



## **ENGULFED BY THE TYPHOON: THE HOSTILITY OF FRANK TYSON THE BEGINNER WHO HUMBLLED AUSTRALIA BY ALAN HILL**

It was bowling of formidable and concentrated fury that rocketed Test novice Frank Tyson to fame on a crumbling pitch at Melbourne in December 1954. It was an explosion of elemental force that rendered technique irrelevant. ‘Sheer speed through the air coupled with a shooter at any moment left the batsmen helpless. Tyson blazed through them like a bushfire,’ reported Wisden. In 79 minutes Tyson took six wickets for 16 runs in 51 balls. Australia were besieged by relentless speed and lost their last eight wickets for 36 runs. Tyson’s final analysis of seven for 27 is still hailed as one of the great achievements in matches between England and Australia.

For the England captain, Len Hutton, the apostle of unbridled pace, these figures were riches indeed. The astonishing advance of Tyson came after only one Test against Pakistan in England. He had only just completed his first full season in county cricket with Northamptonshire. His hopes were slim of gaining a regular place in the team. Alec Bedser, extolled as the master bowler and triumphant with 39 wickets against Australia in 1953, was expected to share the new ball with Brian Statham. ‘You must regard the tour as a learning curve,’ Hutton told Tyson.

Even so, there had already been warnings of his awesome pace. Arthur Morris, a future Australian rival, had noted the burgeoning promise at Northampton in 1953. He remembered the first two overs that Tyson bowled to him as the fastest he had faced in that season. Dennis Brookes, Tyson’s county captain over four peak seasons, also remembered the ferocity of the young contender. ‘Frank was very strong and fast, even off three paces in the nets. Against Australians in 1953 we reduced them to 10 for two. Graeme Hole, who had a very high backlift, came in. His bat was still going down when his wickets were shattered.’

Tyson’s reputation also gathered force against English county professionals. One instructive story involved George Lambert, of Gloucestershire, who, as a night watch-man, was called upon to face Tyson. It was a fearful experience. Lambert returned to the pavilion, trembling in every limb. He was greeted by his team-mate, Sam Cook. ‘Here’s your pint’, said Sam. ‘And there’s a double scotch and chaser. The bugger will be a lot fresher in the morning.’

The fright of the Gloucestershire players in those helmetless days paled by comparison with the menace of Tyson on a spiteful wicket at Old Trafford in August 1953. The speed he displayed against Lancashire was of such magnitude as to foreshadow other exploits in Australia. ‘The first ball Frank bowled soared over his wicket-keeper, Keith Andrew, positioned a cricket pitch length back and thudded into the sightscreen,’ recalls one Lancastrian, Roy Tattersall.

Tyson took three wickets in his first five overs, all the time threatening serious injury as the ball skidded through or reared at the batsman’s body. ‘Frank was the fastest bowler I have ever faced’, said Geoff Edrich, the one valiant Lancashire survivor amid the ordeal. Edrich recorded what Tyson regards

more as an act of heroism than a cricket innings against Northamptonshire. He was, in fact, playing with a hand badly bruised in a previous game. Early in the Lancashire second innings he took a sharp rap on the left wrist from a Tyson lifter. He did not immediately realise that the blow had broken his wrist. Lancashire were dismissed for 141 but Edrich – ‘batting pluckily for three hours’ in the report in Wisden – was unbeaten on 81 at the end.

The evidence was strengthened in a contest with another member of the indomitable Edrich clan on an auspicious July evening at Lord’s in 1954. Tyson was watched by a selection panel of two former England captains, Walter Robins and Norman Yardley and their fellow judges, chairman, Harry Altham and Les Ames. It amounted to an audition and the chance to press his claims before a distinguished assembly. Tyson was now thrust into a duel with Bill Edrich, at 38, a veteran of bumper duels. Edrich had prospered in the heat of battle against Australia’s Lindwall and Miller. ‘He had a small man’s aggression, never terrorised by bouncers, only inspired by them,’ wrote one observer.

Tyson recalls: ‘The Lord’s pitch was lively in those days, with the ball lifting off the ridge and moving up and down the hill.’ The situation for the Middlesex batsmen was also imperilled by the dwindling light. Tyson took up the attack for the last over of the day. The demeanour of Edrich reflected his purpose – to quell the newcomer. As he took guard, he noted the retreating wicket-keeper and slips, all well beyond conversational distance. Tyson, vigorously rubbing the ball, was a barely discernible silhouette at the start of his long pounding run.

‘I had heard of Bill’s reputation as a hooker,’ relates Tyson, ‘and I decided to test him out with a bouncer. He accepted the challenge willingly but had only moved marginally across the wicket to the offside, when my very fast bumper caught him square on the cheek, and broke it. He went down in a welter of blood and was carted off to hospital.’ Tyson believes that his wounding assault won him his spurs. ‘The selectors thought if I could do that to such a competitive player as Bill then I was worth consideration.’

Australia had also been alerted to the speed of the novice bowler. Photographs of the 25-yard run from which Tyson generated his eye-blinking pace had been airtailed to newspapers in the major centres. Australian writers had been given one amazing statistic by their English counterparts. It was estimated that when Tyson began his run-up to bowl, a distance of 72 yards separated him from the wicket-keeper, Keith Andrew.

The photographs on the sports desks gave the impression that Tyson and Andrew were playing in different matches. It was above one newspaper photograph of this separation that Tyson first acquired his threatening sobriquet. An enterprising sub-editor noted the distance and what it could cover in a blur of pace. His headline read: ‘It takes a Typhoon...’

The route to an historic triumph in Australia in 1954/55, ruthlessly orchestrated by Hutton, was founded on the talents of a precocious young guard. Rising spectacularly to the occasion were two former schoolboy prodigies, Peter May and Colin Cowdrey. The faltering English senior batsmen in critical times were happy to admire the batting dominion of the two close friends on their first tour of Australia. May, the ferocious conqueror, dovetailed perfectly with the poise and precision of Cowdrey.

Dread is not a word that features strongly in the Australian vocabulary but May and Cowdrey, the ‘young pups’, as one rival, Alan Davidson, describes them, gave notice in Australia that he and other bowlers would ‘cop it’ in the years ahead. Frank Tyson also recalls the intense concentration and powerful strokeplay of May. ‘Peter really was a tiger. I have never seen anyone hit the ball as hard as him.’

May was only marginally more experienced but the grand manner of his cricket excited all who watched him. The nobility of his driving in the Melbourne

Test compelled a great bowler, Ray Lindwall, to disperse his field in a vain attempt to stem the flow of runs.

It was also at Melbourne, with England floundering, that Cowdrey, then only 22, rallied his side with a maiden Test century. He began his innings in the teeth of a bowling onslaught. England had lost four wickets for 41 runs. Cowdrey scored 102 out of the 160 runs registered while he was at the wicket. England finally reached 191 and Cowdrey equalled Bradman's record in achieving three figures in the lowest total in Anglo-Australian Tests to contain a century.

Geoffrey Howard, the MCC manager, remembered how an innings of remarkable maturity cheered a disconsolate Len Hutton. The England captain was upset after his early dismissal. 'Suddenly those of us who were watching the game started to clap and cheer. It was, of course, Colin. He was quite unbelievable. It was a magical innings.' Hutton's mood swiftly changed when he realised from the commotion on the balcony that Cowdrey was in a state of batting bliss. 'Len came out to have a look and soon he was sharing our enthusiasm,' said Howard. 'It worked like a charm and pulled him out of his misery.'

The rise to prosperity – and a 3-1 victory – in Australia followed a humiliating defeat in the First Test at Brisbane. Aggressive fast bowling, which had rarely been equalled before, yielded a magnificent harvest. 'For those of us who have bowled quick, really quick, there is no comparable feeling in the world,' enthused the matchwinner, Frank Tyson. Bob Appleyard, another member of the MCC team, voices his praise: 'Frank was phenomenal. The quickest I've seen before or since that time.'

Tyson was a man of fury as he swept through the defences of the Australian batsmen. His ally was fellow Lancastrian, Brian Statham whose pinpoint accuracy ensured that there was no escape at either end. Between them they took 46 wickets in the series. Tyson is eloquent in his praise of his partner. 'In every game Statham plugged away, usually into a breeze and uphill, as I captured the glory and the headlines with the wind behind me and any slope in my favour. But make no mistake, without Statham, there would have been no 'Typhoon' in Australia in 1954/55.

Tyson, tagged as a 'four over wonder' in his apprentice years, demonstrated a greater depth of endurance in a gruelling series. Jim Swanton expressed his satisfaction after England won by just 38 runs to draw level in the Second Test at Sydney. 'The match has made a scintillating new reputation, that of Tyson, whose ten wickets were the reward of as fine a display of sustained speed and stamina as I have ever seen in an English fast bowler.' Tom Graveney was a key eyewitness in the field at Sydney. 'I was 50 yards back at slip to Frank and nearer the pavilion gate than the wicket. It was like fielding tracer bullets.'

Tyson joined an elite group of English fast bowlers at Sydney. In the entire 20th century only two others – Maurice Tate and Larwood – had taken ten wickets in a Test on this ground against Australia. George Lohmann (twice) and Tom Richardson achieved the feat in the 19th century. Andrew Caddick also took ten wickets in England's victory in 2003. Neither Lindwall nor Miller, for all their great exploits for Australia, could boast the distinction.

A rendezvous with his boyhood hero, Harold Larwood, sealed Tyson's celebration at Sydney. It linked one architect of Australia's downfall with another. Larwood had been the villain of the piece in the 'bodyline' tour 22 years earlier. Before the party broke up, Larwood offered a prized souvenir for Tyson's inspection. It was a silver ashtray inscribed with the words, 'To Lol for the Ashes, Douglas Jardine.' Fittingly, Larwood, still a 'Pom' at heart in his adopted country, reserved one parting shot to excite the young visitor to his home. 'When you hear 50,000 Aussies shouting at you, you know you've got 'em worried.'