

GUINNER



*My Life
in Cricket*

IAN GOULD

GUNNER

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I A N G O U L D



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Line in the Sand

I KNOW this might surprise a few people who love cricket and watch a lot of it, but most top umpires prepare for games as fastidiously as players. From the day I joined the International Cricket Council (ICC)'s elite panel in 2008, two years after I stood in my first international at the Oval, I trained for every game, and in particular Test matches, in pretty much the same way and certainly with a bit more professionalism than when I played for England back in the 1980s when warm-ups usually consisted of a few laps of the outfield and some stretches with the physio Bernard Thomas, who was the equivalent of a modern-day strength and conditioning coach back then.

Two days before the game started, I would go down to the ground, dump my gear in the umpires'

room, wander over to the nets and stand at one end during each team's practice and just observe. When you think about it, it's an obvious thing to do. The international game moves so quickly these days that when I began a new series in a different country there were invariably bowlers and batsmen who I had not come across before. So, I stood there quietly, getting used to the pace and bounce of the wicket – which is quite often pretty consistent with the pitch they are going to use for the match – and just see what's going on. As everyone in cricket knows, I'm a pretty gregarious person so it was also a nice opportunity to say hello to players I've umpired before, meet new ones and get some feedback on them from the coaches before chewing the fat with the groundsman or the dozens of administrators and media people that are invariably milling around any ground in the days before every international fixture.

But most importantly, it's a time when I could prepare mentally and physically for what's coming: things like adjusting your eyes to the light, which varies so much from country to country or sometimes even ground to ground, getting accustomed to any changes in the background like new stands that you've not seen before or working out where the nearest toilet

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is if you get caught short during a long session of play – which happens quite a lot, I can tell you. A couple of hours sharpens you up and gets you back into focus. I can't say that my method of preparation is followed by all of the other leading umpires. In fact, I think it's a bit of a dying art. But each to their own, as long as they can do the job.

The day before the third Test between South Africa and Australia at Newlands in Cape Town in March 2018 – which was to be the 89th of my career if you count third-umpire duties, or 64th if you don't – was no different, at least in terms of my own preparation. Myself and my English colleagues Richard Illingworth and Nigel Llong had been appointed for the second half of the series, which also involved a fourth Test match in Johannesburg. Richard flew down from Manchester and we all got the overnight flight from Heathrow to Cape Town. Generally, umpires from the same country try to travel together. I've always had a brilliant relationship with those two gentlemen and when you're catching up it doesn't half make a ten-hour flight go quicker. That and a couple of beers, of course.

I don't remember watching much of either of the first two Tests. I love cricket but I get bored quickly

if I'm sitting at home in front of the TV looking at it. If it is a choice between a Test match or a decent jumps card at Fontwell or Newton Abbot on the racing channel, it would be the horses every time. But I was very aware that there had been no love lost between South Africa and Australia in the first two Tests. A few days before I headed to Cape Town, Chris Gaffaney, the very capable New Zealander who was third umpire for the first Test in Durban and had stood with Kumar Dharmasena in Port Elizabeth in the second match, left a message on my phone, warning me that things were starting to get a little bit out of hand. The umpiring team had their suspicions that Australia were working a little too aggressively on the condition of the ball, and they had an informal word with the host broadcaster SuperSport asking that if their camera crew saw anything that looked unusual they should let the umpires know.

Chris wasn't wrong when he claimed things were getting out of hand. It had started on the second day of the first Test when the Australian players tried to get the stump microphones turned down by shouting the names of rival companies to those that were sponsoring the series. A couple of days later Nathan Lyon was fined 15 per cent of his match fee for

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dropping the ball on AB de Villiers after running him out and then David Warner and Quinton de Kock argued heatedly as they left the field and were also disciplined. A couple of days after that Tim Paine, the Australia wicketkeeper, denied that they had personally abused de Kock while he was batting. 'We didn't cross the line,' he insisted.

With the first two Tests back to back, there wasn't much time for things to calm down. On the first day in Port Elizabeth, Kagiso Rabada, the South Africa fast bowler who I was encountering for the first time in that series, brushed shoulders with Steve Smith when he got him out before giving Warner an earful of abuse. Having come into the series with four demerit points to his name, Rabada was subsequently banned for two matches, but there was no way South Africa were going to take that lying down, especially with a series as important as this on the line and Rabada bowling well. They hired seven lawyers, including David Becker, the former head of ICC's legal department, and persuaded the authorities that Rabada hadn't made contact with Smith deliberately. It must have cost them a few thousand rand in legal fees, but it worked. His punishment was reduced to one demerit point which meant he was free to play in the third Test.

To add fuel to the fire, Mitchell Marsh was fined for swearing at Rabada after getting him out. South Africa won the match though, so the series was level at 1-1 as they headed to Cape Town. And while all this was going on, Warner – who was in charge of looking after the condition of the ball for Australia – was taking to the field with the fingers of his left hand strapped up. He even wrote the name of his wife and his kids on the bandages when he realised how much scrutiny his hand was under from the TV cameras.

When I stood in the Cape Town nets and Rabada came steaming past me for the first time I was very impressed. He had a fantastic action, got good bounce and was very quick – even in practice he made a couple of his team-mates hop around a bit. He seemed a really nice man too. We had a little chat. He told me he was going to keep his temper under control, but the vibes that day weren't great. I'd been umpiring at the top level for 12 years by then and after just an hour or so I could sense it might get a bit lively again.

The South Africans had been intrigued as to how Mitchell Starc, Australia's very skilful left-arm fast bowler, had been able to swing it so much in Durban and Port Elizabeth, two venues where

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the Kookaburra ball didn't do a great deal off the straight. In my experience Starc can make it hoop around without doing anything naughty, and I told a couple of the South African players this during that net session. That issue seemed to have been put to bed but the Aussies were still steaming that Rabada had not been banned.

Anyway, I was standing there minding my own business when David Warner came up to me. We shook hands. I've umpired Davey many times and he's a nice bloke, but he is very competitive on the field and always has been. He likes to have a word or two. After the pleasantries, he said to me: 'Well Gunner, where's the fucking line in the sand now?' And that was it – he walked off and left me with those words hanging in the air. Here we go, I thought.

In hindsight, ICC's decision not to bring Illy, Nige and myself in until the third Test was a mistake. Two of the three lads who did the first two Tests were relatively inexperienced. Dharmasena had stood in over 50 Tests but Chris was in only his 19th game and the other umpire, Sundaram Ravi from India, had fewer than 25 Tests under his belt and within a year or so had been kicked off the elite panel because he wasn't deemed good enough.

Look, they were by no means poor at their job, but someone in the ICC hierarchy ought to have looked at that series, which Australia came into on the back of thumping England in the Ashes and were looking to become world number one, and decided it needed a team of their most experienced men. South Africa on home soil were never going to lie down and have their backsides kicked and, in Rabada, they obviously had a relatively unknown quantity who was prepared to give the Aussie quicks as good as they got. Like I said, hindsight is a wonderful thing but I'm absolutely sure the English trio including me would have got on top of things from the off. More things had happened in those first two Tests than you normally have to deal with in a five-match series.

Fortunately, what we did have in Cape Town and for the fourth Test in Johannesburg was a top match referee in Andy Pycroft, who had taken over from another good man in Jeff Crowe. As it turned out, Andy, who is a lawyer when he's not sitting in cricket grounds, was the perfect appointment. Andy had played at the highest level for Zimbabwe and knew the game and what went on inside out. With Andy, the paperwork was always spot on and we ended up having to do a lot of form-filling during those few days. But

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first, we met with the captains and coaches on the afternoon before the Test, warned them about their responsibilities and wished them luck. Everything seemed to be fine. We were good to go.

And for the first two days there was absolutely no hint that this Test would go down in history for all the wrong reasons. While Illy and Nige were out in the middle, I sat in the third umpires' room with Andy, minding my own business. One of the third umpire's more mundane duties is to keep a count to make sure six balls are bowled in each over – you'd be amazed the number of times umpires can't count to six (myself included) – so you have to stay awake and concentrate, but third-umpire stints are pretty uneventful most of the time. You want to be out there, not forever checking this and that on a TV screen. By mid-afternoon you're already thinking about what restaurant to book for the evening.

Dean Elgar carried his bat in South Africa's first-innings score of 311 and Pat Cummins took four wickets before Australia struggled a little in reply, making 255. Cameron Bancroft scored 70 and Rabada took another four wickets but by the third day the Newlands pitch had really flattened out as it tended to do. It was a typically dry, baking-hot Cape Town

afternoon as South Africa set about batting Australia out of the game in their second innings.

Early in the afternoon, all hell broke loose. The SuperSport TV director Eddie came through on my earpiece. 'Gunner, we've got something that you and the on-field umpires need to look at.' Andy was doing some paperwork and I tapped him on the shoulder. Then we saw the first pictures on our monitor of Cameron Bancroft, who was fielding in the covers, applying something which had a yellow side to it on to the ball. The TV director came back on to confirm he was going to show this incident at the end of the next over, so I contacted Illy and Llongy straightaway on the walkie-talkie, during the middle of the over.

Although this was a serious incident that would have dramatic repercussions for Australian cricket it was also very funny because of a couple of incidents that only the players and umpires knew about at the time. Andy Pycroft saw the footage first and said 'Shit.' I was thinking to myself, 'How do I handle this without creating a drama and exacerbating the situation? I have to deal with this. No simulation or preparation has covered this one.' Our coaches run through TV umpire simulations with the guys, but

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I've never been a big fan. I prefer to think on my feet rather than go through hypotheticals in a Skype call. My coach Denis Burns had suspected that I'd wiped the Skype app off my laptop a long time ago:

Denis: 'Can we have a simulation on Skype?'

'On what?'

Denis: 'On Skype; it was installed on your laptop by our IT technicians.'

'Hang on. We've got BBC, Virgin, and Netflix. What channel is it on?'

'Oh dear!'

Mission accomplished. Denis knew I wasn't interested. Illy came back on: 'What now, in the middle of an over?'

I didn't want to spook them and cause a drama, so I said: 'Boys, take a deep breath, stay calm and come together away from the players.' I then explained what I had seen, and they prepared themselves to talk to the players.

The boys wandered over to him, and captain Steve Smith joined them a few moments later. Cameron Bancroft produced a black cloth, the sort the players use to clean their sunglasses. The on-field umpires relayed this information to me and Andy, and the game carried on. No need to change the ball

or anything – back to the cricket. From an umpiring perspective, it went well. No histrionics, no dramas, just a discussion. Both umpires spoke to Denis that evening and told him that my calm attitude had worked and that they were relaxed and composed when talking to the players. I was proud of that. All the time, what later emerged to be sandpaper was hiding down Bancroft's trousers and the cameras had filmed him putting it there.

While all this drama was unfolding around us, Andy Pycroft took a phone call from David Richardson, the chief executive of ICC, and gave me a message to relay to the umpires. I laughed. 'You can't be serious!' Here we go again.

'Boys, take a deep breath, stay calm and come together away from the players.'

'Oh no, what's happened now? Not the same again?'

'No, I've just had a phone call from the ICC.'

'Nice one, do they want to congratulate us on the way we've handled everything?'

'Not quite. Stay calm, and ask Nathan Lyon what colour socks he's wearing?'

[Laughter] 'Seriously? Go on, what's the punchline?'

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‘No punchline, seriously. They think that Nathan is wearing black socks. Ask him to show you his socks.’

‘They want us to ask Nathan Lyon what colour socks he’s wearing, in the middle of this shitstorm?’

‘Please.’

They called Nathan over.

‘Nathan, Gunner would like to know what colour socks you are wearing.’

‘What the ****. Are you ***** kidding me? That takes the ***** biscuit. Tell Gunner he can **** off.’

‘Now, now my son. Please put some white socks on. Standards please!’

‘*****! Okay, *****.’

‘Thank you.’

Seriously, you could not make it up. We were trying to keep the lid on a volatile international incident and someone, somewhere in the world, had noticed the bowler was wearing the wrong colour of socks. Nathan came back on to the field and yanked his trousers up so that the umpires could see his pristine white socks. All in a day’s work.

At tea, the three of us and Andy sat in the room discussing what had happened. By now the story was really starting to gather some momentum,

especially on social media. We decided to bring together Bancroft, Steve Smith and Gavin Dovey, the Australia team manager, for a chat after play. If Bancroft was ball-tampering, he would be banned for one match. The evidence against him, it's fair to say, was starting to stack up. Thankfully, it's the job of the match referee to do the form-filling and Andy spent most of the final session getting that right. After play, we chatted again and were happy we had got our processes right. Throughout all of this I had been amazingly composed. In fact, the others were surprised at how measured I'd been. It was all down to experience, I suppose.

I didn't watch the post-match press conference involving Smith and Bancroft where they confessed to using sandpaper on the ball but there were enough people around Newlands that evening who could tell me what had happened. We were still at the ground, packing up to go back to the hotel, when there was a knock on the door. In walked Cameron Bancroft looking absolutely terrible. We had realised from very early in proceedings that he wasn't the brains behind the operation, or part of this so-called leadership group in the Australian camp which we were now becoming aware of.

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I guess, desperate to do the right thing as a newish player trying to establish himself in the team, he'd stuck his hand up to look after the ball instead of David Warner. We offered him a beer, which he declined although he looked as if he could have done with several. 'Look guys, I'm here to apologise for lying to you today,' he said. 'It's not in my character and I'm not that sort of person. I am really, really sorry.'

To be fair, I thought it was a very brave thing to do. He'd slipped out of the dressing rooms unnoticed to come and speak to us in person, without consulting Steve Smith, Gavin Dovey or anyone else in the Australia camp. He probably felt a bit better afterwards but neither he nor us could imagine the shitstorm that was coming when Australians woke up back home the next morning to the news that their cricketers had been caught cheating red-handed.

The Cullinan Hotel in Cape Town was the place to be for the next few days, not Newlands where the game itself completely lost its intensity. The great and the good of Australian cricket flew in to handle the aftermath of 'Sandpaper-gate'. Within hours the Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull was leading the criticism back home, and a few days later

Smith and Warner – captain and vice-captain – had copped year-long bans and Bancroft nine months. Smith and Warner made tearful returns home, a long-overdue review into the culture at the top of their game was underway and Australian cricket had changed forever. Before the fourth Test at Johannesburg, Darren Lehmann had resigned as coach as well.

I struggled to keep up with events, which were moving so fast. As umpires all we could do was satisfy ourselves that we'd done our jobs properly during that incident. There was certainly nothing said by either team or the ICC to the contrary against us. But what a mess, and what an embarrassment for the game itself.

Meanwhile, a Test match and a series still had to be finished. Tim Paine, a really nice guy who almost gave up the game before forcing his way back into the Australia team, took over from Smith but there was little he could do to prevent South Africa from hammering them in Cape Town. They won by 322 runs to go 2-1 up in the series and when we all reconvened in Johannesburg a few days later we knew it wouldn't be too long before they would win the series 3-1.

That Test was the weirdest I had ever been involved in. It was like umpiring a schools' match.

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Every decision we made was accepted without challenge and it was hilariously quiet. No one sledged and to be honest it was really hard work concentrating – there was nothing to get your teeth into. After what had happened in the first three Tests you might have thought we'd have all been grateful for a bit of peace and quiet, but most umpires are no different to players – we like a bit of an edge to proceedings. Most of the Australian players were walking around like zombies. Lehmann had resigned on the eve of the Test and although Paine did his best and said all the right things about it being the start of a new era for his team – the sides even agreed to shake hands before the game started to show there were no hard feelings – the bitterness and resentment Australia felt was never too far below the surface.

I'm quite a nervous umpire. I've always tried to have absolute clarity when I make my decisions, but we can feel the pressure as much as the players do on occasion. For me, this manifests itself occasionally in a really dry mouth. So I always have a few sweets – normally Werther's Originals – in my pocket to get me through the day, whether I'm umpiring in Hove or Hobart. It's part of my routine and so it was at the Wanderers during that fourth Test. At the end of day

one I was walking off, put my hand in my pocket and one of the wrappers fell out. I pushed it down a stump hole with my boot on one of the pitches on the edge of the square and thought nothing more of it.

The following morning the Australian bowlers were doing their warm-ups on the same wicket. You can probably guess what happened next. A few minutes later their bowling coach David Saker knocked on our door and came in. 'We've got 'em!' he said. By that, we took it to mean that my sweet wrapper he had in his hand was the evidence that the South Africans had been applying saliva from Werther's Originals to get the ball to swing on what was another flat deck.

I looked at Andy and he looked at me, and both of us tried to keep a straight face. I reached into my pocket and rolled a couple of Werther's along the table towards Saker. 'These sweets you mean?' How Andy stopped himself dissolving into fits of laughter I'll never know. It was a ridiculous accusation to make on the flimsiest of evidence but that's how bad things had got between the teams. They were paranoid.

Nathan Lyon tried to wind up a few of the South Africans in Johannesburg with some verbals, and even after I had spoken to the Australian management to tell him to shut up it continued. Nothing over the top,

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but it seemed Nathan wasn't yet on board with the brave new world of Australian cricket. I had a chat with Allan Border, who was commentating on the series for TV and had been disgusted that his country's cricketing reputation had been dragged into the gutter. By all accounts, and with the full knowledge of their chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns, Border gave Lyon an old-fashioned bollocking and, to his credit, Nathan then apologised to me and the other umpires and we had another laugh about his socks.

South Africa won the game easily. Aiden Markram and Faf du Plessis made hundreds and when South Africa declared at tea on day four, setting Australia more than 600 to win, I just wanted them to be put out of their misery quickly. On the final day Vernon Philander took six wickets, but South Africa's celebrations at the end were fairly muted. It had been a horrible couple of weeks and I was glad to be heading home but not until I'd made sure I had some important items in my baggage.

After Cape Town I'd collected the match balls that had been used and put them in a box. I contacted the ICC's anti-corruption unit and reported that I was taking them for safekeeping. I didn't want them being mistaken for practice balls, which would in all

likelihood have been scuffed and marked, and then picked out, potentially identified as the ball we'd played with in the game and possibly used to implicate a player or players. Steve was happy so I brought them back to England. They are in a vault in a bank in London where I keep all my personal stuff. No one has ever asked for them and there isn't a mark on any of them, apart from our signatures for verification. I wonder if anyone will ever ask for them back?