England in Australia 1881-82 Four Tests. ***Australia Won 2 - 0.***

Balls per over: 4 Playing Hours: 5 hr days (timeless) Captains: WL Murdoch (Aus), A Shaw (Eng)

This was an important summer for Australian cricket, with more first-class matches organised than ever before, including a well-contested series of matches against Albert Shaw's touring England team. That team, consisting entirely of professionals, had no pretensions to being fully representative (no team lacking WG Grace could have made such a claim), but some fine players made the trip nevertheless. Australian cricket was in a strong state, but an injury which limited the impact of star bowler Spofforth rather evened matters out. The Australians were also up against England-born Bill Midwinter, who had played for the home side in 1877, and would return to the Australian fold later in his career.

The first and final Tests were left drawn, due to scheduling problems. Such results were regarded in Australia as undesirable in those days, and all subsequent Tests would be played to a finish until time limits were reintroduced in 1946. Both draws were unusually high-scoring affairs for the time, the first Test being the first first-class match in Australia to produce over 1,000 runs, mostly at a gentile pace. Ulyett, Selby, and Bates had fine matches for England with the bat, while Tom Horan (a chanceless 124) and George Giffen (first South Australian to play a Test match) shared Australia's first Test century partnership after Giffen took 50 minutes to get off the mark. The final Test saw more plentiful scoring from Ulyett (149 and 64), who was having an outstanding series with 438 runs, but a consistent effort down the line by the Australians ensured that honours were even on the first innings. Australia used the players who were selected for the 1882 tour of England.

Test cricket in Sydney got off to an uncertain start: the second match, which Australia won by five wickets, should in truth never have received its (retrospective) Test status. Australia was in fact a "Combined NSW and Victoria" team, so Giffen was absent. George Coulthard, former Test umpire, played for Australia in this match, returning to umpiring duties for the final Test (he would be the first Australian Test cricketer to die, at the age of 26 in 1883). George "Joey" Palmer took 11 wickets in this match, out of his eventual 24 for the series.

Australia, at full strength, won again in the third match. Outstanding batting by Shrewsbury, 82 in 170 minutes on a difficult pitch, was negated by partnership of 199 by Alec Bannerman and Percy McDonnell (147 in about 250 minutes), after Australia had been given choice of a new pitch to bat on. Then Palmer and Garrett bowled almost unchanged to limit the Englishmen to 134 second time around, and Australia won by eight wickets, even though only three of its batsmen produced innings in double figures in the match.

The matches were played in good spirit and the tour was a financial success, attracting crowds up to 20,000. Much had now been done to repair the damage to Australia's cricket reputation caused by the riot of 1879. The 1882 Australian team departed for England just two days after the final Test, and several days before the England team left for home. Modern players who feel that their cricket tours are too long might ponder this fact; in the 1880s a cricketer on tour could be committing himself to more than eight months away from home.