



## ASHES' CRICKET SEEN AT THE MCG AN ACCOUNT OF SOME TEST MATCHES BY DOUG MANNING

I have watched play in every Test match staged at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) since the end of the Second World War in 1945. Thus, I am in an excellent position to reminisce about much of the cricket between Australia and England which I have been fortunate enough to witness down through those eventful years. I have chosen to focus on six Test matches which I recall very well, all of which were memorable.

### **Match 1**

**Third Test Match 1946/47**

**1-7 January 1947. State of the Series prior to this match:**

**Australia 2-0**

This was the first Test match which I ever watched. It was also memorable because it was the last Test match which Walter Hammond, that fine, majestic England batsman, played at the MCG. Additionally, it was important in that it was the first post-war Test match at the historic ground. The match afforded the opportunity for a new generation of cricket lovers, of whom I was one, who had come to years of discretion during the war, to catch their first glimpse of the great Don Bradman in action.

Bradman won the toss, and Australia batted first. The pitch was firm and true, though slightly on the slow side. The chief interest for me in Australia's first innings total of 365 was the batting of Bradman. He made a rather slow, and for him, laborious 79 during which he hit only two fours. By far the best batting for Australia came from Colin McCool, who, going in at number seven in the order, made a splendid 104 not out, which was bristling with sound attacking shots. The best of England's bowlers was Bedser who took three for 99 off 31 eight-ball overs.

England replied with a sterling effort which reached 351 - only 14 runs behind the Australian first innings total. I was keen to see Hammond do well, but alas, he hadn't been in long before he drove hard at Dooland, who was bowling fastish leg breaks and top spinners, only to give the bowler a sharp caught and bowled chance low down which he held without much difficulty. Edrich, Washbrook, and Yardley all made sound fifties for England. Dooland and Lindwall were the best of the Australian bowlers.

Australia's second innings of 536 made the match safe for the home side. It was chiefly notable for a magnificent 155 from the Australian opener, the left-handed Arthur Morris. Morris' batting was characterised by brilliant driving on either side of the wicket backed up by sound defence. Bradman's innings of 49 was technically much better than his innings of 79. However, the real sting in the Australian innings came from the tail, where Lindwall hit a whirlwind century. This was backed up by a scintillating innings of 92 from the wicket-keeper, Don Tallon, which resulted in an eighth-wicket partnership

of 154 being posted. This was a joy to watch.

The visitors were set an improbable target of 551 to win. Washbrook and Hutton set about this unlikely task as if they really believed they could do it, achieving an attractive opening stand of 138 which was studded with admirable strokes, particularly from Washbrook who pulled and cut the fast bowlers with panache and certainty in compiling a rather commanding century.

Hammond batted much more soundly in this second innings, making 26 before being bowled by a faster ball from Lindwall. However, apart from a few short showers, which helped the Englishmen prolong their innings, they were in the main saved by some stout resistance from the vice-captain, Norman Yardley, who finished the innings 53\*, and Bedser, who batted with grit and determination for 25. As time ran out, England was a long way from victory, but they had held the line to be 31/7 at the finish of the match - a commendable effort in view of the strength of the Australian side.

Scores: Australia 365 (McCool 104\*, Bradman 79; Bedser 3/99, Edrich 3/50) and 536 (Morris 155, Lindwall 100, Tallon 92; Bedser 3/176, Wright 3/131, Yardley 3/67).

England 351 (Edrich 89, Yardley 61; Dooland 4/69, Lindwall 2/64) and 310/7 (Washbrook 112, Yardley 53\*, Hutton 40; Miller 2/41, McCool 1/41, Toshack 1/39). Match Drawn.

## **Match 2**

**Fifth Test Match 1950/51**

**23-28 February 1951. State of the Series prior to this match: Australia 4-0**

I was unable to watch all of this Test match because of commitments at the Melbourne Teachers' College where I was a student teacher during 1951, but I did see enough of this match to appreciate the quality of the cricket played and to realise the potential significance of the result.

Hassett, who had been appointed Australia's captain when Bradman retired after the Oval Test in 1948, won the toss and Australia elected to bat on an easy paced pitch which, if anything, favoured the batsmen. Morris commenced with a sound 50 for the home side, but was eventually dismissed leg before wicket playing across the line to a straight one from Brown, the England skipper. Hassett, now established at number three for Australia, batted sensibly and responsibly, but toward the end of his innings, was forced to play many more attacking shots than he might otherwise have done because of an uncharacteristic collapse of wickets in the face of some superb medium paced bowling by both Bedser and Brown. In the end, Brown got Hassett for 92 with a beautiful ball which turned from the leg toward the off stump, catching the edge and giving Hutton the chance to bring off a superb slip catch low down to his right. Australia's first innings total of 217 was not nearly enough on such a good batting wicket. Bedser, and the lionhearted Brown, shared the bowling honours with five wickets each.

The England reply, after the whole of Saturday's play was lost to rain, in the end totalled 320, a lead of 103, which, on reflection, turned out to be vital. Uncharacteristically, Hutton was dropped twice in progressing to 79, but the best batting of the match came from the Nottinghamshire opener Reg Simpson, who was not out 156 when his last wicket partner Tattersall was clean bowled by Miller for 10. Simpson shared in a last-wicket stand of 74 with Tattersall. This was the second highest partnership of the innings. So beautifully did Simpson bat in this innings that the doyen of cricket journalists E.W. Swanton, characterised his batting in this match to be "one of the very finest innings played by an English batsman since the war."

For me however the highlight of this innings came from the electric fast bowling of Lindwall and Miller, who, in a superb spell with the second new ball, ripped the heart out of the England middle order, giving rise to a collapse which caused England to fall from 203 for three to 213 for six, as Compton, Sheppard, Brown, and Evans were defeated by the sheer pace of the great Australian pair of fast bowlers.

In wiping off their arrears of 103, Australia lost four of its best batsmen to the excellent bowling of Bedser and Wright, both of whom were at the top of their form with the ball.

The delivery which sent Hassett on his way back to the pavilion for 48 was a beauty from Wright. Wisden tells us that it was “a beautifully flighted leg break (which was) pitched on the blind side. (It) curled around Hassett’s bat, and hit middle and off.” Hole batted well for Australia in this second innings, but once he had gone for 63, clean bowled by a straight one from Trevor Bailey, the rest of the Australian innings folded fairly quickly to the bowling of Bedser and Wright, leaving England with the comparatively easy task of making 95 for victory. With Hutton in ironclad form in England’s second innings, try as they may - and they did try, believe you me - the Australian bowlers could make very little impression.

Thus, England won this match convincingly by eight wickets. It was the first English win against Australia since the Oval Test of 1938. Strange as it may seem, it brought to an end a sequence of eleven Australian victories in three series, which was exactly the same number as occurred after the First World War. Looking back with hindsight, this lone English victory in 1950/51 heralded the recovery of the Ashes by the old country in 1953 when the Ashes crowned the Coronation year.

Scores: Australia 217 (Hassett 92, Morris 50; Bedser 5/46, Brown 5/49) and 197 (Hole 63, Hassett 48; Bedser 5/59, Wright 3/56). England 320 (Hutton 79, Simpson 156\*; Lindwall 3/77, Miller 4/76) and 95/2 (Hutton 60\*; Johnston 1/36). England won by 8 wickets.

### **Match 3**

Third Test Match 1954/55

31 December and 1-5 January 1955.

State of the Series prior to this match: Australia 1 England 1

This match was memorable for the batting of May and Cowdrey, the bowling of Miller, particularly on the first morning of the match, and the bowling of Tyson and Statham throughout the match. The crowds which followed the match eagerly from day to day are worth mentioning too, as some 300,270 people paid a record amount at that time of 47,933 Australian pounds to watch the match.

Hutton won the toss and elected to bat on what looked to be an excellent batting pitch. However, within an hour, Hutton, Edrich, May and Compton were all back in the pavilion for 41 runs and England’s innings looked to be in complete disarray. At lunch-time on this first morning of the match Keith Miller’s figures stood at 9 vers, 8 maidens, 5 runs and 3 wickets. I have never seen Miller bowl better than he did on this first morning of the match. He achieved these heights despite the fact that he came into the match with a knee problem which cast serious doubts on his fitness at the time.

At this point, young Colin Cowdrey, playing on his first tour of Australia, chose to produce a classic innings of 102 - his first Test century. He got his body and his bat behind the many short rising balls which Lindwall and Miller were able to produce at will, whilst whenever the ball was pitched up, he drove both straight and through cover in superb fashion. Whenever the ball was pitched on or outside his leg stump, he was able to force the ball away for runs on many occasions, thus demonstrating batting skills of the highest order.

Although Bailey and Evans combined with Cowdrey to produce stands of 74 and 54, the final England total of 191 looked to well short of what they must have hoped for. Archer had cleaned up the English tail in fine style, taking out the bowling honours with four for 33.

Once again the England bowlers had to rescue their country from potential crisis, and once again they rose to the occasion right royally. Because of the persistent and probing bowling of Tyson and Statham, assisted by Bailey and Appleyard, Australia found itself struggling somewhat at 151 for eight. However, Maddocks, who was 'keeping instead of the injured Langley, and Johnson, the captain, put up stout resistance, causing the Australian tail to wag to such good effect that they finished their innings some 40 runs ahead on 231. The wickets were shared around between Statham, Tyson and Appleyard, with Statham being the best of the bunch. He took five for 60 off 16.3 very accurate overs.

England's second innings was marked by a splendid attacking knock by Peter May, another one of England's fine young amateur batsmen, who during the course of an innings of 91, demonstrated that he could hit the ball powerfully through the field, both straight and on the off side. With Bailey playing his characteristic forward defensive push to perfection, and Evans and Wardle hitting out with gay abandon, the England total reached 279, leaving Australia to make 240 to win, a target which most cricket pundits thought that they would reach without too much trouble.

Australia ended the penultimate day of the match still requiring 165 runs to win the match with eight second-innings wickets in hand. The weight of expert opinion, as the match reached its dramatic climax, was that Appleyard, the off spinner, would be the main destroyer if England were to win on the morrow. But in the event Hutton did not have to call on his spinner because Tyson and Statham bowled unchanged throughout the final morning of the match, Tyson taking six for 16 and Statham two for 19, to send Australia crashing to an ignominious defeat by 128 runs. Tyson's sheer speed through the air, combined with the fear of the odd shooter careering through low on a wearing, dusty wicket were enough to completely bamboozle the Australian batsmen, who had no answer to England's new found demon bowler, who had re-invented himself since he had been hit all around the park during the First Test in Brisbane.

Scores: England 191 (Cowdrey 102; Miller 3/14, Archer 4/33) and 279 (May 91, Wardle 38; Johnston 5/85, Archer 2/50).

Australia 231 (Maddocks 47, Johnson 33; Statham 5/60, Tyson 2/68, Appleyard 2/38) and 111 (Favell 30; Tyson 7/27, Statham 2/38). England won by 128 runs.

#### **Match 4 The Centenary Test Match**

12-17 March 1977

This was a one-off Test match

This match was memorable for many reasons. First of all, the match took place during the same month - March, which is fairly late in the Australian cricket season - exactly 100 years after the first of all Test matches, at the same venue - the Melbourne Cricket Ground - and between the same opponents - Australia and England. Secondly, the match was watched by large crowds of onlookers, including some 218 former Test cricketers from both Australia and England who had been especially invited to attend as guests. Thirdly, the match was honoured by the presence on the last day of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, who were introduced to the players, and afterwards did a stately 'lap of honour' around the ground where they received a tremendous reception from the large crowd who were in attendance at the match. Finally, and quite astonishingly, the match ended with Australia winning by exactly the same margin - 45 runs - as they had won the first of all Test matches way back in March 1877.

The England captain, Tony Greig, won the toss and put his opponents into bat, correctly surmising that the moisture which was still in the wicket would cause the ball to move around a bit. England got off to a grand start in this historic match by dismissing Australia for 138 in front of an appreciative crowd of 61,000 on the first day. The wickets were shared around evenly between the fast-medium bowlers Old, Willis and John Lever, and the fastish left-handed orthodox spin bowler Derek Underwood, whose nagging accuracy yielded him a return of three for 16.

Most people at the ground, including me, thought that England enjoyed a significant advantage at this point in the match. However, that great Australian fast bowler, Dennis Lillee, who was at the height of his powers, thought otherwise. In a tigerish and lethal burst of copybook fast bowling Lillee wrenched the advantage back to Australia in relentless fashion, capturing six for 26 - his best figures to that point in Test cricket. He was ably assisted by Max Walker, who cleaned up the remaining four wickets, to have England all out for 95, thus giving Australia a precious lead of 43 runs which turned out to be vital in the context of this match.

From the second day on any gremlins which may have been in the pitch disappeared, leaving in their wake a well nigh perfect batting strip which Australia took maximum advantage of in scoring 419 for nine (declared) in its second innings, thus handing England the mammoth task of reaching a total of 463 runs if they were going to win the match. They had to score those runs at a rate of 40 runs an hour - not impossible, but certainly challenging.

Australia owed its comfortable position in the match at this point to Rodney Marsh, who became the first Australian wicket-keeper to score a century in a Test match against England. Honourable mentions should be made of Ian Davis, who got the innings off to a sound start with 68, Doug Walters, who scored an aggressive and rollicking 66 and young David Hookes, who in making a very attractive 56 in his debut Test match, hit the England captain Tony Greig for 5 fours in one over - all of them magnificent shots which were a joy to behold.

England replied with a courageous, determined, and at times highly skilful batting exhibition which yielded them a total of 417 runs. In so doing they turned the match into a thrilling battle, well worthy of the hundred years Ashes' tradition which was being celebrated in this match. The visitors were led by a courageous, entertaining, wholehearted and highly skilful innings of 174 by Derek Randall, who played the innings of his life in front of a highly appreciative Australian crowd, of whom I was one. Jack Fingleton was moved to write "We have not seen a better stroke maker from England in Australia since Ted Dexter. His off-side strokes revived memories of Peter May and Denis Compton at their resplendent best." This was high praise indeed, and well deserved.

Randall was ably assisted by some fine batting from the likes of Brearley, Amiss, Greig and Knott, but in the end it was the bowling of Lillee which could not be denied, as he backed up his superb first-innings effort with another magnificently sustained fast bowling stint which netted him figures of five for 139 from 34.4 eight ball overs. Although Randall deservedly received the Man of the Match award for his highly creative and entertaining batting, and his electric and spectacular fielding, my award would have gone to Dennis Lillee whom I have never seen bowl better than he did in this match.

Scores: Australia 138 G.S.Chappell 40; Underwood 3/16, Old 3/39, Willis 2/33, Lever 2/36) and 419/9dec (Marsh 110\*, Davis 68, Walters 66, Hookes 56; Old 4/104, Greig 2/66, Lever 2/95). England 95 (Greig 18, Knott 15; Lillee 6/26, Walker 4/54) and 417 (Randall 174, Amiss 64, Brearley 43, Knott 42, Greig 41; Lillee 5/139, €'Keeffe 3/108). Australia won by 45 runs.

## **Match 5**

**Fourth Test 1982/83**

**26-30 December 1982. State of the Series prior to match:**

**Australia 2-0**

This Test match turned out to be one of the most evenly matched and thrilling encounters played throughout the long history of Anglo-Australian cricket. On the morning of the final day, England won the match by three runs, a margin which equalled the lowest number of runs by which an Ashes' Test match has ever been decided.

Greg Chappell, noting that there was still a fair amount of moisture left in the pitch, opted to send England in to bat. Just after lunch on the first day, with the dismissal of Gower for 18, and England struggling at 56 for three, the Australian captain's decision looked the right one. However, a brilliant fourth-wicket partnership between Tavare and Lamb which added 161 runs in only 32 overs somewhat restored England's position. Right on the stroke of time England were all out for 284. For the home side the wickets were shared between Hogg and Yardley, each of whom took four, and Thomson who bagged two.

Australia's reply reached 287 and occupied all of the second day. Some fine batting by Hughes and Hookes in the middle of the order, followed by a typically belligerent 53 from the Australian wicket-keeper Marsh, ensured that the Australian first innings matched that of England. The English bowling honours were shared between the skipper Willis and the off-spinner Miller, who each took three wickets, with Norman Cowans taking two wickets.

Punctually at stumps on Day 3 of the match England's second innings ended. The visiting team had achieved a total of 294. This was the third instance in this match in which an innings had occupied exactly one day's play. At 45 for three the tourists once again looked to be in trouble, but an aggressive 46 by Botham which preceded some typically determined and enterprising contributions from Pringle and Taylor in the middle order, together with 65 from the opener Fowler, restored some equilibrium to the England innings. Lawson, Hogg and Thomson shared the bowling honours between them for Australia.

As the Australians began their quest for 292 runs for victory on Day 4 of the match the contest looked to be very evenly poised. The pitch appeared to be, if anything, still favouring the batsmen. In addition, the outfield at the MCG was lightning fast as a result of the fact that the southern part of the continent was in the grip of drought. The consequential water restrictions under which the curator was labouring prevented any extensive watering of the ground prior to the commencement of the match. When Chappell was once again dismissed cheaply, brilliantly caught low down in the covers by Gould, who was substituting for the injured Fowler, Australia looked to be in trouble. Dyson and Wessels went for not all that many runs, adding to Australia's woes. But then Kim Hughes and David Hookes came together in a partnership which added 100 runs to the home side's score to temporarily restore the balance. However, these two departed at round about the same time, exposing the lower order to a brilliant spell of fast-medium bowling by Cowans, who in seemingly no time at all claimed the wickets of Hookes, Marsh, Yardley and Hogg for only 19 runs. This left the host nation precariously poised on 218 for nine, chasing 292 to win what was turning into an enthralling contest.

Thus began the thrilling last phase of the match. As Border was joined by the last man, Thomson, he switched to attack, forcing Willis onto the defensive while Border was facing the bowling. However, Thomson dug in very capably, defending his wicket stoutly despite being hemmed in with fielders in

catching positions around the bat, and slowly but surely the Australian score mounted.

On the fifth and final day of play there were 18,000 eager spectators inside the ground, even although one ball could have seen the match come to a sudden end. Willis took the new ball, but didn't alter his tactics of defending against Border and attacking when Thomson was facing the bowling. Steadily the score continued to mount. By this time every run which was scored by the Australian last-wicket pair was being cheered to the echo by an obviously partisan crowd. Cowans, who had been the destroyer, grew tired and was replaced by Botham. Willis, the captain, strained at the leash, but couldn't achieve the breakthrough. Ultimately, it was Botham, the great allrounder, who finished the innings off when the margin between the two sides was only three runs. He induced an edge from Thomson which flew fast, but at eminently catchable height, to Tavaré, fielding at second slip. Tavaré lunged at the ball, but only succeeded in parrying the ball up in the air and behind him. Luckily for England, Geoff Miller, fielding at first slip, had time to run around behind Tavaré and catch the ball as it plummeted earthwards. England had won the match by three runs, and Botham had captured his 100th Test wicket against the old enemy, thus emulating the great Wilfred Rhodes in capturing 100 wickets and scoring 1,000 runs against Australia.

Scores: England 284 (Tavaré 89, Lamb 83; Hogg 4/69, Yardley 4/89) and 294 (Fowler 65, Botham 46, Pringle 42, Taylor 37; Lawson 4/66, Hogg 3/64, Thomson 3/74).

Australia 287 (Hughes 66, Hookes 53, Marsh 53, Wessels 47; Willis 3/38, Miller 3/44) and 288 (Hookes 68, Border 62\*, Hughes 48; Cowans 6/77, Botham 2/80). England won by 3 runs.

## Match 6

Second Test Match 1994/95

24, 26-29 December 1994. State of the Series prior to the match: Australia 1-0

As a competitive entity this match was not all that memorable - Australia won it easily by 295 runs - but it was revived as a spectacle by some excellent batting in Australia's first innings by the Waugh brothers, and in its second innings by a watchful and patient century from David Boon - his 20th Test century overall, and his first at the MCG. And then, on the fifth and final morning of the match a moribund contest spluttered briefly into life when Shane Warne accelerated the match towards a merciful end by capturing a hat-trick - his first in any form of cricket, and the first hat-trick in Ashes - cricket since 1903/04. These three wickets brought Warne to his 150th wicket in Test cricket. When McDermott got Tufnell's wicket in the next over to bring the match to a predictable conclusion, he achieved the splendid milestone of taking 250 wickets in Test cricket.

Thus, this Ashes' Test in Melbourne during the dying days of December 1994 was memorable statistically, even if it did not attain any sustained level of brilliance in the actual play which occurred during the contest.

Atherton won the toss and asked Australia to bat on a dampish pitch which looked as if it might give the bowlers some assistance. Slater and Taylor were both dismissed reasonably cheaply, but then Boon and Mark Waugh dug in and moved the score along steadily until an atypical lapse by David Boon enabled Tufnell to take his first Test wicket in a long time when the Australian was comfortably caught by Hick at first slip. Bevan, coming in next, didn't trouble the scorers overly much, but his early departure enabled the Waugh brothers, Stephen and Mark, to demonstrate a fair modicum of their exquisite batting expertise. Their partnership of 71 runs provided some substance to the Australian innings, which was added to rather generously by Steve, in the manner to which Australian cricket supporters became accustomed in recent years, as he guided the tail through to a total of 279 by the end of the innings, by which time Steve Waugh's contribution stood rather surprisingly at 94 not out. Gough (four wickets) and Tufnell (two wickets) were the best of the England bowlers.

Unfortunately, the England innings was marred by several dubious umpiring decisions which sent first Hick, and then Atherton on their way back to the pavilion. When Stewart's right index finger was broken a second time on this tour by a shortish rising delivery from McDermott, England could well feel that their luck had deserted them. After the dismissal of Atherton and Thorpe, who were both out to the bowling of Warne, England were struggling at 124 for three. Sadly for England, and rather surprisingly in the context of the match, Gooch drove a rank full toss from McDermott straight back into the bowler's hands when facing the first ball of the third morning's play, to be dismissed for a disappointing 15. Thereafter, England's resistance was somewhat of the token variety, with the result that their first innings total of 212 was significantly less than they had hoped for. Warne with six wickets and McDermott with three were the best of the Australian bowlers.

Batting again with a lead of 67, Australia had Boon to thank for their substantial second innings total of 320 for seven declared. On an uneven, two-paced pitch, which by this time demanded tender loving care by the batsmen in occupation, Boon batted with commendable patience and watchfulness. He scored a high proportion of his runs from his trusty on-drive and his ever productive square cut. When the declaration eventually came, England had to score an improbable total of 388 runs to win. Alternatively, they had to hold out for 120 overs if they were going to save the match. Neither of these prospects appeared to be very likely, given England's current level of form or state of self-belief at that time.

England's remote chances of making a contest out of this match disappeared very early during their second innings when Fleming, playing in his second Test match, dismissed Gooch and Hick in quick succession with perfectly pitched out-swingers to which the batsmen had no answer. Although Atherton and Gatting battled on for a while the writing was on the wall. England limped to 79 for four at the end of the fourth day. On the resumption of play on the fifth morning they rapidly succumbed to the bowling of Warne and McDermott in 12.5 overs to lose this match decisively by the substantial margin of 295 runs. Towards the end of the match Warne injected some excitement into the contest by taking a hat-trick - all with beautifully pitched leg breaks. DeFreitas was lbw playing back to one that skidded through low to catch him in front of his stumps. Gough was out caught behind to one that turned and bounced. Finally, Malcolm was superbly caught off his gloves by Boon, who had to dive far to his right in order to gather up what was no more than half a chance.

Scores: Australia 279 (S.R.Waugh 94\*, M.E.Waugh 71; Gough 4/60, Tufnell 2/59, DeFreitas 2/66) and 320/7dec (Boon 131, Slater 44; Gough 3/59, Tufnell 3/90).

England 212 (Thorpe 51, Atherton 44; Warne 6/64, McDermott 3/72) and 92 (Atherton 25, Gatting 25; McDermott 5/42, Warne 3/16, Fleming 2/24). Australia won by 295 runs.

### **Conclusion**

It has been a pleasure to recall these six Test matches, all of which illustrate the continuing ebb and flow of this glorious game of cricket which so many of us love and cherish. Of course, I could have selected an entirely different set of Test matches which could have been used equally effectively to demonstrate the fascinating uncertainty and the continuing roller-coaster which Ashes' cricket has exemplified over more than 125 years of history now. There is one thing of which you can be sure when the subject of Ashes' cricket comes under the microscope - that is that the two original protagonists of this great game will continue to give it their all when they meet on the cricket field, thus perpetuating the keen but sporting rivalry which is the hallmark of Ashes' cricket, whether the matches are played in either Australia or England.