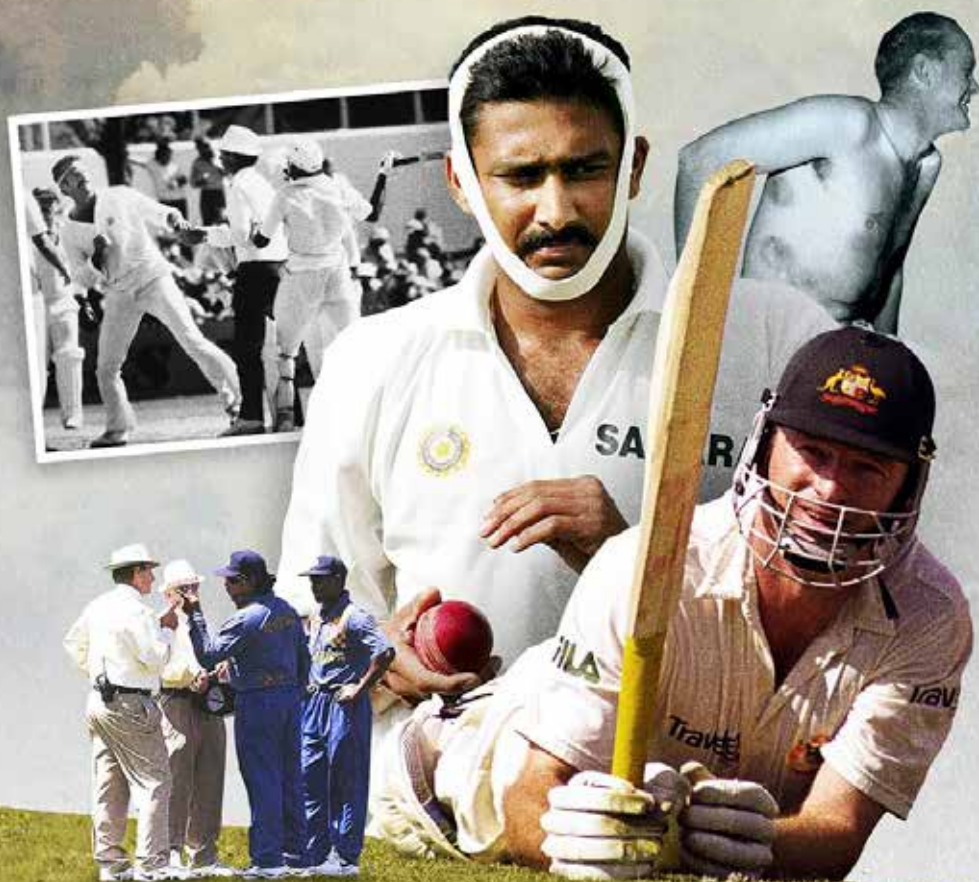


CRICKET'S HARD MEN

The Toughest Characters
from the History of Cricket



Richard Sydenham

Foreword by John Buchanan

CRICKET'S HARD MEN

**The Toughest Characters
from the History of Cricket**

Richard Sydenham

Foreword by John Buchanan



CONTENTS

Introduction	9
Foreword by John Buchanan, the Two-Time World Cup- Winning Coach	17
Finding the Inner Mongrel – Sending the Right Message	25
Beating the Demons – Cricket: The Game Played in the Mind.	38
Anxiety, Depression, Stress: Surviving the Game – The Generation of Acceptance and Understanding	51
Mohinder Amarnath – Much More Than a Happy Hooker	60
Michael Atherton – The Stubborn One	68
Eddie Barlow – Inspiring the Underdog	80
Allan Border – Beach Bum to Hard-Nosed Champion	89
Brian Close – Pain is Just a Four-Letter Word	100
Brian Davison – The Friendly Warrior	114
John Edrich – Putting Cricket into Perspective	121
Andy Flower – Bravery Beyond a Boundary	134
Roy Fredericks – Cement Head	142
Adam Holliioake – The Cage Fighting All-Rounder	150
Douglas Jardine – Born to Lead	161
Javed Miandad – The Original Streetfighter	171
Anil Kumble – Quiet Soldier	179
Bruce Laird – Stay the Course, Earn the Respect	187
Dennis Lillee – Talent Through Gritted Teeth	197
Arjuna Ranatunga – General, Tactician, Agitator.	207
John Reid – Bazball Before its Time	216
Vivian Richards – The Dominator	223
Graeme Smith – Always Leading from the Front	233
Steve Waugh – On the Edge of Conflict	242
Kepler Wessels – Never Know Your Limits.	252
Peter Willey – Scoring the Hard Runs	268
Acknowledgements	283
Bibliography	284

FINDING THE INNER MONGREL

Sending the Right Message

'People who have that ability, generally have it right from the start. There are only a select few who have that ability to thrive in the toughest of situations' – Dav Whatmore

AUSTRALIA COACH Mickey Arthur walked into a sparsely furnished room that was being used as a makeshift press conference facility at Durham's Chester-le-Street ground in July 2012. He did not appear angry; he was typically friendly and cooperative with the assembled media before his tone changed, as he vented his inner thoughts about his team's performance.

'I want to see a bit of mongrel, I really do. I think we've been a bit submissive this whole series,' the South African said, growing into his irritated coach speech. 'We've been allowed to be bullied, and we're better than that.'

Arthur was speaking after England had cruised to an eight-wicket victory over Australia in the fourth one-day international to take an unassailable 3-0 lead and win the series with a match to play. It is rare for a coach to talk about

'the mongrel spirit' and even rarer if he's discussing his own team's lack of it, though it is refreshingly honest when one does. A dressing-down of under-performing players is often reserved for the locker room but, on this occasion, Arthur opted for total transparency about his team's deficiencies.

So, what is this 'mongrel spirit' he referred to? It's not about technique, it's not about tactics, or confidence. More, body language and mental toughness.

'Any cricketer known to be tough will undoubtedly have that mongrel spirit that I have talked about in the past,' Arthur said in an interview for this book. 'Most of it is natural and comes from within, without a doubt. It is like the adage, 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going.' That is mongrel spirit, always up for the contest, always in the challenge, never taking a backward step. Mongrel spirit doesn't mean you have to be mouthing off at guys; it's a body language, it's about having a presence and the opposition knowing you're there and are in the fight.'

There are so many examples and versions of mongrel spirit in the context of a cricket match. One thing is for certain – without it, even the most talented will fall short if they believe they can coast through any contest on their talent alone. Ultimately words such as aggression, determination, resilience, bloody-mindedness, fight, steadfastness, perseverance and persistence come to mind. All pretty much come together under the umbrella that is mongrel spirit.

The great West Indies fast bowler Curtly Ambrose, who embodied a mongrel competitiveness in spades, once spoke of the differences between his former colleagues Brian Lara and Carl Hooper. Although Ambrose was not referring to mongrelness, the message was clearly carried in his statement. The elegant, easy-on-the-eye Hooper,

he said, had more talent as a batsman than Lara. That seemed a peculiar opinion on the face of it given that Lara is the only batsman in the history of cricket to ever score 500 in a first-class innings and twice the record-holder for the highest score in Tests with his 375 and then unbeaten 400. Hooper made 13 hundreds in his 102-Test career at an average of just over 36. Lara made 34 centuries in his 131 Tests at an average just shy of 53. When anybody debates a World XI, Lara would almost certainly at least be in the conversation. Hooper might only be included in a Graceful XI. Ambrose was not trying to belittle Hooper. On the contrary, his interpretation was that if Hooper had Lara's determination and strength of mind, if he hadn't gifted his wicket away quite so often when batting seemed to become too easy for him, what might he have achieved? Ultimately, Lara had mongrel spirit in that once he was 'in', he seldom gave up his wicket because he was bored.

Mongrel spirit can be displayed psychologically, when batting, bowling, fielding or even as a tactician in the case of Somerset captain Brian Rose in 1979. He showed no feelings whatsoever for the paying public at Worcester by declaring his team's innings after one over and a single run (a no-ball from Vanburn Holder), to exploit a loophole in the regulations of the Benson & Hedges Cup and guarantee his side's progress. That was an extreme course of action that would not receive support in the main but demonstrated an icy will to win.

Although Somerset's declaration was within the laws of the game, Rose was condemned by the media and officials. The *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* claimed that Rose had 'sacrificed all known cricketing principles by deliberately losing the game'. Days after the match, the Test and County Cricket Board (TCCB) met and voted to eject Somerset from the competition. So mongrel spirit does not always

make you popular, as Trevor Chappell discovered in 1981. Trevor bowled an underarm delivery when he was directed to do so by his captain and brother, Greg, to ensure New Zealand batsman Brian McKechnie could not score the six that was required to tie the match off the last ball. Greg and Trevor received widespread condemnation and once again the laws were altered to ensure it never happened again.

The actions of Rose and the Chappell brothers took mongrel spirit to the extreme, in the same way as anyone who has ever employed the so-called 'Mankad' dismissal to run out a non-striker deemed to be stealing ground. Generally, mongrel spirit is unlikely to attract vilification, more likely admiration. To former Australia fast bowler Jeff Thomson, it is merely an extension of self-belief.

'It's not so much about being a mongrel of a bloke, you have got to want to be the best,' Thomson revealed. 'If you go out there doubting yourself, you will fail. If you go out there not worrying about anyone else, telling yourself "I'm the man" then you have a chance of succeeding if you have done all that you need to do in training and you obviously have the talent. You have got to have one hundred per cent belief in yourself and the moment you think differently, that's when it won't happen for you. And I am talking from experience because I doubted myself a little when I injured my arm but, fortunately, I quickly realised, "What am I worrying about? I'm still quicker than anybody around!"'

Similarly, even the great Viv Richards said it was normal to lack confidence at times and feel uncomfortable. It might be the case with a bowler running in to a batsman he knows has treated him harshly in previous encounters or who he has never dismissed. A batsman might think in the same negative manner against a bowler he knows has had the better of him before. Richards' way of beating that

negative inner voice was to almost kid himself into thinking differently. If you repeat the same positive message enough, your mind eventually starts to believe it.

‘You may be feeling uncomfortable or hurting inside, but when you are a performer, you have got to show that outside you are not,’ Richards insisted. ‘You *have* to show character and send a [positive] message back to the guy who just hurt you.’ Richards knows this to be true from experience as the Australian fast bowler Rodney Hogg was one of few to hit him on the head with a bouncer. For some batsmen that might have been a psychological hammer blow. For Richards, rather than be cowed, he came straight back by taking on another of Hogg’s short balls and this time hitting him for six, so no advantage was conceded. Deuce at the very least.

Aggression is a significant aspect to mongrel spirit. The previous anecdote described how it can be shown either as a batsman or bowler, but it can also be shown as a fielder. Brian Close displayed it by taking up almost suicidal fielding positions, getting so close to the batsman to disrupt his concentration, though it might now be viewed as being crazy rather than intent on trying to force victory. Close’s efforts might belong to another distant world now with safety more of a concern in recent times, and rightly so.

Former England all-rounder Dominic Cork once opened my eyes about how aggression can be demonstrated on the field using verbal intimidation; not necessarily sledging or abusing opponents, but just showing a certain cockiness or presence.

‘If you’re batting, it’s just you and your mate and 11 of their guys so it is vital that you back each other all the time,’ Cork said. ‘Don’t be too quiet, encourage each other, support each other, and don’t be frightened to do so in

a confident way. You'd be surprised the kind of positive message it sends back to the bowler and fielders.

'On the other side of the coin, if you're in the field, there's 11 of you and only two of them. So, you must try to make them feel up against it and under pressure. It's an intimidatory tactic of course but one you should use to put doubt or fear in the batsmen's minds. If they're a hundred for none, then it doesn't work quite so well! But there will be plenty of occasions when it will.'

Ambrose has always maintained that aggression is one of the most important assets in a fast bowler's armoury. Most good pace bowlers have a naturally aggressive streak, though some have had to learn this along the way. When South Africa's Shaun Pollock started out, he was known to be something of a soft touch despite possessing great potential and skill. He could be fearful of bowling a short ball at an opposition tailender, until he discovered this philosophy was not always reciprocated. However, he retired with 421 Test wickets, placing him amongst the best pace bowlers of all time, if not *the* greatest South African quick. But while a rookie at Natal, as it was then, he needed a pep talk from team-mate Malcolm Marshall. Not the worst of mentors, it must be said. Marshall felt Pollock was 'a bit too nice' but his advice soon changed that.

'I suppose I toughened him up a bit,' Marshall said in an interview before his premature death in 1999. 'The competitive part of his game was a weakness. He hardly pitched it short to opposing batsmen. I simply made him realise how important a bouncer is to a quick bowler. It's all right being nice and friendly after the game, but during the match you have got to be totally committed to winning. Then he hit something like 18 batsmen on the head the next season, so he proved how he had progressed.'

One player who needed no such assistance was Pakistan swing bowler Sarfraz Nawaz, who was an invaluable mentor to a young Imran Khan in the 1970s. In a match against India, when batting helmets were still not a frequent sight, Mohinder Amarnath was struck on the head from an Imran bouncer, requiring a hospital check-up. The first ball back that he received, on his return to the match in the same innings, was from Sarfraz. Of course, it was a bumper. Sarfraz certainly did not lack mongrel spirit. He bowled four straight bouncers at India in that 1978/79 Test match, influencing captain Bishan Bedi to declare and forfeit the match.

Amarnath showed guts in coming back in against Imran and Sarfraz after being knocked down, while Sarfraz showed true mongrel spirit in eschewing any feelings of compassion by delivering yet another short ball. Australia's fearsome new-ball opening partnership of Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson were cut from the same cloth.

Australia batsman Rick McCosker famously batted in a mummified bandage in the Centenary Test at Melbourne in 1977, after he had his jaw broken by a Bob Willis bouncer. He courageously came out to bat at number ten in the second innings, still with no helmet. He made a brave 25, including a hooked four off a John Lever bouncer, defying his safe and secure off-field reputation as a white-collar bank worker. The first ball he faced with his jaw wired closed was another bouncer from Willis. 'The crowd and our players were incensed,' Lillee said, 'but when I reflected on it later, Bob was right. I would have done the same thing in his position.'

Bob Massie, who famously took 16 wickets on his Test debut at Lord's in 1972, said Lillee was ahead of all the great fast bowlers because of his intimidation factor.

He felt that when he was running in to bowl, batsmen would often be defeated by his aura before he had even bowled a ball.

'I bowled at the other end to him a lot and you could just see his aggressiveness, combined with his skill. He was a natural fast bowler, and he had the natural fast bowler's instincts. He didn't try to hit batsmen, but he tried to get batsmen out with the short ball. Dennis's attitude was "I don't want to hit him, but he's got a bat, so he needs to use it." He didn't want to maim people, but he just had that hunger to bowl fast.'

Thomson shared the same philosophy and considered Lillee even more aggressive than himself, though most commentators generally felt Thomson was quicker. Contrary to his combative reputation on the field, Thomson never said anything to batsmen and felt he did not need to, letting his blinding pace speak for him. However, he was happy to speak with a spiky edge in the media if it intimidated opposition batsmen that read his comments. The most famous quote attributed to him was that he wouldn't mind if his bowling caused (a batsmen's) blood to be spilled on the pitch.

'My attitude was, "I don't give a f*** if the batsman gets hit, that's his fault." It might sound crude, but I was all about maintaining positive thoughts and at no time did I want to be worrying about what injury my bowling might do to a batsman,' Thomson said. 'His challenge was to play me in the best way he can. If he can't, then that's not my fault. If I was worried about blood on the pitch, I wouldn't have been a fast bowler, would I? I never wanted to hurt a batsman but if it worked out that way I wasn't going to blame myself. You can't worry about things that are not in your control.'

The challenge is always there for any batsman when facing fast bowling, to come through it unscathed with your wicket intact, even if they must take a few blows along the way. Sometimes that challenge can be tougher than at other moments, whether it's the standard and/or pace of the bowlers or maybe the pitch is uneven or just conducive to fast bowling. Former Australia batsman Allan Border was a perfect example of someone who showed that resilience can take you a long way when the contest is especially hard, on the technique and body. Border resisted West Indies' quartet of pace bowlers in the mid-1980s and while his team often lost to them his reputation was improved as a batsman and combatant. 'Those guys really bombed him,' team-mate Kepler Wessels recalled, 'and he stood up to it and came through it. We came through it together, but they really did get stuck into AB. It was that inner toughness that was in-built in him that got him through.'

Border carried that bloody-mindedness into his captaincy too. He famously refused to talk to his friends on the England side in 1989 when he had set out to regain the Ashes, ignoring what it did for his image in the English media, who nicknamed him 'Captain Grumpy'. Those headlines meant very little to him and it was not difficult for him to be thick-skinned; it actually suited his single-minded, steely game plan as batsman and leader. His uncompromising approach and psychological game-playing to motivate team-mates three years earlier, though, was less publicised. The tied Test with India in what was then Madras was the start of a renaissance for an Australia team in transition. Their World Cup win the following year consolidated that progress. But back in Madras, his team-mate Dean Jones scored 210 in sweltering conditions. He

required a hospital drip after that fluid-sapping innings. But beforehand, Jones came off for an interval, feeling totally shattered and dehydrated. He made the mistake of mentioning how he was feeling to his skipper, expecting a sympathetic reply. But he was left disappointed.

'Okay, if you can't hack it Deano, I'll get a Queenslander like Greg Ritchie out there who will show a bit of guts.' That short, sharp, no-nonsense comment had the desired effect and Jones resumed his innings.

'Interestingly,' Jones said, 'it wasn't until the next Test when I came through an awkward session when Kapil Dev was bowling well that AB came up to me and said, "Now I know you can bat." This was after I came off a double! He had a shrewd way of keeping your feet on the ground.'

South Africa captain Graeme Smith, who made his Test debut eight years after Border retired, was similar in lots of ways to the Australian. Not only were they both gritty – some might say ugly – left-handed batsmen who valued their wicket higher than most, they were both courageous, strong-willed, inspirational leaders of men.

Curiously, in Smith's first Test series in 2002, he fronted up to the media and revealed the sledging tactics of the Australians after he had received what he regarded as over-the-top verbals, or what Steve Waugh might have referred to as 'mental disintegration'. Time would soon tell that they were wasting their breath on Smith. His revelations in the media, though, gave the impression he was telling tales and falling foul of the unwritten rule that what is said on the field, should stay on the field.

'That was never about squealing,' South Africa coach then, Eric Simons, explained. 'Graeme would front up to anything. If he felt like he wanted to talk about something

that happened on the field, he would. It would have been him just feeling like something needed to be said and he wouldn't have feared the consequences.'

Smith's reputation as one of the game's hardest competitors derived from his unyielding mental toughness, according to Simons.

'There were cricketers like Kepler Wessels who would be very happy to play with broken fingers. Graeme wasn't like that so much. When he got hit by a cricket ball, he didn't like it. Some people seemed to thrive on the pain or the challenge, like Steve Waugh or Kepler. Graeme fronted up to situations no matter how daunting; he would take on a bees' nest! Playing with broken bones would have really hurt him, but it had more to do with there being a bigger job to be done and that was scoring runs, the need of the team and his own mental toughness to get through it, rather than batting through the pain barrier. He saw the bigger picture. If that was just one of the obstacles he had to overcome, then he overcame it.'

Not every cricketer possesses mongrel spirit naturally. Some are born with it, like Kepler Wessels and Douglas Jardine; some never have it, and such a void might have been their undoing as far as career success went. Some learn to develop it along the way, while others have it without showing this quality in an obvious way. Take David Gower, the former England batting great. He was often criticised for his seemingly casual approach to batting, as he could be *laissez-faire* and played shots that his captain might prefer him not to, but while his grace and elegance sometimes translated as carefree when he was caught in the slips chasing a wide one, occasionally we must accept that cricketers are individuals and certain players still achieve in their own way. There is no way Gower could

have averaged 44 in 117 Test matches without a modicum of resilience and mental toughness. He averaged 43 against the much-celebrated West Indies fast bowlers *in* the Caribbean and nobody did that without a generous dollop of guts and determination. Gower's way, though, wasn't to outwardly present himself as the tough guy. He was cool in his appearance, he might shrug when asked about poor dismissals, he wasn't overly animated as a captain. That was his way and it worked for him.

'There was within me a little more steel than I usually showed,' Gower said. 'I just found it hard to be steely and bloody-minded all the time. Some days you had to force yourself to be good and on others you could do well without going to all that trouble. I'm afraid there is a sad truth that your innate character will out in the end. Fears, worries, weaknesses – you can only do so much to overcome them. The impression of me being a *bon viveur* served a purpose both within and without. In my mind it lessened the hurt of failure. It was a way of saying, "Well, okay. There's always tomorrow."'

Former Australia batsman Dav Whatmore, better known for winning the World Cup as coach of Sri Lanka in 1996, believes mongrel spirit or determination – whatever we wish to call that special something that creates a mental and physical toughness – is a natural asset that cannot be taught. You can improve your attitude, but the rest comes from within.

'If you're somebody who welcomes the verbals and the tough battles out on the field, it's fine, but it's very difficult to grow into that if you're not naturally comfortable,' Whatmore commented. 'People who have that ability, generally have it right from the start. There are only a select few who have that ability to thrive in the toughest of

situations and I worked with two of those guys – Arjuna Ranatunga and Allan Border – they had it in spades.’

So, there you have it. Mongrel spirit, what it is, how it can be used and how it manifests in the professional game of cricket. Still, with all that said, you can be the mentally toughest out there, or the most physical beast in the game, but as Bob Massie rightly pointed out, talent and technique still ultimately put runs and wickets on the scoreboard.

‘I agree that the mind plays a big part but if you haven’t got a good technique, it doesn’t matter how much you’ve got up top,’ said Massie. ‘If your technique isn’t right, if your feet are not in the right position and if you don’t execute the right shot, if you’re playing across the line with a poor pickup, all the thinking and nous in the world won’t get you through unless it’s combined with a good technique – certainly at the top level.’