

1930

THE DON BATS INTO 'CRICKET ETERNITY'

It was an individual innings, enthused *The Times*, 'so glorious it might well be classed as incomparable': 105 at lunch, 220 at tea, 309 at the close, caught for 334 the following morning.

As Don Bradman removed his green-and-gold cap to thunderous applause and walked off the field at Headingley, Leeds, on Saturday, 12 July 1930, he was without doubt the greatest batsman in the world.

Two weeks earlier the reserved young Australian had scored 254 to establish a new record for the highest Test innings at Lord's; now he ranked as the batsman with the highest individual score in the history of Test cricket.

Most men would willingly dedicate a lifetime to such an achievement — but for Don Bradman, not yet twenty-two, it was only the beginning of a career which would rewrite almost every record in the history book of cricket.

Donald George Bradman was born at Cootamundra, New South Wales, on 27 August 1908. He was an active sportsman from an early age, taking part in tennis, football, and cricket which was soon his favourite.

He perfected his batting technique by spending many hours hitting a soft ball against a corrugated iron water-tank at his parent's backyard at Bowral, a small New South Wales town south of Sydney.

It was for the Bowral High School that young Don scored his first century at the age of twelve, and it was playing for the Bowral town side that he first attracted the attention of the State selectors, who included him in the New South Wales team for the 1927 Sheffield Shield match against South Australia in Adelaide.

Coming in to bat at number seven, Bradman scored many of his 118 runs in the first innings off Clarrie Grimmett, then considered one of the world's top bowlers.

His next Shield match, against Victoria in Sydney, saw Bradman with 134 not out, followed by a century in both innings against Queensland.

A second-innings century for New South Wales against the visiting M.C.C. ensured him a place in the team for the 1928 First Test in Brisbane, but his scores of eighteen and one failed to impress, and he was relegated to twelfth man for the Second Test in Sydney.

Bradman was back in the Australian side for the Third Test — after which, apart from one Test in the 1932-33 series that he missed through illness, the Don represented Australia in every Test against England until his retire-

ment in 1948, as well as against the West Indies in 1930-31, South Africa in 1931-32, and India in 1947-48.

When the Australian team to tour England in 1930 was selected, few could have been surprised at Bradman's inclusion, although he himself later remarked: 'It seemed too good to be true; it took me some time to realise that I was really going Home, to begin an adventure upon which every Australian, whatever his station, sets his heart.'

By the time he departed for England the young batsman had already pulled off two impressive feats: a score of 452 not out, a world record for first-class cricket, in 415 minutes against Queensland in the 1928-29 season; and an Australian aggregate record with a score of 1690 runs during the same season. But even greater triumphs awaited the reserved young man 'at Home'.

His first appearance on English soil saw Bradman notch up 236 runs in 270 minutes against Worcestershire, making a major contribution to the touring team's victory by an innings and 165 runs.

Yet England refused to be impressed: as Neville (later Sir Neville) Cardus put it in the *Manchester Guardian* 'Against that Worcestershire attack, mechanically wheeling up the stuff of benumbed mediocrity, almost any decent batsman would get runs.'

The Don found an excellent way to overcome that excuse: he simply topped the earlier score by eighteen runs against the best players England could field. His 254 was the highest Test innings played at Lords, with Bradman

the youngest cricketer ever to score a double-century in the battle for the Ashes.

Cardus now admitted that Bradman 'is a great player fit to be mentioned with the best of them', while Plum Warner, later to manage the M.C.C. 'bodyline' team in Australia, openly paid homage to the Don as 'the champion batsman of the world'.

Bradman later described that innings as the best in his career. 'Practically without exception every ball went where it was intended to go', he noted.

In Sydney — where jubilant hooting from harbour ferries announced the Australian victory at 3 a.m. — and throughout Australia, the name Don Bradman was on everyone's lips. For the millions crippled by the Depression, the vision of a young New South Welshman and his mates licking the English at their own game on their home ground brought a new sense of pride to being an Australian.

But Bradman was far from finished — two weeks later he added forty-seven runs to the Englishman R. E. Foster's Test record of 287.

'Of all the distinguished performances in the long history of Test cricket, Don Bradman's great feat of scoring 309 runs in the day off his own bat, as he did on the first day at Headingley, must rank very high, if not at the very top', wrote Irving Rosenwater in his biography of the great batsman.

'This was achieved not merely in a Test match but in the very highest form of Test cricket — between England and Australia. England's bowling was stronger than at Lord's ... yet Bradman made England's bowlers, according

to one observer, “look cheaper than dirt” and “served them all as though they were novices in a backyard”.’

Bradman was to continue doing that for the next eighteen years to most bowlers who dared to cross his wicket. Only during the infamous ‘bodyline’ series of 1932-33 was the runs-hungry tiger temporarily tamed into scoring but a single century in three Tests — yet even 103 not out under such trying circumstances is a tribute to his greatness.

In a Test career spanning twenty years, Bradman made 6996 runs (including twenty-nine centuries) for an average of 99.94 in eighty Test innings; scored 29.03 per cent of all Australia’s runs in Tests; and captained Australia for twelve years, during three of which he did not lose a rubber.

He averaged 110 runs in ninety-six Sheffield Shield innings, and 95.1 in 338 first-class innings. Altogether, between 1927 and 1949, he scored 28 067 runs in 338 innings, an average of 95.14.

Ironically, in his last international innings, during the Fifth Test against England in 1948, he was bowled for a duck by Hollies at The Oval.

But, as Bradman’s former team-mate, the late Jack Fingleton, so correctly pointed out, figures

...tell only one portion of the story of his tremendous capacity. One had to bat with him, bowl or field against him, or, knowing the game and the art of batting, see and analyse his technique to comprehend the revolutionary dominance he brought to the game. On and on and on he seemed to go, batting into cricket eternity.

Bradman, then a stockbroker in private life, was knighted on January 1949 for his services to cricket. A qualified umpire, he saw long service as a selector and as chairman of the Australian Board of Control for International cricket.

He was made an honorary life member of the Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Hampshire clubs, as well as of the M.C.C. — at whose headquarters, Lord's, a glass case in the famous Long Room preserves, as a permanent tribute, the boots he wore during that magnificent innings at Headingley just over fifty years ago.