England in Australia 1897-98 Five Tests. ***Australia Won 4 - 1.***

Balls per over: 6 Playing Hours: 5 hr days (timeless) Captains: GHS Trott (Aus), AE Stoddart (Eng)
AC MacLaren captained England in the first two Tests.

Stoddart once again captained an England touring team, although he was unable to appear in the first two Tests. The team was popular and the tour a success (from the Australian perspective) although there had been a problem in advance when some in the New South Wales establishment had wondered at the inclusion of a non-white man, the Indian Prince Kumar Shri Ranjitsinhji, in the tour team. Fortunately the "deterrent tax" which applied to such undesirables was waived in the case of the man who would later become a Maharajah and represent India at the League of Nations, and thankfully he proved popular with the Australian hoi polloi.

Both Ranji and stand-in captain MacLaren brought their outstanding early-season form into the first Test where England made its highest score in a Test match to date, 551. Ranji's scoring rose toward a run-a-minute in a 175 renowned every bit as much for its elegance as its speed. The weight of runs was too great for Australia, although the batsmen, by scoring 408 in the follow-on, served notice that they were getting the measure of the English bowling. Charlie MacLeod, hard of hearing, left his crease after being bowled by a no-ball (he didn't hear the call) and was run out.

McLeod achieved some vengeance in Melbourne with 112. Both here and in Adelaide, the tide of runs ran the other way and England was swamped. All of Australia's specialist batsmen fared well, Iredale twice topping 80, but Joe Darling's 178 in 285 minutes in Adelaide, including a hit right out of the ground to register his 100, was the standout. Hugh Trumble took eight wickets in Melbourne and newcomer Monty Noble eight in Adelaide, while Ernest Jones was the first bowler to be no-balled for throwing in a Test: it proved to be an isolated incident.

England's bowlers made a better start in the 4th Test in Melbourne, but they had no answer to the 20-year-old Clem Hill, whose 188 in five hours was one of the finest knocks of his career. He received little support until Trumble helped him add 165 for the seventh wicket, which would remain an Australian record for over 75 years. Great depth in the Australian bowling kept England in check – ten batsmen were out in the 20s – and the series was won.

Jones, in spite of occasional questions over his bowling action, took his fine form into the final Test in Sydney, a very hard-fought match even though the series had been decided. Richardson, though, dominated the first innings contest with 8 for 94 – he is still the only bowler to take eight in an innings in his final Test match. But Jones dismissed MacLaren with the first ball of the second innings, and the England batsmen were unable to recover. When the Australians were set 276, Joe Darling took the long handle to Richardson. He hit an Ashes record 20 fours on the way to 100 in 91 minutes, still the fastest ever in Australia in terms of time. (The number of Balls Faced remains unknown, probably in the range 80-95, so it was slower than Roy Fredericks' 71-ball 100 in Perth in 1975.) By the time he was out for 160 in less than three hours, with 30 fours, Australia's fourth victory of the series was assured. A close LBW call for Darling at 50, coming after Ranji had been given out apparently in error, showed up the chanciness of the game of cricket.

Darling had finished with 537 runs for the series, and Australia now had a successful and cohesive cricket team of players proud to represent their country, and capable of beating the best from the Home Country. The importance of this fact, as the Australian people prepared to vote on Federation, has been remarked upon by many commentators.