



MOST RUNS BY ENGLISH PLAYERS IN THEIR DEBUT TEST SERIES BY JEREMY MAILES

R.E. Foster	486	1903/04	v	Australia
K. Pietersen	473	2005	v	Australia
P.A. Gibb	473	1938/9	v	South Africa
G. Gunn	462	1907/08	v	Australia

Kevin Pietersen's final scoring stroke at The Oval, an edge for four off Glenn McGrath, was hardly his finest moment but put him in exclusive company. Above him in the list of most successful Englishmen in their debut series is the only man to have captained England at cricket and football while below him is one of the most florid eccentrics the game has known.

Pietersen is 25 and would expect to be still playing for England at 28, the age at which George Gunn appeared in his first Test. But even at his most optimistic, the Hampshire batsman cannot expect to be playing Test cricket at 50 when Gunn made 85 against the West Indies. On the eve of his 50th birthday he had vowed to make a century the next day and delivered by scoring 164 not out against Worcestershire, giving only one chance when on 135.

Like Pietersen, the Nottinghamshire batsman was not a first choice when he made his Test debut against Australia in 1907/08. Pietersen was overlooked for the Bangladesh Tests, while Gunn was not even included in the touring party, and was Down Under nursing a haemorrhage of the lungs. Replacing England's consumptive skipper Arthur Jones, he began with scores of 119 and 74 to start a sequence that would see him fall 11 runs short of Pietersen's total, employing technique that Wisden considered 'as nearly as possible faultless'.

In a pen portrait of Gunn, Robertson-Glasgow confesses that 'the word 'brilliant' is just ridiculous'. The author concludes that 'Cricket is still scratching its head about George Gunn and it will not readily recover from him'. He is best remembered for walking down the pitch to pace bowlers not with the skipping movement of Brian Close but 'like a grimly playful crab'.

Gunn could score freely against the best bowling in the world in a mode he described as 'swashbuckle' and yet would stonewall a modest county attack out of wilfulness. He once gave his wicket away when in the 90s during a close-fought county match on a sudden whim to 'go to pavilion and sit with missus'. Against Warwickshire he patted back a half volley to give a deliberate caught and bowled to Harry Howell and when his indignant skipper demanded an explanation he explained: 'Too hot, Sir'.

Pietersen and Gunn have much in common. Both men caused shockwaves in the Nottinghamshire committee room and England's latest batting prodigy has Gunn's ability to bring spectators running from the bars. But it is difficult to imagine Pietersen blocking for anything other than the interests of his team.

Pietersen's musical taste covers rhythm and blues as well as hip hop. There is no record of Gunn's enthusiasms but he prided himself on a good ear. During an upcountry game in Australia he became increasingly distracted at the crease, finally laying down his bat and striding into the adjacent field where a brass band was playing at a fete. Gunn buttonholed the conductor and complained that the cornet was flat.

For Cardus, he was 'shortish, well-built but not at all a sturdy man. A little bandy in the legs, quizzical of eye and face, and slow and humorous in his talk.' Pin-sharp and sprightly to the end, Gunn was planning to travel to Australia with Peter May's 1958/59 tourists when he died aged 79.

Geoffrey Boycott or his ghost writer may have rifled through a thesaurus to speak of Pietersen's 'hubris' in the Daily Telegraph but if the England number five ever needs a lesson in respect for others he could take one from Gunn who combined outrageous confidence during his playing days with deference to others in retirement.

Allan Rae used to tell this story of the 1950 West Indies tour to England. After the game at Trent Bridge where Everton Weekes made 279 in four hours, the tourists were in their changing room. There was a knock and a voice asked: 'Is Mr Weekes here?' A dapper old man entered whereupon Everton stood and said: 'You asked for me, Sir?' The old gent walked up to Everton and said: 'Mr Weekes, I am George Gunn, Sir. I have seen them all but your batting today is the greatest I have ever seen Sir.' He shook Weekes' hand, bowed slightly and left the room.

Pietersen is level with wicket-keeper Paul Gibb but this is one of the few things the pair have in common. On a central ECB contract, England's new hero is unlikely to spend his declining years living in a caravan and working as a bus driver.

When Paul Gibb collapsed and died at Guildford bus station in December 1977 he was 64 years old and about to take the wheel of an Alder Valley single-decker. Thirty-eight years earlier, he had made his Test debut as an opening batsman with Bill Edrich at Johannesburg, scoring 93 and 106.

Only months later Gibb would follow Edrich into the RAF and while the Middlesex man bombed dams in the Ruhr Valley, Gibb piloted Sunderland flying boats in sorties against battleships in the North Atlantic. The experience left its mark and David Frith speaks of Gibb 'standing dazed during many a post-war afternoon on cricket fields, wondering what the hell he was doing there'.

Bespectacled and shy to the point of self-effacement, Gibb hardly seems to have been cut out for air assaults and keeping wicket to bowlers as difficult as Ken Farnes and Doug Wright. Eight months before his death, it had only been after sustained persuasion from playing contemporaries that he reluctantly took his place at the Centenary Test celebrations in Melbourne.

Domed of forehead and with a receding hairline since his 20s, Gibb donned a toupee and delighted in walking unrecognised past teammates such as Trevor Bailey and Doug Insole. Indifference to the thoughts of others about one's hairstyle is perhaps the only other point of contact with Kevin Pietersen. If the current England number five continues putting industrial quantities of fluorescent dye on his scalp he may turn up at the 150th anniversary Test in 2027 as a slaphead of Gibb proportions.

At St Edward's School in Oxford, Gibb began a lifetime addiction to ice cream which left no impression on a wiry physique. He delayed going to university and spent two years working for the cricket-obsessed millionaire philanthropist Sir Julien Cahn before taking a place to study history at Cambridge.

Unsuited to teaching and largely unconcerned about financial matters, Gibb was often without employment and was reduced to working in a London department store. He returned to county cricket in 1951 as a professional for Essex, being the first Varsity blue to play for a wage. The move appalled the mandarins at Lord's and prompted an MCC committee under the enlightened guidance of Colonel Rait Kerr to withdraw his membership.

However bullish Pietersen may be about his future, he would probably settle for Gibb's Test average of 44.69 and would leap at Gunn's record of 15 catches from as many Tests. While Pietersen renounced the South African game, Gibb spent many years in the country as a coach and counted Mike Procter among his pupils.

Early in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator describes a college athlete as 'a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute excellence at 21 that everything afterwards savours of anticlimax'.

While Pietersen may struggle to recapture the brutal intensity of his final-day Oval blitz on Brett Lee, it's likely that there will be many more high spots to come and the rest of his career will be far from a letdown. But the Fitzgerald quote is apt for the one man above him in the aggregates.

When Reginald 'Tip' Foster scored a debut series aggregate of 486 on the 1903/04 tour of Australia he was 25 years old and had already captained the England football team. He would be dead from diabetes at the age of 36. Foster's opening innings of 287 at Sydney remains the highest Test score by an Englishman in Australia. In 1907 he skippered the England cricket team against South Africa at Lord's. Kevin Pietersen's patriotism knows no bounds and his hitherto underestimated tactical astuteness may allow him to go on and captain England at cricket, but he would be crazed if he entertained hopes of leading the football side as well.