

The Mythology of Australian Cricket 1890-1914

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Since the initial first-class match took place in Australia in 1851, Australians have had a tendency to mythologise the game of cricket. Its powerful influence over the years on Australian individuals and society had been seriously underestimated until very recent times.

The men who ran the game over the years have, in the main, either been poorly educated individuals or professional people who used their position to climb the ranks of Australia's social classes. The influences exerted on these men from politicians through to the downright corrupt has seen a permanent rift between players and administrators over the years. It could be argued that the period 1979-86 were the highpoint years of the corrupting influences on the country's cricket administration.

Prior to that the 1890-1914 period had a number of machiavellian situations of which six are detailed in this paper. They are:

- (i) The tour of Australia by a team of England cricketers under the patronage of Lord Sheffield in 1891-92
- (ii) The two subsequent tours of Australia in 1894-95 and 1897-98 with Andrew Stoddart as England's captain
- (iii) The rebellion by Australia's top cricketers against the governing Australasian Cricket Council which culminated in January 1900
- (iv) The emergence of the Australian Board of Control for International Cricket in 1905
- (v) The 'Row of 1912' which finally broke the players' stronghold of their control over the game
- (vi) The rise and early death of Australian cricket's first hero: Victor Trumper

This paper shows how all six situations have been so mythologised over the years that revelation of the actual facts have been received with disbelief by many who only have a superficial knowledge of the game.

Cricket lore tells of Lord Sheffield's inspiration in putting together and funding a team to tour Australia. We are told of his great love for the young country's cricketers, so much so that he donated a Shield for intercolonial play. The truth is that Sheffield was ordered by the British Government to visit Australia—in the guise of a cricket manager—in order to hasten the six colonies into federation. Sheffield, a homosexual, spent three of the five months of the tour on the island of Tasmania with "some new friends". His failed mission was taken up by Andrew Stoddart later in the decade.

Australia's cricket administrators failed in their first attempt (1892-1900) to take control of the game from the players. Their second, and successful, effort (1905) was akin to Tammany Hall virtues. This paper shows the players' backlash which culminated in their withdrawing of services in 1912. The War of 1914 took many players away to fight and left the administrators fully in control.

Victor Trumper, the great sporting hero of the early years of the century, was completely opposite to the mythological lillywhite image in which he was presented. He was three times declared

bankrupt and a proven embezzler yet got away with his misdemeanours as no one would believe him capable of such nefarious activities.

This paper is an off-cut of a much larger work due to be published in London in May 1993.