

The Baggy Green

Extracts

I am unable to describe the joy that Audette and I experienced when the announcement was made. A cricket fanatic all my life, I saw it as the game of gentlemen - in character rather than social class. It is the greatest game of them all and my son had been selected to play at the highest level of the game, representing the greatest country of them all: nearly too much to take in. I could not afford to buy my own bat or protector as a youngster and here was my son, selected to represent our country. My dear old mother was living with my youngest sister Jay and her husband Vic South at Chatswood at the time, and on hearing the news Mum said to Vic,

'Son, don't you wish your name was Francis?'

But the euphoria for all of us was to be short-lived. 'The best laid plans of mice and men' to paraphrase Mum's favourite Scottish poet, Robbie Burns, or, in more modern terms, as Beatle John Lennon wrote in the '70s:

Life's what happens when you're busy making other plans.

Just as we were getting used to the idea of our son being an Australian representative cricketer ...



The boys might have let their hair down on the way (and between matches), but they took the issues of selection and performance very seriously. Bruce and Graeme Watson were fighting for the spot as Keith Stackpole's opening partner for the series. Bruce played very well in the lead up matches and was picked by the tour selectors, Ian Chappell, Keith Stackpole and John Inverarity, to open the batting in the First Test at Old Trafford. The pitch was so green it was hard to distinguish it from the outfield. With luck running their way, Keith and Bruce weathered the early John Snow and Geoff Arnold storm and put on 68 for the first wicket ...



The captain was the poster boy in many of the funny incidences cleared for team-mates to re-tell beyond the tour. David Hole, son-in-law of Len Newbury, owner of Gray Nichols, the renowned cricket bat manufacturer, held a barbecue at his home at Sussex on a Saturday evening prior to a limited overs game scheduled for the next day. Most of the Australian cricketers were guests at the do, and some continued into the early hours of the morning, heading back to the hotel at about 3.00am.

In one car were Ian Chappell, Rodney Marsh and Graeme Watson. They decided that they wanted to hit a few golf balls and pulled off the road onto an open field. Golf balls depleted, and impossible to retrieve in the dark and in their condition, it was time to continue their journey home. They could see the lights of the expressway across the field and decided to drive towards them. Though oblivious to the fact, their intended path crossed a bowling green - they were stopped just shy of it when the car became the captive of a ditch at the front of the green. For some reason that made sense to their temporarily befuddled brains, they wiped all their fingerprints off the car and off the 'Men at Work' sign that they'd acquired on the way, and now disposed of, and headed again towards the lights, this time on foot.

They arrived back at the hotel with the rising sun. Ian waited until the respectable hour of 7.00am and woke Ray Steele. Grinning broadly, Ian asked Ray whether he would believe it if told that his car had been stolen overnight. Even sleepy-eyed with the unexpected waking ...



Along the way, Bruce also padded up for charity cricket matches for the Spastic Centre of New South Wales. For three or four years he and Shelley, together with Shelley's boss, Charlie Price, organised a celebrity cricket match at Drummoyne Oval at the start of each season. In earlier years Charlie had been a member of the Australian Services XI cricket team, which toured England at the end of the War and included players such as Keith Miller, Lindsay Hassett, ...

The charity matches raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Spastic Centre. The first match in October 1972, with many of the Australian cricket team responding to Bruce's overtures, attracted over 20,000 spectators. It was a fabulous day, followed by a small reception that included among the guests, Bob Hawke, the then President of the ACTU, later to become the Prime Minister of Australia. He chatted amiably with Audette and me and won me over a bit with his relaxed and down to earth manner. A year later we could have used Mr Hawke's negotiating skills ...

Shelley secured sponsorship from Qantas in the form of three free round-the-world tickets. Bruce used the tickets to invite Tony Greig (England), Barry Richards (South Africa) and Keith Boyce (West Indies) as their star attractions. As fate would have it ...