

Exclusive club (established 1877) demands highest standards

In the intensity of an Ashes series, only the truly exceptional player prospers. But who stands above the rest? Over the next four weeks, Calvin Shulman finds the answer

Just after 1pm on a sunny afternoon on March 15, 1877, Alfred Shaw bowled to Charles Bannerman. The unexceptional dot ball from the round-arm opening bowler was the first in Test cricket and started one of the greatest rivalries in sport — England v Australia.

The 1500 spectators at the Melbourne Cricket Ground watched Bannerman, born in Kent 25 years earlier, score the first Test run off the next ball. He went on to record the first century with his 165 and became the first Test player to retire hurt when the second finger on his right hand was split by a rising ball from George Ulyett.

Australia won that match by 45 runs and in the intervening 132 years, the old adversaries from either side of the globe have met a further 315 times, Australia winning 131 Tests, England 97 with 88 drawn.

Some 767 players — 424 Englishmen and 343 Australians — have been involved in the Ashes, but who are the real heroes of the series? Over the next four weeks we will reveal our top 100 Ashes cricketers after a detailed examination of each player's contribution to one of the greatest and most enduring contests in world sport.

Points have been awarded for batting, bowling, wicketkeeping and fielding. Each completed 20 runs earns a point, as does a wicket, so a century equates to a five-wicket haul.

Catches or stumpings taken as a wicketkeeper also count for a point while those held in the outfield warrant half a point.

But the true effect of those performances have also been put into context. Bonus points have been added for playing in winning teams and series, with greater emphasis placed on success overseas. Points have also been deducted for ending up on the losing side, so some players have produced negative playing scores.

Captains have always had a huge influence, from James Lillywhite and Dave Gregory in 1877 to Andrew Strauss and Ricky Ponting this year, so extra points have been added or taken away for their leadership performances. Who will come out on top? Will batsmen or bowlers dominate the list? Can wicketkeepers make their mark? Will the points system favour all-rounders? Will good players in poor sides be penalised?

No system for ranking players across the ages can be foolproof, but we hope you find the results interesting and welcome your views on the final outcome.


We open with 30 players, 17 representing England and 13 Australia. Each player's performances and points are listed by matches, batting, bowling and fielding.

Next week: 70-41

99=
Bill Ponsford (Aus)
 born Oct 19 1900 North Fitzroy, Melbourne
 died Apr 6 1991 Kyneton, Victoria

Ashes Tests	20	(1924-34)	W8	D4	L8	7		
Runs	1558	(47.21)	HS 266	100	5	50	5	77
Wickets	0							0
Catches	17							8.5
Total								92.5


A powerful accumulator of runs, a fierce driver and excellent against spin. The only player to make two first-class scores over 400.



95
Ian Redpath (Aus)
 born May 11 1941 Geelong, Victoria

Ashes Tests	23	(1964-75)	W6	D13	L4	5		
Runs	1512	(38.76)	HS 171	100	2	50	10	75
Wickets	0							0
Catches	29							14.5
Total								94.5


Tail opening batsman who was the last Australian to play as an amateur. Started as a free-flowing striker but became a solid accumulator.



90=
James Kelly (Aus)
 born May 10 1867 Sandridge, Victoria
 died Aug 14 1938 Sydney

Ashes Tests	33	(1896-1905)	W14	D9	L10	15		
Runs	613	(17.51)	HS 46*	100	0	50	0	30
Wickets	0							0
Catches	39	Stumpings	16					55
Total								100


A solid and dependable wicketkeeper who had to contend with the extreme pace of Ernie Jones. Capable of lightning stumpings.



85=
Trevor Bailey (Eng)
 born Dec 3 1923 Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Ashes Tests	23	(1950-59)	W7	D7	L9	11		
Runs	875	(25.73)	HS 88	100	0	50	5	43
Wickets	42	(32.69)	BB 4-22	5w	0	10w	0	42
Catches	16							8
Total								104


A redoubtable opponent who thrived on a crisis. A fine fast-medium bowler and brilliant fielder who favoured gritty defence with the bat.



80
Dick Lilley (Eng)
 born Nov 28 1866 Birmingham
 died Nov 17 1929 Bristol

Ashes Tests	32	(1896-1909)	W10	D10	L12	-17		
Runs	801	(20.02)	HS 84	100	0	50	4	40
Wickets	1	(23.00)	BB 1-23	5w	0	10w	0	1
Catches	65	Stumpings	19					84
Total								108


A tidy wicketkeeper who could be relied upon as a safe catcher and stumper. A forcing batsman, he played several useful innings.



75=
Sammy Carter (Aus)
 born Mar 15 1878 Halifax, Yorkshire
 died June 8 1948 Sydney

Ashes Tests	21	(1907-21)	W12	D3	L6	21		
Runs	776	(25.03)	HS 72	100	0	50	4	38
Wickets	0							0
Catches	35	Stumpings	17					52
Total								111


A first-rate wicketkeeper who did not stand as close to the stumps as many of his contemporaries. Noted for his over-the-shoulder scoop shot.



99=
Ernie Jones (Aus)
 born Sep 30 1869 Auburn, South Australia
 died Nov 23 1943 Magill, Adelaide

Ashes Tests	18	(1894-1902)	W7	D6	L5	17		
Runs	126	(5.25)	HS 20	100	0	50	0	6
Wickets	60	(29.28)	BB 7-88	5w	3	10w	1	60
Catches	19							9.5
Total								92.5


A bowler of genuine pace who was said to have bowled one through W.G. Grace's beard in 1896. Learnt the value of length and control.



94
Bob Taylor (Eng)
 born July 7 1941 Stoke-on-Trent

Ashes Tests	17	(1978-83)	W8	D3	L6	15		
Runs	468	(17.33)	HS 97	100	0	50	1	23
Wickets	0							0
Catches	54	Stumpings	3					57
Total								95


Always the bridesmaid behind Alan Knott, Taylor finally got his chance when his rival joined World Series Cricket. A magnificent wicketkeeper.



89
Tom Hayward (Eng)
 born May 29 1871 Cambridge
 died July 19 1939 Cambridge

Ashes Tests	29	(1896-1909)	W10	D7	L12	-5		
Runs	1747	(35.65)	HS 137	100	2	50	12	87
Wickets	12	(40.50)	BB 4-22	5w	0	10w	0	12
Catches	14							7
Total								101


One of the leading batsmen of his generation. He relied on patience, judgment and a stout defence, partnering Jack Hobbs to great effect.



84
Brett Lee (Aus)
 born Nov 6 1976 Wollongong, New South Wales

Ashes Tests	18	(2001-07)	W12	D2	L4	25		
Runs	334	(20.87)	HS 47	100	0	50	0	16
Wickets	62	(40.61)	BB 4-47	5w	0	10w	0	62
Catches	4							2
Total								105


One of the most recent incarnations of the Australia fast bowler who unsettles England batsmen with the bouncer-yorker method.



79
John Snow (Eng)
 born Oct 13 1941 Peopleton, Worcestershire

Ashes Tests	20	(1968-75)	W4	D12	L4	3		
Runs	392	(15.07)	HS 48	100	0	50	0	19
Wickets	83	(25.61)	BB 7-40	5w	4	10w	0	83
Catches	7							3.5
Total								108.5


England's leading strike bowler in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ray Illingworth's main weapon with 31 wickets in the 1970-71 series win.



74
Tony Greig (Eng)
 born Oct 6 1946 Queenstown, South Africa

Ashes Tests	21	(1972-77)	W6	D7	L8	-16		
Runs	1303	(26.19)	HS 110	100	1	50	0	65
Wickets	44	(37.79)	BB 4-53	5w	0	10w	0	44
Catches	37							18.5
Total								111.5


A 6ft 7in all-rounder who exuded confidence and charisma, leading from the front with bat or ball. Key player in Packer revolution.



98
Mike Brearley (Eng)
 born Apr 28 1942 Harrow, Middlesex

Ashes Tests	19	(1977-81)	W11	D3	L5	34		
Runs	798	(22.80)	HS 81	100	0	50	4	49
Wickets	0							0
Catches	20							10
Total								93


Rodney Hogg, the Australia fast bowler, said: "He has a degree in people." The scholarly captain was worth his place for leadership alone.



93
Ken Barrington (Eng)
 born Nov 24 1930 Reading, Berkshire
 died Mar 14 1981 Bridgetown, Barbados

Ashes Tests	23	(1961-68)	W3	D15	L5	-23		
Runs	2111	(22.96)	HS 256	100	5	50	13	105
Wickets	0							0
Catches	19	(45.77)	BB 2-47	5w	0	10w	0	4
Total								95.5


A notorious stonewaller who often carried England's batting along on his broad shoulders. Died while acting as England's assistant manager in 1981.



88
Alec Bedser (Eng)
 born July 4 1918 Reading, Berkshire

Ashes Tests	21	(1946-54)	W2	D7	L12	-26		
Runs	373	(14.34)	HS 79	100	0	50	1	18
Wickets	104	(27.49)	BB 7-44	5w	7	10w	2	104
Catches	11							5.5
Total								101.5


Powerful opening bowler and a pillar of the side in the postwar era. One of only seven England bowlers to take 100 Ashes wickets.



83
W G Grace (Eng)
 born July 18 1848 Bristol
 died Oct 23 1915 Motttingham, Kent

Ashes Tests	18	(1880-99)	W13	D4	L5	23		
Runs	1098	(32.29)	HS 170	100	2	50	5	9
Wickets	9	(26.22)	BB 2-12	5w	0	10w	0	9
Catches	39							20
Total								106


The colossus of his age and still the greatest name in the sport more than 90 years after his death. Opened the batting at the age of 50.



77=
Tom Richardson (Eng)
 born Aug 11 1870 Byfleet, Surrey
 died July 2 1912 St. Jean d'Arvey, France

Ashes Tests	14	(1893-98)	W6	D1	L7	12		
Runs	177	(11.06)	HS 25*	100	0	50	0	8
Wickets	88	(25.22)	BB 8-94	5w	11	10w	4	88
Catches	5							2.5
Total								110.5


Genuinely quick with immense stamina, he thrived on hard and dry batting wickets utilising a long run-up with a high arm at delivery.



71=
George Lohmann (Eng)
 born Dec 2 1865 Kensington, London
 died Dec 1 1901 Cape Province, South Africa

Ashes Tests	15	(1886-96)	W12	D0	L3	17		
Runs	203	(10.15)	HS 62*	100	0	50	1	10
Wickets	77	(31.01)	BB 8-35	5w	5	10w	3	77
Catches	22							11
Total								115


Operating at little more than medium pace, he was a fearsome proposition, seaming the ball both ways with numerous variations.



97
Len Braund (Eng)
 born Oct 18 1875 Clewer, Berkshire
 died Dec 23 1955 Putney, London

Ashes Tests	20	(1901-08)	W6	D2	L12	-2		
Runs	830	(25.15)	HS 103*	100	2	50	2	41
Wickets	46	(38.45)	BB 8-81	5w	3	10w	0	46
Catches	37							18.5
Total								93.5

Enjoyed a long professional career as a fine batsman on all pitches, a clever leg-break bowler and an immaculate catcher in the slips.



92
Warren Bardsley (Aus)
 born Dec 6 1882 Warren, New South Wales
 died Jan 20 1954 Sydney

Ashes Tests	30	(1909-26)	W13	D10	L7	21		
Runs	1487	(33.04)	HS 193*	100	3	50	8	74
Wickets	0							0
Catches	6							3
Total								98


Classical left-hander with an upright stance and wide variety of shots. The first Australian to make two centuries in a Test, in 1909.



87
Godfrey Evans (Eng)
 born Aug 18 1920 Finchley, Middlesex
 died May 3 1999 Northampton

Ashes Tests	31	(1946-59)	W7	D10	L14	-12		
Runs	783	(17.79)	HS 50	100	0	50	1	39
Wickets	0							0
Catches	64	Stumpings	12					76
Total								103


Often touted as the best wicketkeeper the game has seen. Technically superb, he was equally adept standing up or back.



82
Mike Gatting (Eng)
 born June 6 1957 Kingsbury, Middlesex

Ashes Tests	27	(1980-95)	W9	D9	L9	14		
Runs	1661	(37.75)	HS 160	100	4	50	12	83
Wickets	0							0
Catches	19							9.5
Total								106.5

Slow starter in Test cricket who finally came good as a burly and powerful batsman. Led England to a surprise series win in 1986-87.



77=
Joe Darling (Aus)
 born Nov 21 1870 Adelaide
 died Jan 2 1946 Hobart

Ashes Tests	31	(1894-1905)	W12	D9	L10	18		
Runs	1632	(30.79)	HS 178	100	3	50	8	81
Wickets	0							0
Catches	23							11.5
Total								110.5

Led three teams to England, winning in 1899 and 1902. A robust left-hander who could employ both stubborn defence and forceful attack.



71=
Lindsay Hassett (Aus)
 born Aug 28 1913 Geelong, Victoria
 died June 11 1993 Bateman's Bay, New South Wales

Ashes Tests	24	(1938-53)	W12	D9	L3	29		
Runs	1572	(38.34)	HS 137	100	4	50	6	78
Wickets	0							0
Catches	16							8
Total								115

Pocket-sized batsman who was a quick-footed attacking player before the Second World War, more circumspect as captain in later years.



96
Alec Stewart (Eng)
 born Apr 8 1963 Merton, Surrey

Ashes Tests	33	(1990-2003)
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