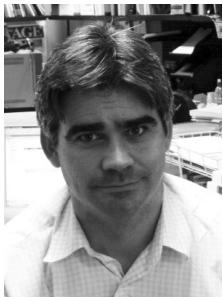


AFFIRM press



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CHAPPELL'S LAST STAND

BY

MICHAEL SEXTON



PROLOGUE

IT'S TIME

Ian Chappell's natural instinct is to speak his mind, which is why he was so troubled leaving the nets after South Australia's practice session in the spring of 1975.

As he tucked his pads under his arm and picked up his bat, the rest of the players were already making their way to the change room at the back of the ivy-covered Members Stand. The Sheffield Shield season was beginning that week in Brisbane. Queensland would play New South Wales. Like a slow thaw following winter, cricket's arrival heralded the approach of summer.

Chappell felt compelled to make some sort of speech on the eve of the season. Despite his prowess with words he wasn't much for the 'rah rah' stuff. He believed bowlers bowled and batsmen batted. If they needed motivation from speeches then there might be something wrong. When he spoke it was direct and honest which is why his mind was being tugged in two directions: what

he wanted to say to the team that might set the tone for the year, and what he really thought of their chances.

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Chappell felt great pride in his state and had agreed to captain again despite handing over the national job to his brother Greg. The captaincy of Australia was in far better shape now than when he had been given it, when the side was listing. Bill Lawry was sacked as the 1970–71 Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) became the first English side to tour without dropping a Test. They also drew plenty, with the seven-match series ending 2–0. Coming off the back of the 1968 series, which ended one-all, Test cricket was drifting into dreariness.

This wasn't new. In the 1950s Sir Donald Bradman worried that Test cricket was going stale. He conspired with Richie Benaud and Frank Worrell to play audaciously during the West Indies' tour of Australia in 1960–61. It produced a summer of adventure, a tied Test, knife-edge results and a concluding street parade through well-mannered Melbourne for the West Indians. The ticker tape that floated down on the visitors carried the thanks of a grateful cricket nation for switching the game from black and white to technicolour.

The colour started fading again as the decade wore on. In 1964 the Ashes were retained, Australia winning one Test from five matches. The next two series both ended one-all. By the time Ian Chappell went out to take the toss for the first time as captain, at

the SCG in February 1971, the past 27 Ashes Test matches had produced only nine results, with four going Australia's way.

It wasn't the kind of cricket Chappell had been brought up to play.

Observers might have known things were going to change in Australian cricket when Chappell arrived at Heathrow Airport for the 1972 tour wearing a mauve safari suit. When required, the team wore blazers and ties, but otherwise Chappell's Australians were a paisley and striped-blur with moustaches and sideburns going back and across. They were all flared trousers, flared collars and flared hair. In London they set up camp in the Waldorf Hotel where they drank half pints of double diamond pale ale with Mick Jagger. Before the first Test at Manchester they went en masse for a trim at a hair salon owned by George Best.

It matched a fashion sentiment at home where a seismic social and political shift was at play. After 23 years in power the conservative government faced defeat. Labor leader, Gough Whitlam, promised to sate the mood that it was time for change.

When elected Whitlam tried wresting the country loose from its cultural bondage. He wanted a new national anthem, the end of British honours and knighthoods, to withdraw from America's war in Vietnam and to make tertiary education free. He urged that books, films, music and theatre be written for and about Australia. Not everyone liked it but those who did adored it. It was the anti-cringe or, as Paul Keating would later call it, 'the cultural strut'.

When the Australians took to Lord's for the second Test match in 1972 they were set to strut.

They really shouldn't have been because they were already one down in the series after losing at Old Trafford by 89 runs. Chappell was facing accusations that he was too cavalier. In that first Test, after winning the toss and batting, England posted 249 with lanky debutante Tony Greig top scoring with 57.

The Australian openers were skittish in reply. Keith Stackpole was dropped on consecutive balls. When the second fell to the turf he scrambled through for a single only to see Bruce Francis clip the next one within inches of the grasping fingers of John Snow.

The pair steadied and built the total to 68 when Francis was lbw to Basil D'Oliveira. Chappell arrived at the crease to face Greig who bent his back and reared the first delivery short. Chappell loved to hook and the ball left a sweet red cherry imprint in the middle of the blade. It soared across the pale Manchester sky ... and into the hands of Mike Smith standing at fine leg, his heels touching the boundary and his arms outstretched above his head. In the second innings another mistimed hook shot, this time off Snow, had Chappell caught behind for seven.

Critics suggested that the shot was too risky for a number three because when it failed it exposed the middle and lower orders. Chappell believed he had been playing the shot well and was unlucky. Later he would advise his players that they shouldn't whinge about short bowling because 'you've got a bat in your hand, so use it'.

At Lord's, Chappell and Ray Illingworth had conducted the coin toss in drizzle and the overcast conditions made the match resemble one played on a wet driveway by kids using a tennis ball half wrapped in electrical tape.

The conditions helped debutant Bob Massie to eight English wickets in the first innings. The Australians weren't spared in their first dig. Francis was clean bowled first up by Snow. Stackpole made five. At 2/7 the Chappell brothers were at the crease. England knew what to do and, on a greasy deck under a bruised sky, they launched ball after ball at the Australian captain's nose. He attacked back. The cherries grew as he hooked and pulled. Most fizzed to the boundary – one went over for six. The brothers added 75 until Smith again caught Ian at fine leg, this time running to catch the chance off Snow. Greg finished with 131 and Rod Marsh made 50.

After Massie picked up another eight-wicket haul in England's second innings the tourists needed 81 to win. Stackpole was unbeaten on 57 when he joined the celebrations in the Australian change room. The Australians won with so much time to spare that the ground cleared out and so the planned royal visit scheduled for tea-time had to be abandoned. Instead the team visited Buckingham Palace that evening.

After the third Test was drawn, and England won the fourth with Derek Underwood spinning Australia out on a grassless deck (something of a rarity in Yorkshire), the series moved to London's The Oval for the fifth and final Test. There the Australians threw down a marker, Lillee taking ten wickets and

the Chappells both making first innings centuries.

Needing 242 to win, the Australians were 1/116 at stumps on the fifth day with Stackpole and Chappell in command. The next morning Chappell, on 37, swept Underwood. The ball hit the top edge, cannoned off his face and into the grateful hands of Bob Willis. A collapse followed and, at 5/171, the momentum had swung.

The series decider was now a thrilling drama played out on the final day of the final Test. The tension built on every delivery faced by Paul Sheahan and Marsh. Sheahan hadn't had a prolific tour but continued playing off the front foot. As the 71 runs were whittled away Marsh became antsy, wanting the contest finished. He wasn't going to nudge and push runs. Instead, his hammer blows through mid-wicket were exclamation marks on the statement 'We will win'. The sight of the pair running from the pitch, whirling their bats above their heads like windmill blades, broadcast the joy of victory to Australia.

Chappell saw Marsh collapse into 'an untidy heap' in the change room and put it down to the release of tension. Marsh believed part of that tension was the fear of being responsible for a loss and, in doing so, letting down his mates.

Standing amid the celebrations Chappell felt the match was a watershed. He would later reflect that it was the best Test match he ever played in. England was the leading side in the world at that stage and the match could have gone either way. That it went to Australia convinced him and, he believed, others in that squad, that they were good enough to match it with the rest of the world.

As they packed their gear for home no-one felt the joy more than tour manager, Ray Steele. Although a veteran cricket administrator, his sporting grounding came from Australian Rules football. He had played with Richmond in the 1940s, a blue-collar club that was intolerant of pretension.

In 1972 he had watched, with growing admiration, Ian Chappell cope with the demands of being captain, a job he believed meant having to be a guide, philosopher, friend, diplomat and orator.

Chappell was not burdened with older players who may be prone to second-guessing or cynicism. With 38 Tests behind him, the captain was the most experienced player in the squad and, at age 28, he had only three players older than him. Moreover, five players had never played a Test match, and his strike bowler, Dennis Lillee, had played only two.

Cricket, although a team game, can be a singular sport. A century or a bag of wickets can come amid a heavy defeat and the individual is still feted. Steele saw Chappell turn the equation around. His way of describing it was that this was the least ‘average-conscious’ side he had toured with. Its objectives were team-based and Chappell led them with a ‘freedom from humbug’.

One example was early in the tour during a lead-up match against Lancashire in May, when county captain, Jack Bond, took Chappell on a tour of the facilities at Old Trafford. He showed Chappell his own changing room and invited him to share it with him during the match. The ‘Captain’s Room’, he added, would also be available to Chappell during the first Test.

Chappell looked around, remarked how small it was and that while he appreciated the invitation he would decline because he wasn't sure how the rest of the Australian side would fit.

Although Lord's belonged to Massie, Steele identified Chappell's against-the-odds attacking innings as one of rare character or, in football shorthand, 'guts'.

The team was like its captain – decisive, skilful and daring. And they played, he concluded, the sort of cricket the public would pay to see.

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The first hint the players had of the Australian public's resurgent interest in cricket was when traffic groaned to a standstill in Drummoyne in Sydney's inner west. It was October 1972 and the squad had re-united the evening before for the first time since returning from England. They were in town to play a charity match for the New South Wales Spastic Centre.

Ian Chappell asked the driver how much further they had to travel and was told the ground was still a fair way off. All he could see out of the window was a street choked with cars. Eventually he and the other players decided that the only option was to hoof it. As they walked they melded into a stream of fans carrying eskies and bubbling with enthusiasm.

Chappell was stunned by the numbers and wondered aloud to Marsh why people were coming along to watch this game. When they arrived at the ground it was packed. Veteran cricket

writer Ray Robinson estimated the crowd to be 15,000 which he believed was the largest cricket crowd to attend an Australian suburban ground.

This was what the players hadn't realised while they had been away – the impact they had on supporters at home. The Oval Test match was the first time the ABC had broadcast a game from England, and Marsh and Sheahan's exuberance was re-enacted in lounge rooms across the nation.

The Drummoynes' crowd was the beginning. Shield cricket was boosted with the 1972 tourists distributed across the states, particularly the non-powerhouse ones. The Oval Test had been the first in which no player from New South Wales featured. Meanwhile six players were from Western Australia, three from South Australia and two from Victoria.

In December the Australians were back playing Test cricket. In the first Test against Pakistan in Adelaide, Chappell thumped 196 and Marsh 118 in the first innings, setting up victory by an innings and 114 runs. Australia took the series 3–0. That is how things tended to roll from then on.

Australia then went to the Caribbean and won 2–0. After the first two Tests of the 1973 series were drawn Chappell lost Lillee and Massie to injury and form respectively, and turned to Max Walker and Jeff 'Bomber' Hammond to bowl in the body-wilting humidity. The line-up produced a remarkable 44-run against-the-odds victory in the third Test in Port of Spain. Australia then won the fourth Test in Georgetown by ten wickets.

The following home summer New Zealand was done 3–1. A

year later England was crushed 4–1, with both Lillee and his new mate, Jeff Thomson, bowling at a terrifying pitch.

Chappell had inherited a team in a time of crisis and rebuilt it into the most exciting side in world cricket. Crowds surged to see Lillee and Thomson hurl down deliveries that turned Marsh into a contortionist behind the stumps. Greg Chappell batted elegantly and Doug Walters with élan.

Handmade signs appeared in the outer, renaming grassed, general admission hills as grandstands in honour of Walters and the Chappells. In the punters view, the Poms had been roasted, and the West Indies, Pakistan and New Zealand dispatched.

In 1975 the Ashes Test series in England was shortened to four Tests to accommodate the first limited-overs World Cup. In that tournament Australia reached the final at Lord's against the West Indies. Played to the soundtrack provided by South London's Caribbean migrant community, the teams forced each other to high peaks of effort. Clive Lloyd's 102 was tempered by Gary Gilmour's 5/48 as the West Indies set Australia 291 off 60 overs.

Early in his innings of 62, while batting with his brother, Ian Chappell pushed a ball to cover where it was misfielded. As he took off for a single, Viv Richards pounced on the ball, turned and threw down the stumps to dismiss Greg. A direct hit from Richards had earlier run out Alan Turner. Soon he would combine with Lloyd to run out Ian Chappell.

The calypso emotion ran high as the Duke of Edinburgh handed the trophy to Lloyd. Chappell then set his side for the Ashes. In the opening match Australia crushed England by an

innings and 85 runs. The remaining three Tests were drawn, with one – the third Test at Headingley – unable to be completed after the pitch was damaged as part of a political protest.

As stumps were drawn on the final day of the final Test at The Oval, Chappell confirmed his time as captain was over. His 192 in the match showed he was still a brilliant batsman but he was at the end of his tether with leadership. Ray Robinson, who chronicled every Australian leader from Dave Gregory on, wrote that Chappell placed more pressure on opposing batsmen than any other Australian captain he had seen. The pressure of the job, though, had taken its toll. He would later say that while he enjoyed some of the battles he had with cricket authorities they wore him out in a hurry.

In this final Test in charge he had enforced the follow on and made England strain on every ounce of its bulldog pride to hold out for a draw. He congratulated Greig and sat in the rooms knowing the captaincy now belonged to his younger brother. By resigning when he decided he had had enough, Chappell fulfilled a promise he made to his then wife, Kay, in 1971, when he heard he was replacing the sacked Lawry. He told her he would never let the bastards get him like that, and they hadn't.

Chappell had led Australia 30 times for 15 wins and 5 losses and had never lost a series. It was September 1975 – South Australia's first match was in six weeks.

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Chappell remained one of the standout batsmen in the Australian team – and would make himself available for national selection against the touring West Indies. If asked by Greg he would help him with the captaincy but otherwise he intended to stay out of his brother's way. However, he wasn't quite finished with leadership – there was a feeling of having some unfinished work to do in Adelaide. In the past his priorities had been to give everything to Australia and then, if there was anything left over, to South Australia. If there was still anything left over after that, Glenelg got it. He announced now that he was devoting his 'time and energies to leading South Australia back as a cricket force'.

This was not going to be easy.

Chappell had enjoyed success as a state captain, winning the Shield title in 1970–71 but things had deteriorated since. The past two seasons had been horrible, with the side only winning one game each year and finishing bottom of the table.

Chappell lay much of the blame on a lack of resources, saying it was 'a joke the way cricketers in South Australia are prepared for first-class cricket'.

Grade pitches were regularly underprepared, as were players. It was opener Ashley Woodcock – a student of physical fitness and science – who arranged a pre-season training camp in the Adelaide Hills for the state squad not the SACA. There were no specialist coaches for juniors and no financial incentives for veterans. It resulted in a mixed squad of experience, kids and unknowns.

Chappell weighed up the group. There were two spinners in their twilight – Terry Jenner and Ashley Mallett. Wayne Prior

was quick but green, and all-rounder Gary Cosier had played well since coming from Victoria. Woodcock was a handy opener and there were two promising young batsmen in David Hookes and Rick Darling.

Chappell believed that if all went well South Australia could rise to third place on the table. Not many inspirational speeches have ended with the goal of finishing mid-table. But for some reason he ignored reality and went with hope. As he entered the rooms and called for attention he looked at the team and told them there were some wise old heads that would help the young guys get through tough times. He asked simply for contributions. Not necessarily five-wicket hauls or centuries, but a regular contribution from everyone.

If that happens, he said, 'I believe we can win the Sheffield Shield.'

In making that bold but unlikely prediction Chappell took a stand against the mediocrity that had crept into his state team – but there was more. At a press conference where he announced his retirement as Australian captain a few weeks earlier he was asked if he had any regrets. He took a long draw on his cigar and puffed out a grey cloud before admitting to a few but then adding: 'If you are captain of a team, you have to be seen by your players to be a leader and you've got to stand up for your team and not be pushed around and I think that was part of the success of the Australian side in the 1970s. When I took over in 1972 we realised we weren't going to be pushed around and I think that helped us win some games we wouldn't have otherwise.'

There were things that bugged him about cricket including the pay, conditions, rules, and lack of consultation. He also hated seeing South Australia being pushed around. He was going to take a stand against them all. It was to be his last season – might as well make it one to remember.