

# 1933 WAS BODYLINE CRICKET?

W. M. Woodfull, Australia's cricket captain, was injured, angry, and most explicit:

*There are two teams out there, but only one is playing cricket. It is too great a game to spoil by the tactics your team are adopting. I don't approve of them and I never will. If they are persevered with it may be better if I do not play the game. The matter is in your hands.*

With these celebrated words flung at 'Plum' Warner, manager of the 1932-33 touring M.C.C. team, Woodfull summed up reaction throughout Australia to the aggressive bowling tactic adopted by the visitors in an apparent attempt to defeat Don Bradman and other batsmen by intimidation rather than skill.

What the Englishmen called fast leg-theory and the Australians denounced

as bodyline bowling, consisted of a constant delivery of short-pitched, fast balls, which rose sharply towards the batsman's head and shoulders, and the placing of five fieldsmen on the leg side within 10 metres of the wicket, and others farther out, sometimes leaving only one or two fielding on the off-side.

The batsman was like a bear in a cage being pelted with stones by naughty children — or so it seemed to many angry Australian cricket fans.

Bradman's tremendous success during the 1930 tour had convinced the English selectors that new leadership was needed if the Ashes were to be brought back to England in 1932-33.

The man they chose for this was Douglas R. Jardine, a former Oxford amateur, to whom winning as such was the most important part of the game.

And to win, Jardine decided, he would need to exploit what appeared to be Bradman's main weakness: fast-rising balls on the leg-stump.

Because of this, fast bowlers — H. Larwood, W. Voce, W. E. Bowes, and G. O. Allen — were included in the M.C.C. team which sailed for Australia on 17 September 1932.

As Larwood would later write, he and Voce had long before agreed to Jardine's decision that 'Voce, being a left-handed natural inswing bowler, should concentrate on Bradman's leg-stump and bowl to his normal leg-theory field', while Larwood would 'bowl on the leg-stump, making the ball come up into the body all the time, so that Bradman [would have] to play his shots to leg'.

As it turned out, Allen refused point-blank to bowl bodyline when ordered to by Jardine, but Larwood, Voce, and Bowes, proved so capable as to threaten a complete break in Anglo-Australian cricket relations.

Bodyline was first used in the match against Victoria in Melbourne, where Bradman was sent out lbw for thirty-six and Woodfull lbw for fifty-one, to Larwood and Bowes respectively.

Ironically, Bradman was unfit for the First Test, in Sydney, where the bowling tactics designed to tame him were used to good effect in gaining England a ten-wicket victory.

Stan McCabe's 25 fours in four hours did, however, enable the visitors to defend their tactic by pointing out that leg-theory balls could be hit.

At the Second Test, in Melbourne, Bradman was dismissed by Bowes with the first ball, but in the second innings his 103 played a crucial part in securing Australia's 111-run victory.

But already the rumblings of discontent among Australians over bodyline was becoming stronger, finally erupting at the Third Test which began in Adelaide on Friday, 13 January 1933.

Larwood's second over on the Saturday saw a rising ball strike Woodfull sickeningly on the heart, forcing him to stagger away from the wicket in obvious pain.

Jardine's reaction was to congratulate his bowler and to continue with an obvious bodyline attack, causing the Australian captain to be hit several times

more about the body.

It was while he was in the dressing-room being massaged, that Woodfull lashed out at the English manager (who, personally, was also opposed to the bodyline tactic). On the Monday, Warner told the Press that Woodfull had apologised — but this was promptly denied by Woodfull.

By then feelings were running so high against the touring side that mounted police were brought to the field to protect them in case the 50 000-strong crowd's anger turned to violence.

While former Australian captain M. A. Noble accused Larwood for being vicious, and Neville Cardus advised Jardine in the *Manchester Guardian* that it would be better to lose the Ashes than to win by 'the present methods', the Australian wicketkeeper, W. A. S. Oldfield, was hit on the right temple as he mishooked a ball from Larwood.

He was rushed to hospital with a fractured skull while spectators loudly aired their anger and disgust.

'The scene that followed has never been equalled before', wrote Hugh Buggy in the Adelaide afternoon newspaper, the *News*. 'Wild hooting burst out in the outer ground, and the angry demonstration soon spread to the stands. Repeatedly the English bowler and Jardine were counted out.'

More police were rushed to the ground as the match continued, eventually being won by England by 338 runs.

While the match was still in progress, however, the Australian Board of Con-

trol sent its famous cable to the M.C.C. to protest against the use of bodyline which, although not illegal, the Board considered 'unsportsmanlike'. From Lord's a week later came the reply:

*We, the Marylebone Cricket Club, deplore your cable. We deprecate the opinion that there has been unsportsmanlike play. We have the fullest confidence in the captain, the team, and its manager, and are convinced that they would do nothing to infringe the laws and the spirit of the game. We have no evidence that our confidence is misplaced.*

*Much as we regret the accidents to Woodfull and Oldfield, we understand that in neither case was the bowler to blame. If the Board wishes to propose a new law or rule it shall receive our careful consideration in due course.*

*We hope the situation is not now as serious as your cable appears to indicate, but if it is such as to jeopardise good relations between English and Australian cricketers and you consider it desirable to cancel the remainder of the programme, we would consent with great reluctance.*

The M.C.C. cable reflected impressions in England that the Australians were 'squealing' because of the way in which leg-theory was dismissing Bradman and his fellow batsmen for low scores.

The Australian Board replied that it did not consider cancellation necessary and withdrew the reflection on the visitors' sportmanship, although it stressed its belief that bodyline was 'dangerous to players' and 'opposed to the spirit of cricket'.

The Board also undertook to appoint a committee to prepare a report on possible ways of controlling this form of bowling.

But what really opened the eyes of the M.C.C. to the true dangers of bodyline was its use, in England, by West Indians later in 1933. The result was a rule outlawing fast, short-pitched balls which, in the opinion of the umpire at the bowler's end, constituted a systematic attempt at intimidation.

Bodyline, in the end, won for Jardine and his team, four of the five Tests and allowed them to take home the Ashes.

But the cost was high, for it will always be remembered as the series when one side played a game that was not quite cricket.