

Do the Numbers Back the Legends?

Thirteen Years of IPL in SQL

Every ball bowled in the IPL from 2008 to 2020, queried to check whether the players and teams everyone calls the best actually are, by the numbers.

THE QUESTION

Reputation is built on memory. This is built on every ball.

Commentary and fan debate tend to run on highlight reels and recent form. This project sets that aside and works from the full record instead: every delivery bowled across 13 IPL seasons, joined against match results, to see who the data actually backs as the tournament's best batsmen, bowlers, and teams.

193,468

deliveries bowled, 2008–2020

816

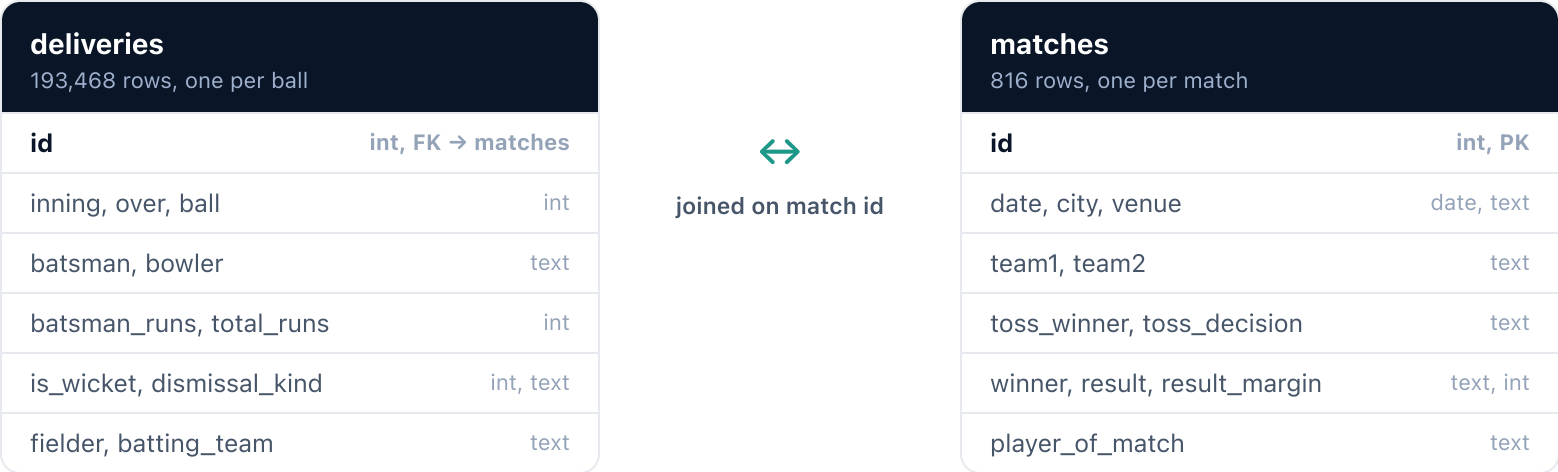
matches across 13 seasons

252,794

total runs scored in IPL history

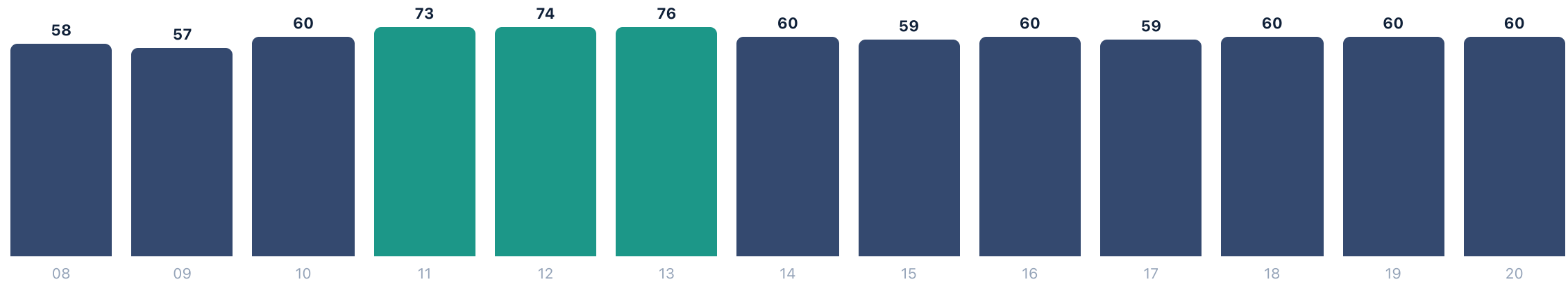
Two tables: one row per ball, one row per match

Joined on match id, which lets a question be answered at whichever level actually fits it: ball-by-ball for individual performance, match-level for results and context.



FINDING 01

Three seasons ran far more games than the rest



Matches played, by season. 2011 to 2013 highlighted.

2011, 2012 and 2013 each ran more games than any other season.

The tournament expanded to more teams over these three years before settling back to a steady 59 or 60 matches from 2014 onward, a useful check before comparing any per-season number across the dataset.

FINDING 02

One player accounts for 2.4% of every run scored, ever



Across 13 seasons, hundreds of players, and 252,794 total runs, **Virat Kohli's 6,081 runs** make up 2.4% of everything scored in IPL history. Computed as a running share ordered by total runs per batsman, so the figure is against the whole competition, not against just his own team or season.

Nearly one in every forty runs in IPL history belongs to one player.

Kohli is followed by SK Raina (5,604) and DA Warner (5,522), both well clear of the rest of the field but still short of his total.

FINDING 03

Chris Gayle leads by a distance nobody else is close to



Career sixes hit, 2008–2020.

Gayle has hit 114 more sixes than the player in second place.

That gap is bigger than the one separating second place from eighth. On the bowling side, PP Chawla (181), A Mishra (172) and RA Jadeja (148) have conceded the most, all three spin bowlers, which fits: spin gets targeted for boundaries more than pace does in this format.

FINDING 04

De Villiers leads overall, and leads even harder under pressure

Strike rate, players with 3,000+ career runs



Strike rate, overs 16 to 20 only (200+ balls faced)



De Villiers scores nearly a run and a half per ball once a game reaches the death overs.

He tops the overall strike-rate list among high-volume scorers, and the gap widens further when the comparison is narrowed to overs 16 through 20, the highest-pressure stretch of a T20 innings. Across the last two slides he now leads three separate, independently computed metrics. That is not one good season inflating an average, that is a 13-year body of work.

FINDING 05

The tightest bowling, among those who bowled enough to count

Economy rate (runs conceded per ball) among bowlers with at least 50 overs bowled. Lower is better.

1ST

1.06

Rashid Khan, runs conceded per ball

2ND

1.11

Anil Kumble, runs conceded per ball

2ND

1.11

GD McGrath, runs conceded per ball

Two of the top three built their reputations before T20 cricket existed.

Kumble and McGrath were both established Test bowlers well before the IPL began. Economy at this level looks like a skill that transfers across formats, not something specific to how the IPL is played.

FINDING 06

Mumbai leads, but by a smaller margin than reputation suggests



All-time match wins, 2008–2020.

Mumbai's lead over Chennai works out to about one extra win a season.

14 wins separate them across 13 seasons, close enough that a single bad season for either team could plausibly flip the order. Worth remembering next time "Mumbai are just the best franchise" gets said as if the gap were wider than it is.

FINDING 07

Winning the toss barely matters. What you do with it does

Match win rate after choosing to bat first



Toss winner going on to win the match

51.2%

of matches, across all 816 games. Essentially a coin flip.

Teams that choose to field first win 55.0% of the time. Teams that bat first win 45.3%.

Winning the toss itself predicts almost nothing about the result, but the decision made with it does. Chasing carries a real, measurable edge in this format, most likely from knowing exactly what target to chase rather than having to set one.

FINDING 08

The extremes: one legendary innings, and three one-run thrillers

175*

highest individual score, CH Gayle for Royal Challengers Bangalore, 2013

146

runs, the biggest winning margin, Mumbai Indians, 2017

3

matches decided by exactly 1 run across the whole dataset

Gayle's 175 not out is the only score anywhere near that height.

The next-best individual innings tops out at 158. It happened against Pune Warriors in Bangalore on 23 April 2013, a single innings that still stands unmatched seven seasons later in this dataset.

SUMMARY

The data mostly backs the legends

- **AB de Villiers tops four separate, independently computed leaderboards.** Strike rate, death-overs strike rate, career sixes, and Player of the Match awards (23, the most of anyone, with Chris Gayle second at 22). That is not a hot streak. That is a 13-year career the numbers actually support.

- **Chris Gayle's six-hitting record is not close.** 349 sixes is a bigger gap over second place than the gap from second place to eighth.

- **Team dominance is more myth than margin.** Mumbai's all-time lead over Chennai works out to about one extra win a season, real but nowhere near what fan conversation implies.

- **The toss matters less than the decision made with it.** Fielding first wins 55.0% of matches against 45.3% for batting first, even though winning the toss itself predicts almost nothing.