

# 'Accidental' Australia captain Paine on verge of Ashes landmark

Paine contributed to victory in Manchester by ending a run of low scores with a valuable 58

LONDRES: Greg Chappell could not do it, while Ricky Ponting and Michael Clarke, who both had two attempts each, were unable to manage it either. But if his side avoid defeat in the fifth Test against England at The Oval starting tomorrow, Tim Paine will join the list of Australia captains who have led the team to an Ashes series win in England.

It is a feat no Australia captain has achieved since Steve Waugh oversaw a 4-1 success 18 years ago. Waugh, like Chappell, Ponting and Clarke, is one of Australia's greatest cricketers. No one, least of all wicketkeeper Paine himself, would suggest he is in that class and the way in which he inherited the captaincy was highly unusual.

Traditionally, Australia have picked their best 11 players first and then opted for one of them as captain, while in England, where there has long been an emphasis on 'leadership qualities', the tendency has been to select the skipper first and then find 10 others to join him.

Paine's case was different. Following the ball-tampering scandal in Cape Town in March 2018 that saw Steve Smith stripped of the captaincy and David Warner removed from the post of vice-captain — with both batsmen subsequently given 12-month bans by Cricket Australia — officials needed someone uncontaminated by the incident to lead the team and turned to Paine the morning after 'Sandpapergate'.

Paine, who had made his Australia debut in a Test against Pakistan at Lord's in 2010, had been on the brink of retiring from cricket in 2017 and taking up a job with an equipment manufacturer instead. But having forced his way back into the side, the

Tasmanian found himself thrust into the captaincy barely a year later.

Ever since becoming skipper, Paine has faced accusations that he is both an "accidental" skipper and not worth his place in the side. But having shown dignity after a dramatic one-wicket loss in the third Test at Headingley, Paine had the satisfaction of leading the team to an 185-run win at Old Trafford on Sunday that ensured they retained the Ashes at 2-1 up with just one to play.

## 'SCARY SMITH'

Much of the credit will go to Smith, who has so far scored 671 runs at 134.20 with three hundreds, including 211 at Old Trafford, in his first series since his ban. "He is just a genius and I never had any doubt he would come back and be the player he was," said Paine, who made his Test debut in the same match as Smith.

"The scary thing is he's getting better. I don't know where it is going to stop but we are enjoying being on the ride, that is for sure."

Just as Smith is the world's top-ranked Test batsman, Australia spearhead Pat Cummins is at the summit of the corresponding bowling rankings.

Most captains are only as good as their players, but Paine contributed to victory in Manchester by ending a run of low scores with a valuable first-innings 58.

"In terms of what we've been able to achieve as a group is pretty satisfying from where we've come from in the last 18 months," said Paine. "Great character, shows the great people we have got and shows we've also got some bloody good cricketers in our team."



MANCHESTER: Australia's captain Tim Paine (L) and Australia's Steve Smith (R) celebrate their victory on the field after the fourth Ashes cricket Test match between England and Australia at Old Trafford in Manchester. — AFP

"Also from where we've come from, even from last week (the defeat at Headingley). That was a loss that would break a lot of teams but we weren't."

As for personal satisfaction, the 34-year-old Paine

added: "My dream was to come here and win an Ashes. I certainly didn't want to be the captain winning the Ashes. "I am just happy to be a part of it. I could have been working at Kookaburra so this isn't bad." — AFP

## England greets Boycott, Strauss given knighthoods

LONDRES: England cricket greats Geoffrey Boycott and Andrew Strauss have been given knighthoods by Theresa May in her resignation honours list.

Boycott and Strauss both received the honour for their services to sport after outstanding careers for England.

"We couldn't be more delighted that Sir Andrew Strauss joins other giants within the sport who have been knighted for their achievements," England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive Tom Harrison said in a statement.

"Aside from his achievements on and off the pitch, Andrew is widely regarded as an exceptional person in our game and this wonderful accolade will be celebrated around the cricketing world."

"Our heartfelt congratulations also go to Sir Geoffrey Boycott, honoured for his long career and passionate dedication to the sport."

Boycott was one of May's sporting heroes and the former British Prime Minister spoke of her admiration for his bloody-minded style of play on several occasions.

During the painfully slow Brexit negotiations last year, May defended her stance by saying: "Can I just say that you might recall from previous comments I have made about cricket that one of my cricket heroes was always Geoffrey Boycott."

"And what did you know about Geoffrey Boycott? Geoffrey Boycott stuck to it and he got the runs in the end."

May, who stepped down as Prime Minister earlier this year, once said she had baked Boycott a batch of chocolate brownies and joked that the former Yorkshire batsman still had the Tupperware box she delivered them in. Boycott, 78, was a polarising figure for his conservative batting and acerbic personality, but that didn't stop him amassing 8,114 Test runs at an average of 47.72 in an England career that ran between 1964 and 1982.

He was forced to apologise in 2017 after joking that he would have to "black up" to receive a knighthood, pointing out that the honour



Geoffrey Boycott

had been bestowed on West Indian cricketers including Viv Richards, Garfield Sobers and Curtly Ambrose.

Boycott was also given a three-month suspended prison sentence in 1998 after being convicted of assault against former girlfriend Margaret Moore.

Former England and Middlesex batsman Strauss hit 7,037 runs in 100 Tests from 2004 to 2012.

Strauss captained England to Ashes triumphs against Australia in 2009 and 2010/2011, the latter campaign making him the first English skipper to win a Test series on Australian soil since Mike Gatting in 1986-87.

South Africa-born Strauss served as England's director of cricket between 2015 and 2018 before resigning when his wife suffered the lung cancer that would eventually lead to her death.

The 42-year-old's time in the England hierarchy was credited with laying the foundations for the team's first 50-over World Cup victory earlier this year. — AFP

## Bangladesh captain Shakib takes blame for Afghan loss

DHAKA: Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan has taken full responsibility for their shocking home defeat to Test rookies Afghanistan in the one-off match at Chattogram and says it would be best if someone else took over the captaincy.

The 32-year-old all-rounder, widely regarded as the best cricketer Bangladesh has ever produced, took the Test captaincy in 2017 from Mushfiqur Rahim for his second stint at the helm after leading them between 2009 and 2011.

War-torn Afghanistan, playing only their third match after being inducted as a test-playing nation two years ago, completed a famous victory by defeating Bangladesh by 224 runs with 3.2 overs left on the final day on Monday.

"It will be best if I didn't have to lead," Shakib told reporters after the match. "I personally believe it will be good for my game. "And if I have to continue leading, then obviously there is a lot to discuss about (with the board)."

Shakib was the lone shining light for Bangladesh during the 50-overs World Cup in England, finishing third on the run-getters' list with 606 from eight innings while also picking up 11 wickets with his left-arm



Shakib Al Hasan (left)

orthodox spin bowling.

Following the World Cup he took a break during Bangladesh's dismal tour of Sri Lanka, where they lost all three one-day internationals but his return failed to inspire the side to victory against Rashid Khan's Afghanistan.

Heavy showers allowed little play on the final day, leaving Afghanistan with a little more than 18 overs in the final session to take the remaining four wickets and force a result, while Bangladesh had high hopes of avoiding defeat with Shakib unbeaten on 44.

However, he edged spinner Zahir Khan off the first ball of the session while attempting a cut shot to allow Afghanistan their big breakthrough. "I am really disap-

pointed," Shakib said. "The whole blame goes on my shoulders."

"I was very nervous when I came out to bat, and got out the first ball and it was my fault. I should have taken more responsibility and could have avoided the cut shot."

"We had to play only one hour and 10 minutes, and I got out the first ball. So it became harder for the team. The dressing room would have felt more comfortable if I had stayed out."

Giving his team zero marks out of 100 for the match, Shakib said they had to produce better players if they were to become more consistent. "If we want to play well consistently, we need to improve our quality and need more quality players." — Reuters

## Australia coach wants struggling batsmen to step up

LONDON: Australia coach Justin Langer has urged the struggling batsmen in his team to step up and deliver when the final Ashes test against England starts at The Oval tomorrow. Australia took an unassailable 2-1 lead in the five-test series following their 185-run win in the fourth test at Old Trafford and now have the chance to wrap up their first series win in England since 2001, when Steve Waugh's men won 4-1.

The performances of Steve Smith, with an astronomical average of 134.2, and Marnus Labuschagne, combined with a strong showing from the bowlers, have minimised the impact of failures from the other specialist batsmen during the series.

Travis Head, Matthew Wade, Usman Khawaja, Marcus Harris, Cameron Bancroft and David Warner have all been posted missing, with experienced opening batsman Warner the worst of the lot with an average of 9.87.

While safe in the knowledge that England cannot win the Ashes, Langer said Australia would not be easing off in the fifth Test. "You've still got to perform, as an Australian test cricketer," he told reporters.

"Whether or not winning the Ashes will make a difference, time will tell, but you've still got to perform whether you are young or a veteran."

## Cricket 'heat rules' call in response to climate change

LONDRES: A joint report by sports researchers and environmental academics unveiled yesterday urges cricket authorities to introduce "heat rules" including postponing games in response to climate change.

The review, by the British Association for Sustainable Sport and two universities, also calls for extra care around youth players and for manufacturers to develop equipment that enhances air flow, as extreme heat becomes more common.

"This is a wake-up call not just for cricket, but for all sport," said Russell Seymour, sustainability manager at Lord's cricket ground in London — the spiritual home of the game — who wrote the foreword to the report.

"Sportspeople are not by nature bystanders and we can and must react to avoid the crises approaching us. "For every player suffering, there are many more fans having to work and go about their daily lives in these increasingly harsh conditions," he added.

With 671 runs from three tests, Smith has carried the Australian batting on his shoulders with some support from Labuschagne, who has an average of 58.2 in the series. Langer called for patience with the young batters in the side.

"He (Smith) has done a lot for Australian cricket for the last few years actually, and so has Dave Warner," Langer said. "But we've also got to remember, Travis Head is new to test cricket, Marnus (Labuschagne) is new to test cricket, Marcus Harris is new to test cricket, Cameron Bancroft is new to test cricket."

"You can't just give them that experience, they've got to earn that and we're very thankful to have Steve batting. We're lucky to have him but test cricket takes time. We've got to respect that, it takes a lot of time."

While his batsmen have been misfiring, Langer has no such problems with his fast bowling unit. Pat Cummins has played all four tests and is the pick of the fast bowlers with 24 wickets while Josh Hazlewood has taken 18 from three.

The touring side have James Pattinson and Peter Siddle with two tests each under their belt in the series, and the uncapped Michael Neser is also an option.

"We've James Pattinson literally jumping out of his skin to play the next test," Langer said. "Peter Siddle, in those first two tests, was probably the stand-out bowler, a great professional and a ripping person to have in the team."

"It'll be fascinating to see how they (Cummins and Hazlewood) pull up ... whatever happens we're lucky to have a couple of other guys who are raring to go if we need them." — Reuters

The "Hit for Six" report details how cricket-playing countries such as India and Australia are already being severely impacted by extreme weather events such as droughts, heatwaves and storms that experts say are being made more common by climate change.

It notes youth matches in Australia have been disrupted due to heat, while dire water shortages have hit a tour of South Africa and flooding has delayed cricket in England.

Its authors say they have combined climate science with heat physiology to show how batsmen and wicketkeepers are becoming increasingly susceptible to poorer performances due to the conditions.

They argue "safety-related heat stress guidelines" are now needed, and that more games may need to be postponed or rearranged to cooler times of the day.

"Above 35 degrees (Celsius) the body runs out of options to cool itself," said Mike Tipton, professor of human and applied physiology at the University of Portsmouth and one of the report's authors.

"For batsman and wicketkeepers even sweating has limited impact as the heavy protective cladding creates a highly humid microclimate next to their bodies."

He added: "Particular care must be given to young players and the grassroots of the sport where elite-level cooling facilities simply aren't available." — AFP