity reflects the scale of cricket in India.

"In India, it's their whole world. If you win, it's everything. If you lose, it's really tough." But she also understands the context behind that emotion. "For some players, it's life changing. Their contracts can support their families. That's why the emotion is so strong."

For all those differences, she sees a shared foundation. "The values are actually really similar," she says. "There's a real care for each other."

For Indian players, New Zealand offers something different – the chance to step outside the spotlight.

"They can walk outside without getting interrupted," Kerr says. "That's pretty special."

Across a century, the relationship between New Zealand and India in cricket has been transformed. What began as a distant contest has become something far more personal – shaped by shared experiences, mutual respect and, increasingly, shared identity.

Sports historian Dr Geoff Watson explains, "India is now very much a place of sporting opportunity for many New Zealanders, not just those playing in the Indian Premier League, but

also a good number of New Zealand hockey players are playing in the Indian Hockey League as well. So it's quite an interesting sort of evolution of the relationship."

As New Zealand and India celebrate 100 years of sporting ties Watson only sees the relationship getting stronger.

"India is part of a sporting pathway for a number of New Zealanders now, for those of Indian descent, and non-Indian descent, so I think that will continue to be important.

"I mean [India] is effectively paying the salaries of a lot of New Zealand's elite cricketers and, to a lesser extent, some of the hockey players and I think that will continue to develop."

Watson points out that successive New Zealand governments have also recognised the broader value of sport in an increasingly multicultural New Zealand. "One of the things you see is that governments of all stripes have continued to put a lot of funding into sports since the 1990s and early 2000s, because they see sport as important to both social and international cohesion."

From Bert Sutcliffe's defiance in Delhi to Bruce Taylor's unmatched debut in Kolkata, from Sir Richard Hadlee and Kapil Dev's great battles as allrounders to Sachin Tendulkar reshaping batting, from John Wright helping build a new India to Ajaz Patel's perfect 10 in Mumbai, the layers continue to build.

Cricket has not just linked New Zealand and India; it has narrowed the distance. As the next century begins, that relationship looks less like a rivalry, and more like a shared future.

What began as a distant contest has become something far more personal – shaped by shared experiences, mutual respect and, increasingly, shared identity.



MOUNTAINEERING

A century of sporting ties

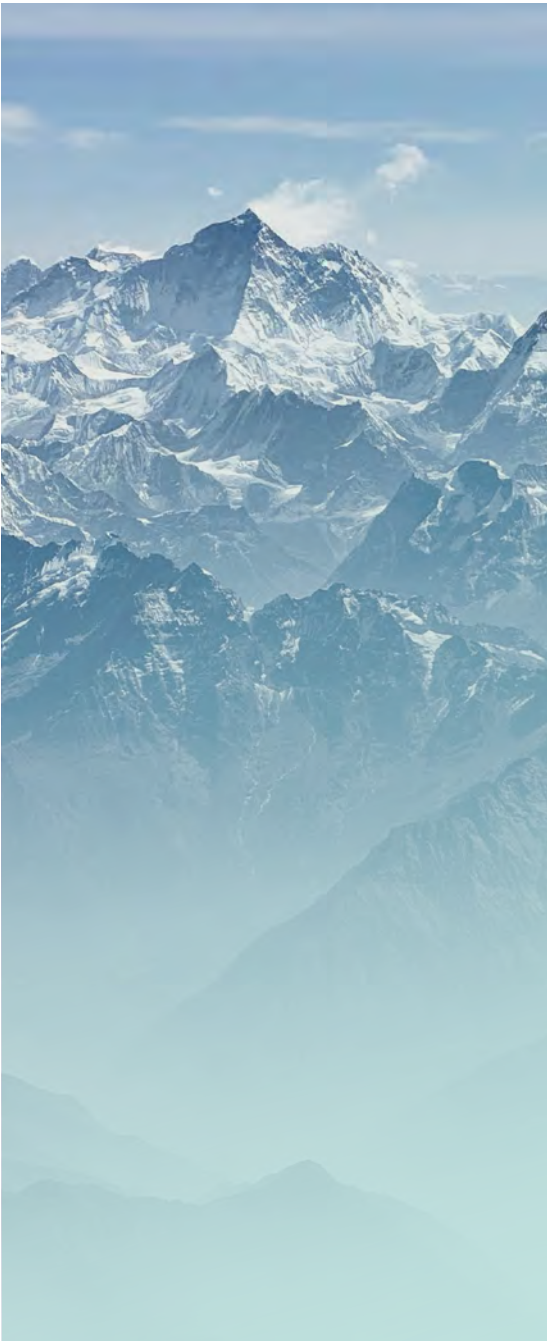
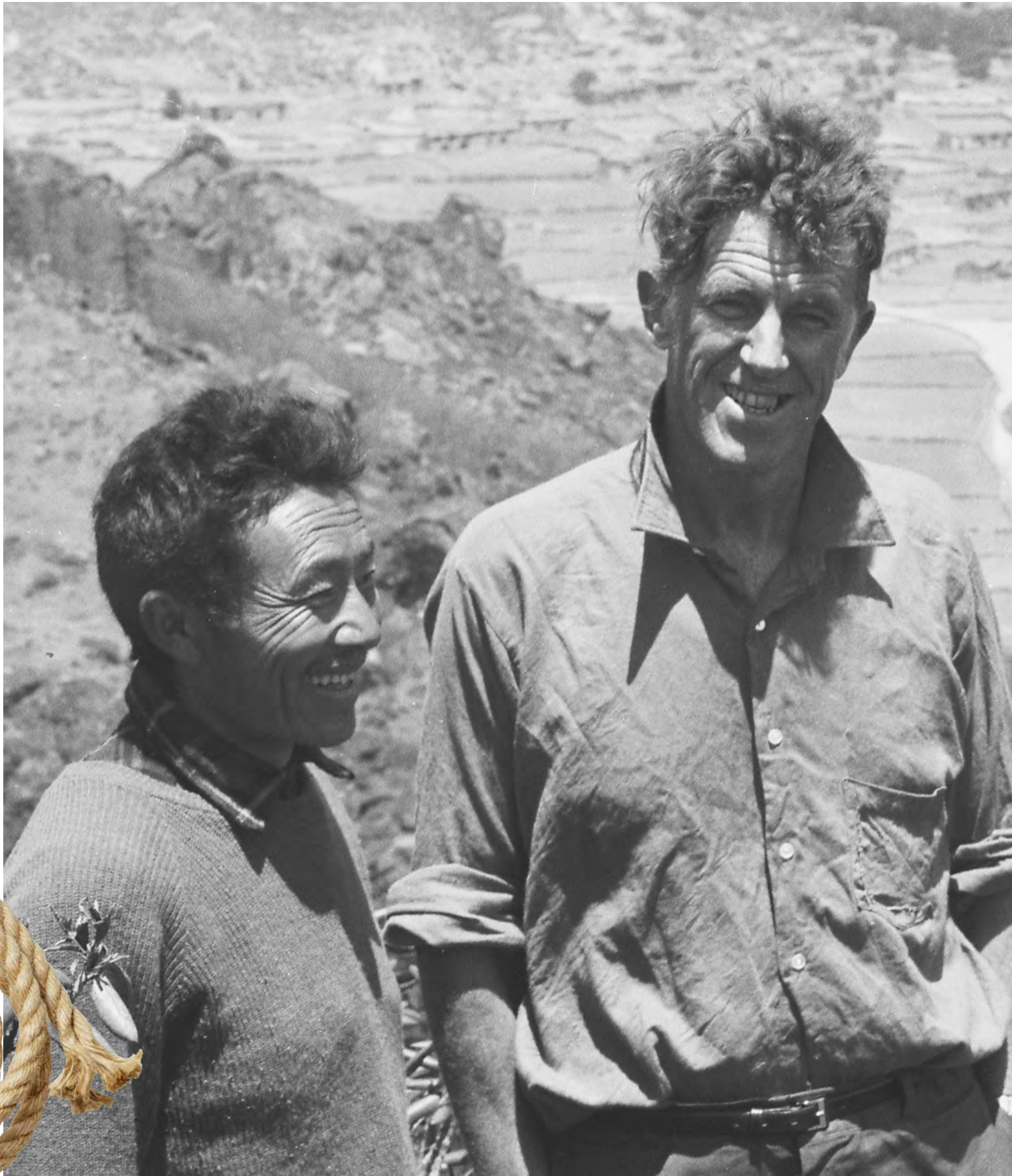
1970

Left: Sir Edmund Hillary receives a deputation of local men
Supplied: Himalayan Trust

How New Zealand and India reached new heights

Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay’s ascent to the highest point on Earth – the summit of Mount Everest on 29 May 1953 – changed mountaineering history forever. It also forged an enduring relationship between India and New Zealand.

For New Zealand, it was a defining national moment. For India, it was a source of shared pride through Tenzing Norgay’s deep association with the Himalayan climbing community centred on Darjeeling.



1970
Centre left: Sir Edmund Hillary above a Solukhumbu village
Supplied: Himalayan Trust

2024
Right: View of Mount Everest
Credit: Julius Zetzsche

But beyond the headlines, the ascent helped lay the foundations for something far more enduring – a relationship between New Zealand and India built not just on diplomacy, but on people, place and shared experience.

That relationship did not emerge overnight. It developed gradually, shaped by expeditions, cultural exchange, humanitarian work and, eventually, formal diplomatic ties. At its centre was Hillary himself – not just the man who reached the summit, but the one who kept returning.

The connection between New Zealand climbers and India began even before Everest. In 1951, a group of New Zealand mountaineers – Earle Riddiford, Ed Cotter, George Lowe and Hillary – travelled to the Garhwal Himalaya in northern India. Having developed their climbing skills in New Zealand’s Southern Alps, they were looking for a new challenge on a much larger scale. With logistical support from India’s Himalayan Club, the team climbed Mukut Parbat. Riddiford and Cotter, alongside Pasang Dawa Lama, reached the summit.

Sir Edmund Hillary’s son Peter, himself a highly accomplished mountaineer having twice summited Everest, recalls that the group had developed their skills to a high level in New Zealand and were eager to find their next challenge.

“So they started thinking about where they could go and what they could do and obviously the Himalayas stands there as one of the ultimate [adventures] ... but they had no idea about the Everest expedition.”

In the 1950s Nepal opened its borders, prompting discussion around whether there was access from the south side to Everest. British explorer Eric Shipton was putting together a reconnaissance expedition to see whether that route was viable. He invited two New Zealanders from the group that had scaled Mukut Parat to join his venture. After much debate it was decided Hillary and Riddiford would join the expedition.

“So Dad went and joined Eric Shipton’s reconnaissance up into the Solukumbu on the south side of Mount Everest. They climbed the Kumbu Icefall, ascended high onto a peak called Pumori and looked into the fabled Western Kumbu of Mount Everest and they

could see that the southern route was potentially doable and that was the beginning of their efforts from the south side.”

The 1953 Everest expedition led by John Hunt was officially a British venture, but its success resonated across the Commonwealth. When news of the ascent reached London on the eve of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the achievement quickly became a symbol of shared endeavour among Commonwealth nations.

For New Zealand, Hillary’s triumph instantly elevated the country’s international reputation. Yet the achievement also held deep significance across South Asia. Tenzing Norgay, who had long been associated with mountaineering operations centred in Darjeeling, was widely celebrated in India. The hill town – then the epicentre of Himalayan climbing – became a focal point of international mountaineering culture.

“There’s this delightful story of the whole British Expedition coming down to Delhi [after completing the 1953 climb] and meeting Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, and Tenzing sharing with Nehru that he’d been invited to fly with the team to London.”

1970
Bottom right: Mingma Tsering and Sir Edmund Hillary in the Solukhumbu
Supplied: Himalayan Trust

2024
Top right: View of Aoraki, Mount Cook
Credit: Nick Da Fonseca





“I like to think that I am a very ordinary New Zealander. Not terribly bright, perhaps, but determined and practical in what I do,” said Hillary.

“But he had a couple of problems – one, he didn’t have a passport, and two, he didn’t have appropriate suits or clothes to wear. Apparently, Nehru said, ‘I can solve both of those right away. Tomorrow morning you will have an Indian passport.’”

“He then took Tenzing to his dressing room and told him to select a couple of his fabled famous ‘Nehru suits’ and that’s what Tenzing took to London and to Europe for that 1953 celebration.”

India embraced Norgay as a national hero and soon afterwards he became director of field training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, established in 1954. Hillary also became revered in India and his relationship with the country changed forever.

While the story of Everest tends to focus on the summit itself, Hillary’s true legacy arguably lies in what he did afterward. Unlike many explorers who moved on from their great achievement, Hillary returned to the Himalayas again and again.

Through the Himalayan Trust – the charitable organisation he founded in 1960 – Hillary devoted much of his life to improving education, healthcare and infrastructure for communities across the region.

Although much of this work was centred in Nepal, its impact was felt across the wider Himalayan region that includes northern India. The Trust built schools, hospitals and airstrips, helping to transform remote mountain communities.

Indian climbers, mountaineering students and expedition leaders regularly encountered Hillary during these decades. His presence in the region made him a familiar and respected figure throughout the Himalayan world.

“I like to think that I am a very ordinary New Zealander. Not terribly bright, perhaps, but determined and practical in what I do,” said Hillary.

It was also during this period that the influence of Hillary and Norgay’s 1953 feat began to have a visible impact on Indian mountaineers. Expeditions into the Indian Himalayas were increasingly organised through institutions such as the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. For Indian climbers beginning their own Himalayan journeys in the 1950s and 1960s, the ascent provided both inspiration and a blueprint.

Then, in 1977, Hillary, along with his son Peter, undertook one of the most unusual expeditions of his career: a jet-boat journey up the Ganges River called ‘Ocean to the Sky’. The expedition began at the mouth of the Ganges in the Bay of Bengal and travelled upstream thousands of kilometres traversing West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand towards the Himalayas, symbolically linking India’s great river with the world’s highest mountain.

The expedition captured the imagination of many Indians, reinforcing Hillary’s reputation. Local enthusiasm was immense, with millions of people flocking to see the group, all sponsored by the Indian government.

In a 1978 interview on TV One’s *the Good Day* programme, Hillary said while the journey itself was very exciting “it was really our association with the people of the river that was so tremendously important to us”.

He continued, “I mean, the warmth that we got from the people living along the banks, we really came to be accepted as people doing a religious pilgrimage up the Ganga, even though we are not particularly religious people.”

“We absorbed the philosophy of the people and we enjoyed and revelled, really, in the warmth that came from them.”

Peter Hillary adds, “My father and I, we’ve both said that in many ways it was the most marvellous expedition of the lot.”

“It had everything and the warmth and generosity of Indian people, whether it was in Bengal or Bihar or Punjab or up in the Himalayas, was just astounding. As we drove the jetboats through Calcutta, we waved to crowds along the banks of the river that we estimated would have exceeded the population of New Zealand at the time, which was three million people.”

2025

Left: Boats moored on a misty river in Varanasi, India
Credit: Harsh Khandelwal



“Every couple of days we would refuel the jet boats, refill a few jerrycans and an Indian oil tanker would come down to some little village at an agreed refuelling site and people would show up.”

While the local Indians wanted to see the “miraculous new jet boats and the conqueror of Mount Everest – Edmund Hillary”, there was more to it than simply the adventure, says Peter Hillary. “For Hindus there’s a wish that they could go on a pilgrimage, called Darshan, and walk the length of the Ganges River and visit the shrines along this holy river.”

“Most people will never be able to do it, but to be in the company of people who are making the journey provides great merit and so people turned out in numbers ... we commonly would have two or three hundred thousand people crowding down to the refuelling site and the energy and the excitement was absolutely magical.”

“I remember stopping on the Gangetic Plains fairly late one evening at a little village, it was like a time warp with great Brahmin cows wandering around, fields of rice and barley and other grains and these mud-rendered, very simple houses. It was so serene and they’d invite us in and make room for our tents.

Just the generosity of the people and the connection we had with them. It was an astounding opportunity.”

That expedition was cathartic for both father and son.

Two years earlier while en route to join Hillary in the village of Phaphlu, Nepal, where he was helping to build a hospital, Sir Edmund’s wife Louise and daughter Belinda were killed in a plane crash near Kathmandu Airport shortly after take-off.

“It was a very challenging and confronting time for Dad, my sister Sarah and me. But the ‘Ocean to Sky’ was an amazing cathartic sort of trip in some respects.”

1973

Top right: A stamp depicting Mount Everest in celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

1983

Top left: Indian Mountaineering Foundation 1983 stamp of India
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

“Of course it doesn’t take away the searing pain of loss, but it does help with learning to live with it and carry on. I’d have to thank the people of India for the warm welcome, the friendship and just reaching out to us [during that expedition]. It gives you a feeling of confidence in humanity and life.”

“We also had the wonderful company of the people on the expedition. There were Indian members, there were Sherpa members from Nepal and there were people from New Zealand and Australia. The camaraderie we shared was absolutely exceptional.”

Among that group were captain Mohan Kohli who had led a successful Indian Mount Everest expedition in 1965, which put nine people on the summit – a record at the time. Others in the party included New Zealand climbers Graeme Dingle, Murray Jones and Mike Gill.

The mission faced extreme rapids and wildlife, and, high in the Himalayas, Sir Edmund nearly died of altitude-induced cerebral oedema.

“There were quite a few scary moments. I mean even in the jet boats ... in those huge waters of the upper Ganges tributaries it was very dangerous and we got very close to getting swamped on several occasions.”

“Then we trekked up to a shrine at Badrinath and attempted to climb a beautiful peak called Karsh Parbat ... sadly Dad developed altitude sickness. It’s quite ironic really after being so strong in the successful ascent of Mount Everest in 1953. He got very sick and we had to wrap him up in his sleeping bag and a collapsed tent and sled him down the glacier to a lower elevation.”

“It’s extraordinary when you get someone down – six, seven, eight hundred metres just how much they will recover if you do it in time and that’s what happened to Dad,” said Peter Hillary.

“We got him down and a can of Wattie’s peaches was pressed into Dad’s hands and he started really enjoying eating the peaches and slurping down the syrup and when he did that we all knew he was on his way back and we were hugely relieved.”

Sir Edmund was then airlifted out by the Indian Airforce.

Between 1985 and 1989 Sir Edmund’s relationship with India took on a much more formal role, when he became high commissioner to India. Hillary’s appointment marked the re-opening of the New Zealand mission which then-prime minister Sir Robert Muldoon had closed in 1982 after falling out with the Indian government in the wake of New Zealand’s sporting ties with South Africa.

Dr Geoff Watson from Massey University says that Hillary played a crucial role in re-establishing ties between New Zealand and India. “There was a sort of a shared sense that Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were seen as both being people of empire ‘who’d made good.’”

Watson explains, “To have Edmund Hillary going to India as the ambassador sent a very important signal that New Zealand took the relationship seriously.

“We got him down and a can of Watties peaches was pressed into Dad’s hands and he started really enjoying eating the peaches and slurping down the syrup and when he did that we all knew he was on his way back and we were hugely relieved.”

As ambassador, Hillary hosted and met Indian dignitaries and was instrumental in Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi visiting New Zealand in 1986.

India's respect for Hillary was further underlined in 1997, when Hillary returned to India to unveil a statue of himself at Darjeeling's Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, alongside Tenzing Norgay's son, Jamling Tenzing Norgay.

In recent decades New Zealanders have continued to climb Indian peaks. In 2022, Matthew Scholes, Kim Ladiges and Daniel Joll of the New Zealand Alpine team climbed Garhwal's Changabang West Face for the first time in 46 years.

Likewise, Indian climbers come to New Zealand to train and climb in the Southern Alps. In 2010, New Zealand launched the Sir Edmund Hillary Fellowship aiming to build on New Zealand-India links. Rahul Gandhi (great-grandson of Nehru) was the inaugural Hillary Fellow and travelled to New Zealand that year, with then New Zealand prime minister John Key saying: "India is a priority relationship for New Zealand. Its leading position in the region and internationally, and its economic significance, make it strategically important to New Zealand."

Mountaineering may not have been the most visible sporting connection between New Zealand and India over recent decades, but it has certainly been one of the most enduring – and quietly transformative.

When Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay stood atop Mount Everest, the summit itself may have lain beyond India's borders, but the political and emotional geography of the achievement bonded New Zealand and India.

Norgay, long associated with Darjeeling, was celebrated as a hero in India, and Hillary's success was seen not as a distant foreign triumph, but rather embraced as a source of shared pride across the Himalayan world.

In the years that followed, India became a crucial gateway for Himalayan expeditions, and New Zealand climbers increasingly engaged with Indian institutions. But Hillary's legacy in India, and in the broader region, reshaped how New Zealand was perceived abroad. At a national level, mountaineering helped to open informal diplomatic channels during a formative period in India-New Zealand relations – India was still defining its place in the world following its independence in 1947, while New Zealand was beginning to assert a more independent foreign policy.

Exchanges between alpine clubs, survey teams and expedition groups created people-to-people links that often preceded formal governmental engagement. While mountaineering may lack the visibility of a packed stadium of cricket or hockey fans, it sits alongside them and other sports as part of the broader tapestry of India-New Zealand ties.

Its impact is also arguably deeper. It has connected the two nations not through rivalry and competition, but through shared challenge and cooperation.



When Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay stood atop Mount Everest, the summit itself may have lain beyond India's borders, but the political and emotional geography of the achievement bonded New Zealand and India.

1953

29 May 1953 Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary after successfully completing the first ascent of Mount Everest at 11.30am
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Signature

Sir Edmund Hillary
Credit: Wikimedia Commons



OTHER SPORTS

A century of sporting ties

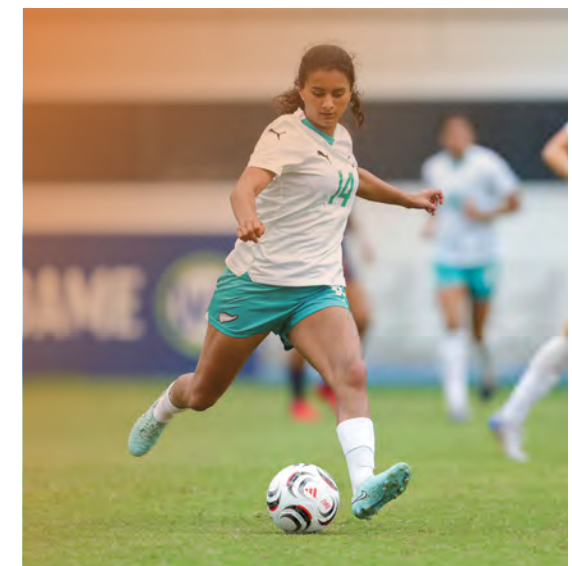
2022

Left: Paul Coll at the Commonwealth Games
Supplied: New Zealand Olympic Committee

India and New Zealand beyond the hockey field and cricket pitch

In 1926, Indian and New Zealand athletes met on hockey fields, unaware they were laying the foundations for a sporting relationship that would stretch across a century. There were no television cameras, no global audiences, no sense of historical weight. Just competition – and the quiet beginnings of connection.

One hundred years on, what started as imperial-era touring fixtures has evolved into a multi-layered sporting relationship shaped by rivalry, migration, cultural exchange and shared Commonwealth heritage.



2022

Top right: Ali Forsyth competes in lawn bowls at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games
Supplied: Sport New Zealand

2026

Centre left: New Zealand Rugby and Rugby India coach visit
Supplied: Sport New Zealand

2026

Bottom right: Emma Pijnenburg at the Oceania qualifiers for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2027
Supplied: New Zealand Football



Cricket and hockey have, at various times, carried the narrative: India's early dominance in Olympic hockey; the rise of New Zealand cricket through figures such as Sir Richard Hadlee; the artistry of Sachin Tendulkar. And of course, the drama of modern Test series, including New Zealand's World Test Championship triumph and landmark success in India.

But to tell the story through those lenses alone is to overlook the bigger picture of what has unfolded.

Because the real story lies in the accumulation – in the dozens of sports, the hundreds of encounters and the thousands of athletes who have crossed paths over generations.

Football, squash, tennis, weightlifting, bowls, kabaddi and badminton – each has contributed its own thread to a relationship that has rarely stood still.

Some contests have been dramatic, even defining; others have gone almost unnoticed yet have helped form an enduring connection.

The Commonwealth as a meeting ground

If cricket and hockey provided the early pillars, the Commonwealth Games became the great meeting ground – a recurring stage on which New Zealand and India would test themselves against each other across an ever-expanding range of disciplines.

When Christchurch hosted the 1974 Commonwealth Games, it did so with a sense of occasion befitting a small nation stepping confidently onto the world stage. India arrived with a team of just 20 athletes but left with a medal haul that spoke to growing ambition: 15 medals, including four gold, and an overall sixth-place finish on the medal table.

New Zealand, buoyed by home support, collected 35 medals to finish fourth, a reminder of the host nation's own rising confidence in international sport.

By the time Auckland hosted the Games in 1990, the dynamic had shifted again. India's emergence in weightlifting, particularly in the lighter men's divisions, was impossible to ignore. Lifters such as Ponnuswamy Rangaswamy, Parvesh Chander Sharma and Paramjit Sharma delivered gold medals, helping India to finish fifth overall.

Throughout the 1990s, at the Games in Victoria, Canada (1994) and Kuala Lumpur (1998), the two nations found themselves regularly competing in weightlifting arenas. The contests were technical, often intense, and rarely headline-grabbing – but they mattered.

When Delhi hosted the Commonwealth Games in 2010, the spotlight fell firmly on India. It would become the country's most successful Games, yielding 101 medals, including 39 gold.

Yet within that success lies a uniquely New Zealand story – one that speaks to the deeper layers of sporting connection.

Less than two years before the Games, there were no lawn bowling greens in Delhi. The sport was part of the programme, but the infrastructure simply did not exist. Enter Bill Fowlie, a New Zealander tasked by World Bowls with overseeing the construction of facilities and the organisation of competition. It was an immense logistical challenge, requiring not only technical expertise but diplomacy, persistence and trust.

Fowlie delivered. Greens were built at the prestigious Delhi Public School RK Puram. The competition went ahead.

And then, quietly, the legacy began.

Among those who would benefit from the new facilities was a local teacher, Pinki Singh. With access to world-class greens on her doorstep, she developed her game in a way that would not have been possible before.

Twelve years later, at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, Singh was part of the Indian women's fours team that defeated New Zealand in the semifinals on the way to gold. New Zealand took bronze.

It was an outcome shaped, in part, by a New Zealander's contribution more than a decade earlier – a reminder that sporting influence is not always immediate, and not always linear.

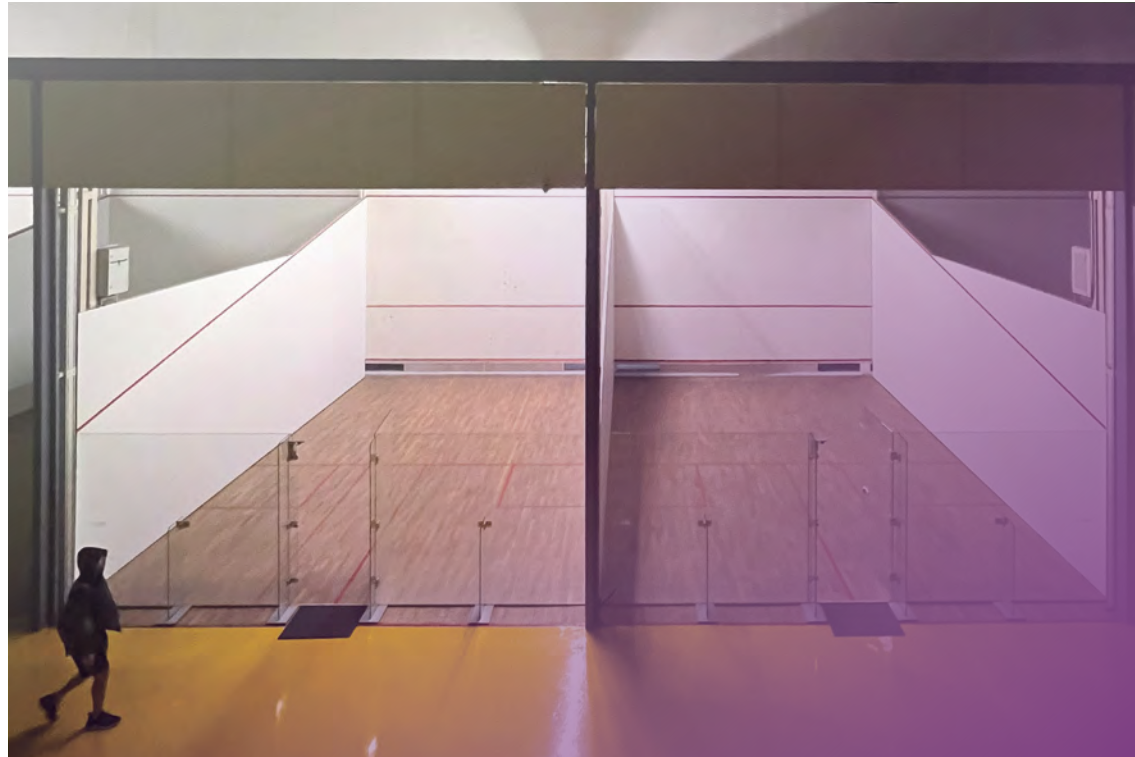
The 2010 Games in Delhi also produced direct competition between the two nations. India's men's hockey team claimed silver while the New Zealand men's took bronze. In the women's tournament, New Zealand secured silver – another example of the two nations pushing each other on a global stage.

While celebrated Indian para-athlete and activist Deepa Malik missed out on a medal at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, she would go on to win silver in shot put at the IPC World Para Athletics Championship in Christchurch the following year. Malik, who is paralysed from the chest down and only began her sporting career at 30, would make history at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, becoming the first Indian woman to win a silver medal at the Paralympics, again for shot put.

Malik's achievements across numerous sports and her activism for disability rights and inclusion in sport made her a natural choice for the 2019 Sir Edmund Hillary Fellowship and a 'citizen ambassador' to New Zealand. Malik toured Auckland and Wellington in 2019, where she met with organisations and community groups.

2026

Left: Sarpreet Singh during New Zealand's match against Iran at the 2026 FIFA World Cup
Supplied: Sport New Zealand



Squash

In more recent decades, squash has emerged as one of the most consistently compelling arenas for New Zealand-India competition.

At the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, India's pairing of Joshna Chinappa and Dipika Pallikal surged to gold in the women's doubles, defeating England in the final.

Along the way, they beat New Zealand's Joelle King and Amanda Landers-Murphy in a tight quarterfinal.

Four years later, on the Gold Coast, the New Zealand duo responded. In a final that carried the weight of unfinished business, King and Landers-Murphy defeated Chinappa and Pallikal to claim the gold.

By the 2022 Birmingham Games, the rivalry had deepened further. Joelle King and Paul Coll combined to win mixed doubles gold, overcoming India's top-seeded combination of Saurav Ghosal and Pallikal. Coll also defeated Ghosal in the men's singles semifinals before going on to secure gold.

The exchanges were not just competitive – they were personal, shaped by familiarity and mutual respect.

The exchanges were not just competitive – they were personal, shaped by familiarity and mutual respect.

2026

Bottom right: Sarpreet Singh, Chris Wood and Elijah Just celebrate Just's goal at the 2026 FIFA World Cup
Supplied: Sport New Zealand

Football

Football, for all its global reach, has provided relatively few direct meetings between New Zealand and India. Yet when those encounters have occurred, they have carried significance beyond the result.

The first meeting came in 1981 at Malaysia's Merdeka Tournament, ending in a scoreless draw. It would be more than 40 years before the two sides would meet again, this time at the Intercontinental Cup in Mumbai in 2022, where New Zealand edged out India 2-1.

But the deeper story lies not in the fixtures themselves, but in the growing intersection between sport and migration.

Only two football players of Indian descent have represented New Zealand at a senior level. The first, goalkeeper Praven Jerram, played in the 1970s. The second is Sarpreet Singh – a player whose career reflects the evolving nature of the relationship.

Born in Auckland to Punjabi parents, Singh's debut for the All Whites came against India – a moment layered with personal and cultural meaning.

"To be a Singh and come back and play in India, against India, was really special," he told *The Times of India* in 2025.

Singh is widely followed in India. When New Zealand qualified for the 2026 FIFA World Cup he joked in an interview with *World Soccer* magazine, "If you look at my socials, you would think India have qualified for the World Cup and not New Zealand!"

It was said with humour, but spoke to something deeper – a connection that now extends well beyond national teams.

Singh's rise would take him to Europe, where he signed with Bayern Munich in 2019, becoming the first player of Indian heritage to join one of football's most storied clubs.

While injuries would limit his impact at the highest level, Singh's broader significance has endured. In an interview with *The Times of India*, he spoke of what it meant to have become a role model for footballers of Indian heritage.

"It's truly humbling that I'm in a position to inspire Indian and South Asian footballers in general.

"As I've grown older, I've become more appreciative of the importance of representation."

"I represent a lot of people. I want to try and create a pathway for future Indian players; I hope it can lead for future players to go through and do their thing."



New Zealand takes on India at its own game

Few stories better capture the cultural dimension of the relationship than the rise of kabaddi in New Zealand.

A traditional Indian sport, kabaddi first appeared in New Zealand in 1990 with a tournament in Hamilton. For many years it remained a niche pursuit, sustained largely within Punjabi and Sikh communities.

Then, in 2012, came a turning point.

South Auckland dairy owner Tara Singh Bains set out to form a New Zealand women's team. Drawing on networks across communities – including local marae – he brought together athletes from rugby union, rugby league and touch.

They had the physicality. What they lacked was experience.

That became clear when they arrived at the 2013 World Cup in India.

"We were just playing against ourselves with our own strategies," recalled player Riri Motu.

"So going into that first game against India was a big shock."

The sport's simplicity – no ball, bare feet, hard surfaces – belied its complexity.

"We were thinking, why aren't people just picking them up and chucking them out? But it wasn't as easy as we thought when we met them face-to-face."

And yet, somehow, they thrived.

New Zealand finished runners-up to India in that tournament, stunning the kabaddi world. They repeated the feat in 2016 and secured bronze in 2019.



For Motu, however, the defining memory was not the result, but the reception.

"It was like they loved us. We were like superstars. It was overwhelming."

She saw echoes of Māori values in the hospitality.

"I think about it in terms of manaakitanga – the respect, the care, making sure you're looked after. That was exactly what we experienced."

In 2021, a purpose-built kabaddi stadium opened in Takanini at the Sri Kalgidhar Sahib Gurdwara (New Zealand's largest Sikh temple) – believed to be the only dedicated facility of its kind outside India. By 2025, the New Zealand men's team had claimed victory at an international tournament hosted there.

What began as a transplanted sport had become something embedded in New Zealand sporting life.

"I think about it in terms of manaakitanga – the respect, the care, making sure you're looked after. That was exactly what we experienced."

2013

Top left: New Zealand's first women's kabaddi team in India to compete in the Kabaddi World Cup
Supplied: Riri Motu

Badminton and earlier connections

Competition between New Zealand and India has played out on the badminton court on a regular basis, with the first competition believed to have taken place in 1963 when India came to New Zealand to play a Thomas Cup tie. The Cup is sometimes referred to as the World Men's Team Championships.

The two countries met again in another Thomas Cup tie in New Zealand in 1972. There have also been a handful of player exchanges.

In 1969, New Zealand player Richard Purser was invited to India to compete in a series of international tournaments over a three-week period.

India competed at the 1974 Commonwealth Games in Christchurch, where Prakash Padukone, considered a pioneer of Indian badminton, reached the quarterfinals.

The two nations have also played one another in the Uber Cup, known as the World Women's Team Championships.

During the late-1990s and early-2000s, the two countries were often very competitive with one another, particularly in team events.

In recent years, India has become a leading badminton nation with several men's and women's players featuring in the upper echelons of the world rankings. Although opportunities to compete still exist, results are generally more one-sided in India's favour.

That said, one of the standout moments for New Zealand came at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, when New Zealand beat India 3-2 in the mixed team event.

The tie came down to the final match, with Rhona Robertson and Tammy Jenkins winning the deciding doubles match in a dramatic fifth game, guaranteeing New Zealand a bronze medal in the team competition.

Earlier that year, New Zealand beat India 3-2 in the Uber Cup qualifier in the Netherlands, showing just how evenly matched the two countries were at the time.

There are also a couple of Indian players who left a lasting impression on the New Zealand badminton fraternity.

While Prakash Padukone was knocked out in the quarterfinals of the 1974 Commonwealth Games in Christchurch, he would go on to win gold at the 1978 Games and would become the first Indian player to win the All England Open in 1980. Padukone was renowned for his incredible deception and skill on the court.

Syed Modi, who won gold at the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane in 1982, also played in New Zealand at an Auckland invitation event in the mid-1980s and is remembered as an outstanding player and personality in the sport.

In recent years, India has become a leading badminton nation with several men and women's players featuring in the upper echelons of the world rankings.

**2025**

Far left: India's Shrivalli Bhamidipaty and New Zealand's Aishi Das in Pune, India for the Billy Jean King Cup
Supplied: Tennis New Zealand

2025

Left: New Zealand celebrate a win in Pune, India in the Billy Jean King Cup
Supplied: Tennis New Zealand

Tennis

Long before global tours and television audiences, tennis provided another avenue for connection.

Indian star Vijay Amritraj won the 1977 New Zealand Open singles title, defeating American Tim Wilkison in the final. Alongside his brother Anand, he also enjoyed doubles success against New Zealand opponents, including Onny Parun and Jeff Simpson.

It was part of a broader era in which both nations were carving out their identities in international tennis – often crossing paths in the process.

Over the past 30 years, Indian players have generally enjoyed greater success on the global stage.

Leander Paes made history when he won a bronze medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics in the men's singles.

Rohan Bopanna won his first men's major title when he won the doubles at the 2024 Australian Open and, at the age of 43, also became the oldest No 1 in ATP doubles history.

Sania Mirza is India's most successful female tennis player having won six Grand Slam titles – three in women's doubles and three in mixed doubles. She also held the world No 1 ranking in doubles for nearly two years.

In 1997, Mahesh Bhupathi made history as the first Indian to win a Grand Slam title when he claimed the 1997 French Open mixed doubles.

A standout for New Zealand in recent years though has been Erin Routliffe – winning the US Open women's doubles titles in 2023 and 2025, as well as the 2024 WTA Finals. She was also runner-up at Wimbledon in 2024 and became the first New Zealand woman to reach the world No 1 ranking in women's doubles in July 2024.

In recent times, contests between New Zealand and India in tennis have been somewhat sporadic. The 2015 Davis Cup Asia/Oceania group tie in Christchurch is one example of a relatively recent New Zealand-India confrontation.

After day one the encounter was level, at 1–1 in the singles.

New Zealand then surprisingly won the doubles with Marcus Daniel and Rubin Statham shocking India's world top 10 pairing of Rohan Bopana and Saketh Myeni in straight sets.

Daniel thought that his effort was done for the tournament with Statham and Michael Venus set to play the final reverse singles.

"That night I was having dinner with my parents, having a glass of wine because I was like, 'Oh, I did a great job today and got the job done and tomorrow I will just go out and support the team!'"

"Then I got a tap on the shoulder from the team captain and [Rubin] had gone down sick and it was like, 'Hey, you're up first tomorrow'. I hadn't played a singles match at this stage for something like three years."

"I had to go out there on the slowest hard court and play [Somdev Devvarman] a guy who was known as being the fastest man around ... and I was a serve and volley player.

"So it was the worst combination of things. Only clay would have been worse. I lost but it was a good match and I just put everything of myself into [it]."

India went on to win the tie 3–2.

History shows Indian players have excelled at doubles play and Daniel feels that comes down to being "extremely skillful with their hands" and "deft around the net which lends itself well to doubles".

Daniel says there has been plenty of crossover at times between New Zealand and Indian players teaming up in doubles as their skills are complementary.

"But not only do your games have to be complementary, you need to get on with the people as well."

"There's something in that, perhaps our battling natures? Perhaps also a built-in humility ... and feeling there's an element of needing to prove yourself in a country where [tennis] is not as high up the totem pole as other sports."

A connection older than the century

While 1926 marks the start of official sporting ties between New Zealand and India with that inaugural hockey tour, there are connections that predate it.

Two early All Blacks – Harry Braddon and Maurice Herrold – were both born in Kolkata in the 19th century. Their stories sit as quiet reminders that the ties between the two nations run deeper than fixtures and tournaments.

They speak to movement, migration and the long arc of shared history.

Today, the relationship continues to evolve in ways that would have been unimaginable a century ago.

Migration has reshaped the sporting landscape. Athletes of Indian heritage now represent New Zealand across multiple codes. Indian athletes compete regularly in events hosted in Aotearoa. Cultural exchange is no longer incidental – it is central. Nor is the connection defined by official tours alone. It lives in communities, in pathways and in shared experiences.

What began as competition has become an ongoing conversation.

And if the past 100 years have shown anything, it is that the most meaningful sporting relationships are not built on isolated moments of brilliance, but on the accumulation of encounters, generation after generation.

The next century of New Zealand-India sporting ties is already underway. And, like the first, it will likely begin in ways that seem small until history gives them their weight.

2019

Top left: Deepa Malik and Sophie Pascoe
Supplied: Paralympics New Zealand

2025

Top right: Emma Pijnenburg plays for the New Zealand Football Ferns
Supplied: New Zealand Football

2026

Bottom centre: New Zealand Rugby and Rugby India celebrate 100 years of unity through sports in Odisha, India
Supplied: Sport New Zealand



Today, the relationship continues to evolve in ways that would have been unimaginable a century ago.



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New Zealanders to
excel in Asia.

2026

Right: Football Ferns Michaela Foster and Maya Hahn
during the FIFA Women's World Cup qualifiers
Supplied: New Zealand Football

2022

Back cover: New Zealand and India teams walk on
to the field ahead of the New Zealand vs India 2nd
Twenty20 International cricket match, Bay Oval,
Mount Maunganui, 20 November 2022
Supplied: Photosport

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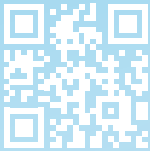


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