

# **TWO GREAT TEAMS: A COMPARISON OF THE 1948 AND 1989 ASHES CRICKET TOURS TO ENGLAND**

**Iain Stewart  
&  
Ian Jobling  
The University of Queensland  
Brisbane, Australia**

In mid-2001 the Australian cricket team embarked upon another tour of England in quest of the 'Ashes'. Australia versus England Test cricket matches began in 1877.<sup>1</sup> Since then, at roughly four yearly intervals, an Australian team has embarked on a tour of England. During these six-month tours, a Test Match series is contested for the Ashes.<sup>2</sup> Each time a touring squad of seventeen players to tour England is announced, the question inevitably asked is, 'How will its performances compare to any of its predecessors?'<sup>3</sup> Since World War Two, Australia has toured England on thirteen occasions in quest of the Ashes.<sup>4</sup> Results from these tours have been quite varied, ranging from poor in 1956 and 1985, to outstanding in 1948 and 1989. This article compares two of Australia's greatest post-WWII Ashes tours, 1948 and 1989, in order to ascertain which was more successful. On the basis of a comparison of the 'facts' gleaned from books and commentaries, and from contemporary articles and newspapers, we argue that the 1989 tour was equally, if not more successful than that of the 'Invincibles' of 1948.

## **The 1948 Tourists**

The Australian teams for both the 1948 and 1989 tours were relatively inexperienced in Test match cricket. Malcolm Conn commented on the 1948 team:

One of the great flaws of any historical comparison is that the players who played in the past are always remembered for the greats that they became. However, their presence in a particular team, series or era was not considered that way at the time. indeed some of the most well loved names of the Australian game – Lindwall, Miller, and Arthur Morris – had no more than 11 Tests available to them before the 1948 tour because of the war.<sup>5</sup>

International cricket resumed three years after the end of WWII, and only Donald Bradman, Sid Barnes, Lindsay Hassett and Bill Brown had been members of the previous tour to England ten years earlier.<sup>6</sup> The 'aging' Bradman captained the seventeen player touring squad.<sup>7</sup> Table 1 depicts the members of the 1948 team and the number of Tests they had played before the departing Australia for England.

## Two Great Teams

Table 1: Number of Tests Played by Team Members prior to 1948 Ashes Tour<sup>8</sup>

Name	Number of Tests	Name	Number of Tests
Donald Bradman	47	Lindsay Hassett	14
Sid Barnes	9	Bill Brown	20
Ron Hamence	3	Neil Harvey	2
Ian Johnson	8	Bill Johnston	4
Ray Lindwall	11	Sam Loxton	1
Colin McCool	9	Keith Miller	11
Arthur Morris	11	Doug Ring	1
Ron Saggars	0	Don Tallon	11
Ern Toshack	8		

In total, the Australians had played 170 Tests at an average of only ten Tests per player. Despite this relative lack of experience, the Australian team had been very successful since the war and played with confidence. Since the end of the war, Australia had won eight of the eleven Tests – six by an innings – and without a loss.<sup>9</sup> The 1948 team was a well balanced touring side with openers Barnes and Morris spearheading the batting. Brown, a Test batsman with eight centuries, was relegated to reserve opener. The experienced Bradman came in at number three, followed by Hassett, and then the nineteen year-old promising left-hander, Harvey. Miller, an all-rounder of superb quality and capable of winning matches with both bat and ball, added further depth to the batting line-up. Another all-rounder, Loxton followed him. Tallon, a dashing wicket keeper and capable batsman preceded an impressive 'tail' of Lindwall, Toshack and Bill Johnston.

The bowling was led by Lindwall and Miller sharing the new ball. Johnston, capable of bowling pace and then left-arm leg spin, was first change. Toshack's accurate swing bowling completed a strong line up McCool, Johnson, Ring, Hamence and Saggars were reserves, who settled for minor games against counties on the tour.<sup>10</sup> Tour captain Don Bradman commented on the touring team's prospects before leaving for England:

I was confident of our ability. Nobody knew of our weaknesses as I did, but there were certain characteristics about the team that inspired confidence. Individual ability had to be tested in some case in the crucible of hard experience – in others it was already known. But I knew we were better equipped in the technical sense than any other touring team with which I travelled.<sup>11</sup>

### The 1989 Tourists

Australian cricket was in a major slump in 1989. In the eleven Tests before the 1989 tour began, Australia had only recorded two victories, with four defeats and five draws.<sup>12</sup> The team lacked harmony, the batting line-up was

brittle, and the bowlers lacked penetration.<sup>13</sup> Despite this dismal record the Australian team gained confidence from the 1988-89 Test series against the West Indies where, in the final two Tests of the already decided series, they managed a victory and were the better team in the drawn final Test.<sup>14</sup>

When the seventeen players were announced for the 1989 Ashes Tour, it was regarded as the worst team to ever be selected to leave our shores. Table 2 depicts the team and their experience in Test matches.

Table 2: Number of Tests Played by Team Members prior to 1989 Ashes Tour<sup>15</sup>

Name	Number of Tests	Name	Number of Tests
Allan Border	102	Geoff Marsh	27
Terry Alderman	24	David Boon	36
Greg Campbell	0	Ian Healy	8
Trevor Hohns	2	Mervyn Hughes	11
Dean Jones	21	Geoffrey Lawson	38
Tim May	7	Tom Moody	0
Carl Rackeman	5	Mark Taylor	2
Mike Veletta	7	Steve Waugh	26
Tim Zoehrer	10		

Although this squad of players had more Test experience, with an average of nineteen Tests per player, than their 1948 counterparts, only Border, Lawson, Alderman and Boon had played in a previous Ashes tour.<sup>16</sup> The media attacked the selection of the Test squad. When Mike Whitney was excluded. Bill O'Reilly, a former champion leg-spinner, commented that 'without Mike Whitney the pace attack is frightening -for us, not for the Englishmen'.<sup>17</sup>

The 1989 Test team was regarded as vulnerable. The batting was held together by Border, acknowledged at the time as the best batsman in the side, batting at number 4. The openers were Marsh, who was consistent at being inconsistent, and Taylor, who had played only two Tests. Boon was chosen at number 3, but he could also slot into the role of opener if needed. Border followed, then Jones, who had shown good form prior to the series. Waugh, who had performed consistently against the West Indies without cracking big scores, was next. Healy, the team's wicket-keeper, who had only just cemented himself into the team, was the last of the recognised batsmen.

Alderman, having just served a two-year ban for playing in a rebel tour to South Africa, led the bowling with paceman, Lawson, and fast-medium, Hughes. Both had performed well recently without taking good hauls. Hohns, a leg-spinner new to the side, completed the Test team. Players who were confined to only county games were bowlers Campbell, Rackemann, and May, reserve keeper Zoehrer, and batsmen Moody and Veletta.<sup>18</sup>

## Statistical Analysis

### ***First-Class Results***

Statistically, results from the 1948 Ashes tour were phenomenal. This team was the first, and still the only, team to tour England without losing a single first-class match. Their record is imposing and they have justifiably been dubbed the 'Invincibles'. They played 31 first-class matches, winning 74 per cent of these. Of the 34 total matches played in England, Australia won half of them by an innings, and an additional six more by eight wickets or more.<sup>19</sup>

By comparison, the 1989 tourists had an equally illustrious record. This squad of players contested only twenty first-class matches, winning sixty per cent of these and only losing one minor game at the start of the tour.<sup>20</sup> The records of all first-class games conducted on these two tours were.<sup>21</sup>

	<b>First-Class Games</b>	<b>Won</b>	<b>Lost</b>	<b>Drawn</b>
<b>1948 Tour</b>	31	23	0	8
<b>1989 tour</b>	20	12	1	7

Of all other Ashes tours since WWII, only the 1975 and 1993 touring teams have completed a tour of England winning over half of the first-class games.<sup>22</sup> However, the results from the 1989 and 1948 trips to England easily surpass these two tours in terms of success

### ***Test Match results***

Winning Test matches and ultimately the series is the prime objective of Ashes tours. When comparing the Test match results from 1948 with 1989 there is virtually no difference. The 1948 side contested five Test matches and won 4-0, while the 1989 team surprised all observers by winning by the same 4-0 margin in their six-Test series. These two touring sides remain in the history of post-war Australian cricket as the only teams to win an Ashes series 4-0. A close examination of each series allows greater scope for determining which of the two sides performed better.

### ***1948 Test Series***

The 1948 Test series was dominated by an experimental new rule allowing a new ball to be taken every fifty-five overs. This decision resulted in a reduced need for either side to choose spinners in their teams, effectively meaning that whichever team had the better new ball bowlers would hold the upper hand throughout the series. This played right into the hands of Australia who had the best array of fast bowling power in years.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the Test series, England fought hard but were outclassed. The First Test set the trend for the series to come with England in disarray at 8 for 74 at tea on the first day. A huge psychological advantage had been gained, which lasted for the first two Test matches, which Australia won

comfortably by 8 wickets and 409 runs, respectively. England recovered well in the Third Test, and at various stages Australia was in grave danger of losing the match. Rain, however, hampered England's chances and a draw resulted. Australia had retained the Ashes, leading 2-nil with only two Tests to play. The Fourth Test has gone down in history as Australia's best-ever batting performance England set Australia the mammoth target of 404 on a turning wicket with a whole day to play. Amazingly, the Australians achieved the impossible, the only side to ever score over 400 to win in the final innings of a Test This totally devastated the England players, who had put in a sterling effort in the last two Tests without reward.<sup>24</sup> The Fifth Test was dominated by the Australian bowlers as they cut a swathe through England, dismissing them for a paltry 52 and 188 Australia finished victors by a massive innings and 149 runs The innings victory denied Don Bradman a second innings in his final Test, leaving the best batsmen the world has ever seen scoring 0, and tantalisingly close to a century average – 99.94.<sup>25</sup>

### 1989 Test Series

Before the 1989 tour began the general expectation was that Australia would struggle to hold its own, even against the relatively weak Test side that England was likely to field. Instead, the Australians inflicted on England one of the most comprehensive defeats in the history of Anglo-Australian cricket.<sup>26</sup>

The success of the 1989 Ashes tourists took many cricket observers and lovers by surprise Australia dominated the series thanks largely to their batsmen. Patrick Eagar's comment is most apt: 'With runs galore to play with in every match, Border was able to set attacking fields. He sized up each batsman's weakness in turn and placed his fields accordingly'.<sup>27</sup> From the First Test of the series, Australia was in command, setting England a mammoth total of 7 for 601 declared. This was the highest ever innings total at Leeds, ensuring Australia could not lose the game.<sup>28</sup> England avoided the follow-on, but a batting collapse on the last day ensured an Australian victory by 210 runs. In the Second Test at Lords, not much changed. England played poor cricket, batting and bowling terribly to concede a first innings deficit of 242. They eventually lost by six wickets. Rain marred the Third Test, forcing a draw. However, Australia's third consecutive first innings score of over 400 meant that the team was in a position of power throughout this Test as well. The Fourth Test match saw Australia reclaim the Ashes, the first time they had been regained in England since 1934.<sup>29</sup> Australia again scored over 400 in the first innings (the sixth consecutive Test in which this had been achieved), and won the match by nine wickets. Australia, heading to stumps on Day One at 0 for 301, dominated the Fifth Test. Australia scored 600 for the second time in the series, and for only the third time ever. The eventual victory margin of an innings and 180 runs was Australia's seventh highest

overall in all Test matches, and the largest ever achieved in England. The Sixth Test was rain-affected and resulted in a draw though Australia had the better of the entire game, scoring over 400 in their first innings yet again. This set a new world record for the most consecutive Test first innings scores over 400.<sup>30</sup> England just avoided the follow-on to salvage a draw and some pride.

In summary, Australia in all six Tests of the series showed complete dominance over England in every facet of the game. Australia won four of the six Tests, and probably could have won them all had rain not intervened. In all six Tests Australia held a first innings lead of at least 171 runs, giving a good indication of the extent to which Australia controlled the series

### **Comparing the Two Tours**

#### ***Factors supporting the idea that 1948 was more successful***

In 1948, unlike 1989, cricket was still played on uncovered wickets. This made batting quite difficult and often caused one team to be at a disadvantage. Australia toured England for three months, did not suffer one defeat, and won half of their games by an innings. This speaks volumes for their ability to play in both good and bad conditions.<sup>31</sup> The achievement of completing a tour of England without defeat gave this Australian side quite a deal of glamour, which no Ashes touring side has been able to match.<sup>32</sup>

#### ***Factors supporting the idea that 1989 was more successful.***

Journalist, Peter McFarlane wrote the following in 1989:

The detractors can argue as long and as vehemently as they want but they cannot decrease the significance of the fact that not since 1934 has Australia regained the Ashes in England. To do it they have overcome – brushed aside – an England side that boasted world-class batsmen, a rehabilitated Ian Botham and respected bowlers.<sup>33</sup>

Statistically, the 1989 tourists performed much better in the Test matches than the 1948 tourists, despite the fact that England were clearly a much weaker opposition in 1989 than 1948.<sup>34</sup> However, unlike in 1948 when the '55 overs till new-ball rule' clearly advantaged Australia, in 1989 the Australian four-pronged pace attack had to bowl for longer periods with the older ball. Despite this they still scored at an average of 30.16 more runs per wicket than England in 1989. This compares to only 19.01 more runs per wicket that the 1948 Australians could achieve.

The Test series of the two tours is summarised in Table 3 and, as can be seen, the 1989 tourists performed better than the 1948 team in all departments of the game.

Table 3: Statistical summary of the 1948 and 1989 Test Series<sup>35</sup>

	1948 Australia	1948 England		1989 Australia	1989 England
<b>Tests Played</b>	5	5		6	6
<b>Innings Faced</b>	9	10		11	11
<b>Runs Scored</b>	2981	2645		3877	2882
<b>Wickets Lost</b>	62	91		67	104
<b>Overs Faced</b>	1067.30	1130.3		1241.20	974.50
<b>Runs/wicket</b>	48.08	29.07		57.87	27.71
<b>Runs/innings</b>	331.22	264.50		352.45	262
<b>Runs/over</b>	2.79	2.34		3.12	2.96
<b>Fifties</b>	12	13		20	11
<b>Centuries</b>	8	4		7	5
<b>5 wickets</b>	4	1		7	-
<b>10 wickets</b>	-	-		1	-

It must also be remembered that when Australia set off for England in 1989 they were described as 'the weakest ever sent in search of the Ashes'.<sup>36</sup> on return, Australia had resoundingly won the Test match series 4-0, never looking like losing a single test. The Australian public was enthralled with the Ashes success, at a time of economic recession and few sporting achievements of note. A ticket-tape parade was staged through Sydney, 'something the 1948 team did not receive, but unlike the 1989 Australians, they had been expected to win'.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Comparison of Player Performance*

A novel way to determine which of the touring sides performed better is to examine how many players from the 1989 team and the 1948 team would be selected in a combined team. The selection was made purely on the Test series statistics and averages of all the players in their respective positions.<sup>38</sup> Only players contributing in more than one Test were considered.

Of the openers to choose from, three of the four players, Barnes, Taylor and Morris, had series averages of over 80. However, the selection has to go to Taylor and Morris. Taylor's selection in a result of accumulating 839 runs, the third highest ever by an Australian in an Ashes series;<sup>39</sup> and Morris for hitting 696 runs, including three half-centuries and three centuries.

The number three is Bradman. Despite Boon averageing over 50 in the series, Bradman scored over 500 runs at an average of 72.57. Border is selected to bat at four, even though he did not score a century in the entire series, His six fifties in nine innings and an average of 73 keeps him clear of any of his 1948 rivals, Brown, Hassett and Miller, who all batter at number four during some stage of their tour, but had lower averages.

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Selected to come in at number five would be Jones ahead of Harvey. Jones scored over 500 runs at 70 including three 50s and two 100s in his remarkable series. Steve Waugh, with his colossal series average of 126 and 500 runs, makes him an easy selection over Hassett, who still managed a respectable average of 44 in 1948. Of the two wicket keepers, Tallon performed better than Healy in both batting and wicketkeeping.

Four bowlers need to be selected for this combined team: only Alderman with 41 wickets and an average of 17 would be selected from the 1989 tourists. The other bowlers, Lindwall, Miller and Johnston, select themselves. Lindwall, who devastated the England's players with his stunning speed and swing, collected 27 wickets at an average of 19 Miller's taking of 13 wickets at 23, as well as being a competent batsman, clearly justifies his selection Johnston, with an average of 23 and 27 wickets in the series, and his ability to take wickets bowling both swing and spin gives this combined side variety in attack. A combined side would be comprised thus:

<b>Player</b>	<b>Year of Tour</b>
Mark Taylor	1989
Arthur Morris	1948
Donald Bradman (captain)	1948
Allan Border (Vice-Captain)	1989
Dean Jones	1989
Steve Waugh	1989
Keith Miller	1948
Don Tallon	1948
Ray Lindwall	1948
Terry Alderman	1989
Bill Johnston	1948

This combined eleven has an even mix of players from both teams, five from 1989 and six from 1948, indicating the evenness of the two touring squads.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, both the 1948 and the 1989 teams were even in their performance under the different conditions of the time for the following reasons. Firstly, both touring sides won the Ashes in comprehensive fashion, 4-0; secondly, player performances were even, indicated by the selection of five players from 1989 and six from 1948 in a combined team; and finally, each team had their different advantages – in 1948 Australia was aided by the '55 overs till new-ball rule' and in 1989 Australia met a weakened England on covered pitches.

Both captains, Donald Bradman and Allan Border, are deserving of the credit bestowed upon them for focussing their teams during their respective

Ashes campaigns, and for winning the Ashes so comprehensively. Clearly, the 1948 and 1989 teams deserve to be ranked closely together as the best ever post-WWII Ashes tours. Where does the 2001 team rate?

**NOTES:**

1. Garrie Hutchinson and John Ross (eds), *200 Seasons of Australian Cricket*, Ken Fin, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 203-70.
2. The Ashes is the traditional prize for the victorious cricket team contesting an Australia versus England Test series. The Ashes first started as a joke, after Australia had defeated England in the only Test of the 1882 tour of England. The *Sporting Times* printed a mock obituary on 2 September 1882: 'In remembrance of English cricket which died at The Oval . . . deeply lamented by a large circle of sorrowing friends . . . RIP the body will be cremated and the Ashes taken to Australia'. Ivo Bligh, the England captain appointed for England's tour of Australia in 1882-3, continued the notion by vowing to win back 'The Ashes', the mythical body of English cricket. His mission was successful, winning the three Test series 2-1. At a dinner following the Third Test in Sydney, Mrs Annie Fletcher, presented him with an embroidered bag in which to place 'the Ashes'. Later, in Melbourne, this symbolic gesture was repeated when an engraved urn was presented to him by Florence Morphy. Inside the urn is believed to be ashes from a burnt stump or ball. Since this historical moment in 1882, the 'Ashes' have been contested in every Australia versus England Test series. Australia has won or retained the Ashes on 31 occasions to England's 27. Hutchinson & Ross, *200 Seasons of Australian Cricket*, pp 203-70; Warwick Franks, 'Four of the best', *ABC Cricket 1997 Ashes Tour*, Sydney, 1997, pp 18-21.
3. Franks, 'Four of the best', pp. 18-21.
4. Post World War II Ashes tour results to England, Franks, 'Four of the best', pp. 18-21.

Year	Matches	Australia	England	Drawn
1948	5	4	-	1
1953	5	-	1	4
1956	5	1	2	2
1961	5	2	1	2
1964	5	1	-	4
1968	5	1	1	3
1972	5	2	2	1
1975	4	1	-	3
1981	6	1	3	2
1985	6	1	3	2
1989	6	4	-	2
1993	6	4	1	1
1997	6	3	2	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>28</b>

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5. Malcolm Conn, *The Australian*, 28 October 1998.
6. Jack Pollard, *From Bradman to Border: Australian Cricket, 1948-1989*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1990, p. 5.
7. Donald Bradman is regarded as the greatest batsmen ever. In his career, which spanned nineteen years, he had a Test average of almost 100, almost fifty per cent better than any other batsmen. Bradman holds, or has held, many batting records, his more notable being the highest Test score 334, most number of Test centuries, 29, most runs 6996, highest average 99.94 and many others. Cf. Iain Stewart, 'Post-Bradman cricket In Australia: what impact did the retirement of "The Don" have on Australian cricket?', Unpublished paper, The University of Queensland, p. 8.
8. Information compiled from Don Bradman, *Farewell to Cricket*, 1994, Harper Collins, Sydney, p. 147 ; Jack Pollard, *The Complete Illustrated History of Australian Cricket*, Pelham Books, Victoria, 1992.
9. Pollard, *The Complete Illustrated History of Australian Cricket*.
10. Bradman, *Farewell to Cricket*, p. 147.
11. Bradman, *Farewell to Cricket*, p. 147.
12. Pollard, *The Complete Illustrated History of Australian Cricket*
13. Pollard, *From Bradman to Border*, p. 5.
14. Pollard, *The Complete Illustrated History of Australian Cricket*, pp. 51-12.
15. Mark Ray and Geoff Lawson, *Geoff Lawson's Diary of the Ashes*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1990.
16. Allan Border, *Ashes Glory: Allan Borders Own Story*, Swan Publishing, Sydney, 1989, p. 31.
17. Bill O'Reilly, 'It's war, but where is the artillery?' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 March 1989; see also Border, *Ashes Glory*, p. 31.
18. Border, *Ashes Glory*, pp. 146-51.
19. Pollard, *The Complete Illustrated History of Australian Cricket*, p. 343.
20. Philip Derriman and Ross Dundas, *The ABC Australian Cricket Almanac*, ABC Enterprises, Sydney, 1990.
21. Derriman and Dundas, *The ABC Australian Cricket Almanac*.
22. Derriman and Dundas, *The ABC Australian Cricket Almanac*.
23. Pollard, *From Bradman to Border*, p. 345
24. Hutchinson and Ross, *200 Seasons of Australian Cricket*, pp. 203-70.

25. Irving Rosenwater, *Sir Donald Bradman: A Biography*, 1978, Batsford, London, p. 355.
26. Derriman and Dundas, *The ABC Australian Cricket Almanac*.
27. Patrick Eagar and Alan Ross, *Tour of Tours: Border's Victorious Australians of 1989*, Hodder and Stoughton, Sydney, 1989.
28. Border, *Ashes Glory*, p. 159.
29. The 1989 Ashes series victory was the first time since 1934 that the Ashes had been regained from England in England. This means that on all other occasions when Australia have won an Ashes series in England, in 1938 (drawn), 1948, 1961, 1964, 1968 (drawn), and 1975, they were already holders of the trophy. See Ross Dundas, *Test Cricket Statistics: ABC Cricket 1998-99*, Sydney, 1997, pp. 33-41.
30. Border, *Ashes Glory*, p. 159.
31. Pollard, *The Complete Illustrated History of Australian Cricket*, pp. 343-7.
32. Rosenwater, *Sir Donald Bradman*, p. 355.
33. Peter McFarline, 'It's time for captain to take a bow', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 August 1989.
34. John J. Figueroa, *West Indies in England: The Great Post-War Tours*, The Kingswood Press, London, p. 10.
35. *Howzstat: International Cricket Database*. Available: <http://www.mullara.met.unimelb.edu.au:8080/howzstat> [1998, September].
36. McFarline, 'It's time for captain to take a bow'.
37. Philip Derriman, 'Huge ovation for Border's marvels', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 September 1989.
38. For a full description of Test match statistics from the 1948 and the 1989 Tours, see Appendix 1. *Howzstat, International Cricket Database*, Available: <http://www.mullara.met.unimelb.edu.au:8080/howzstat> [1998, September].
39. Border, *Ashes Glory*, p. 159.

Additional statistics are available from Ian Jobling at [ianj@hms.uq.edu.au](mailto:ianj@hms.uq.edu.au)