

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN-JENKINS

Time To Urn Our Stripes



By Stuart Weir

Christopher Martin-Jenkins is simply 'the voice of cricket'. President of the MCC, he has served as Cricket Correspondent for the BBC, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*, as well as being a part of the BBC *Test Match Special* commentary team.

What makes the Ashes so special?

First of all longevity and tradition; the fact that Australia is the opponent England most wants to beat and vice-versa. And, of course, every series adds something to that history and tradition.

What is your first Ashes memory?

That was 1953. My family, like many others, got its first television to see the coronation. So I was able to watch the Ashes on TV, too, and see England regain them.

What are your thoughts on the Ashes 2005 series?

It was simply the best series ever – perhaps only 1981 could compare with it. There was not a bad game in the series.

It was just a pity that it was telescoped into a short period rather than stretching over the whole summer. But in the modern way, the Test Series had to accommodate a one-day series as well.

I think Test cricket at its best is like a good novel, which needs time to develop the plot.

How significant was Michael Vaughan's contribution to the 2005 victory?

For a captain to be successful, he needs a good team. Vaughan had good players around him but he made the most of them. He was at his best in the 2005 series – decisive and quick to put his decisions into practice. Tactically he was excellent – in particular at Edgbaston where he kept a cool head when it could all have gone wrong.

After the 2005 series, England went to Australia and were turned over 0-5. What went wrong?

I suppose just about everything went wrong! Quite simply England came up against a much better side and were overwhelmed. It was just too much for captain, Flintoff. Perhaps England believed their own publicity and did not prepare as well as they might have done.

This winter we go again after a home series win in 2009. Will England fare any better?

Yes, I think this will be a much closer series. I

would see it as 50-50. England can win but will need a good start and a bit of luck. Australia have a habit of winning the first Test at Brisbane and putting the opposition on the back foot. If England can avoid losing the first Test, they have a great chance.

I think we have the bowlers to win the series but the batting will have to be more consistent than it often is.

You mentioned the 1981 series. Could something like that happen again?

Definitely, but you might need to find another Botham! England made an amazing recovery after a bad start. The Headingley Test has been called the match of the century. Cricket is so unpredictable. Think of the last Test this summer against Pakistan. When England were 102-7, who would have predicted an innings win?

What are the best England and best Australian team you have seen?

The best Australian team was the one that dominated world cricket from about 1989 for 15 years. They were consistently successful and resolute. The team was built on two of the greatest bowlers ever – Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne. There were three excellent captains in that period, Mark Taylor, Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting. If I had to pick one I would probably go for Steve Waugh as he always seemed to perform when the team needed him.

The best England team was in the 1980s with Gower, Gooch and Gatting scoring the runs, and Botham and Willis opening the bowling.

Are you comfortable with three South Africans in the current England team?

Not entirely. I recognise, of course, that in the modern world people with a British passport and British parents are entitled to play for England, but I would like to see people commit themselves to one country. For example, if you have played for a country at, say, under 19 level, I think you should stick with that country.

Do you think IPL is a good thing for cricket?

Not really, but I suppose because of financial factors and the increasing tie-up between sport and business, it was inevitable – as the Kerry Packer matches were a few years ago. I regret the

negative impact on Test cricket which has always been the pinnacle of the game.

Where do you stand on referrals?

To be honest I would be happier not to have them. I feel that we have lost a fundamental principle of cricket, which every schoolboy has always been taught – not to question the umpire's decision. Now professional players are expected to question the umpire. But with TV dissecting every controversial decision from every angle, I think it was inevitable.

Football is agonizing over how to use technology. Has cricket got it right?

Just about. There were teething problems but I think it's getting there. You need as much technology as is available. For example, in summer 2010, having Hot Spot has been a big help to correct decisions. I also think that you have to accept that even with all the technology, you do not have absolute certainty.

Action images / Tony O'Brien/Livepic

What is the secret of *Test Match Special's* enduring popularity?

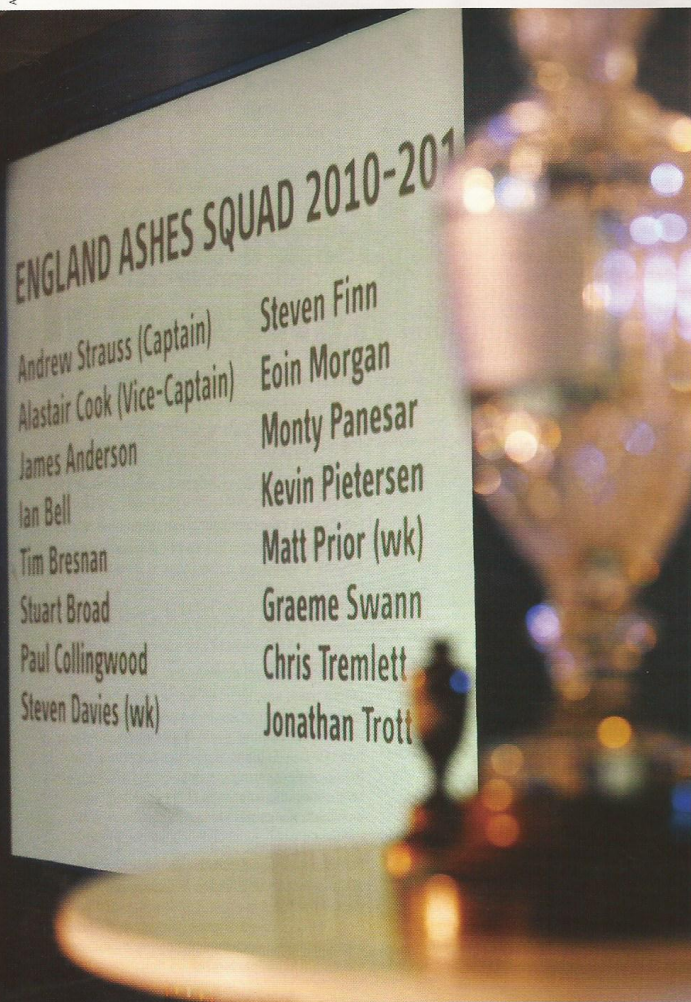
Radio is a friendly medium. *TMS* seems to achieve a good balance of voices and opinions which makes for a popular formula.

What role does faith play?

My Christian faith is something that I think about daily and sustain by reading the Bible.

How do you keep your faith going when you are away for three months on a tour?

Fortunately I am no longer away that long, but when I was, reading the Bible and getting to church when I could were important. I have had the privilege of attending all sorts of churches in every country I have been to – whether a charming Anglican church in the parish of St James in Barbados which would have fitted into any English village, to Perth Cathedral where the Dean, John Shepherd, was one of the most inspiring preachers I have ever heard. ■



VODAFONE ASHES TEST MATCHES

First Test: 25-29 November, 2010 (Brisbane)

Second Test: 3-7 December, 2010 (Adelaide)

Third Test: 16-20 December, 2010 (Perth)

Fourth Test: 26-30 December, 2010 (Melbourne)

Fifth Test: 3-7 January, 2011 (Sydney)

The tour begins with a warm-up game on 5 November.

There are 7 one-day games from 12 January to 6 February.

Sadly for UK TV viewers, games typically run from midnight to 7.00am.

HISTORY

The Ashes – contested by England and Australia – is the oldest continuous international cricket fixture of all, dating back to March 1877.

England won their first home encounter at the Oval in 1880. However, at the same ground in 1882 they suffered their first home defeat, which prompted the famous obituary notice for English cricket in the *Sporting Times*. It read:

*In Affectionate Remembrance
of
ENGLISH CRICKET,
which died at the Oval
on
29th AUGUST, 1882,
Deeply lamented by a large circle of sorrowing
friends and acquaintances.
R.I.P.
N.B. – The body will be cremated and the
ashes taken to Australia.*

This in turn led to a group of Australian ladies on the following winter tour to Australia presenting the then English captain, the Honourable Ivor Bligh, with a small urn containing the ashes of a ball. The urn was presented to MCC and is on display at Lord's.

Thus, talk of regaining the Ashes or bringing them back from Australia is just figurative, as the urn rarely leaves Lord's. A replica is presented to the teams.

THE GREATEST TEST OF ALL TIME

The third Test between England and Australia, 16-21 July 1981, has been called the greatest Test match ever. It represented an amazing turnaround. Australia batted first and scored 401. Then they bowled England out for 174.

So England started their second innings needing 227 to avoid an innings defeat. They slumped to 41-4 and 135-7. Ladbrokes were offering 500-1 on an England victory. Then Graham Dilley joined Ian Botham. With Botham ending 149 not out and Dilley making 56, England reached 356.

For all England's heroics, Australia only needed 130 to win and they soon reached 56-1. When 56-1 became 75-8 and 111 all out, England had pulled off a remarkable victory. Bob Willis had taken 8-43.

Ian Botham was man of the match with scores of 50 and 149 not out, 6-95 and 1-14.

As Christopher Martin-Jenkins said at the time, 'The speed with which the match ... was turned upside down made it unique.'