

A legend and a gentleman - Arthur Morris

By TONY STEPHENS
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Arthur Morris

1922-2015

ARTHUR Morris didn't mind being overshadowed by Don Bradman; sometimes he even enjoyed it.

Occasionally asked what he was doing when Bradman, in his last Test innings, was famously bowled for a duck, Morris would say he was at The Oval, London, in 1948. Doing what? "Playing. I was up the other end." How did Arthur go? "I managed 196."

Morris died on Saturday.

He managed to help that Australian team, called The Invincibles, to win that Test and the series, 4-0. In the previous Test, at Leeds, Morris managed 182 in a 301-run partnership with Bradman, helping Australia to chase 404 runs for victory in 345 minutes. He had helped Bradman, then troubled by Denis Compton's bowling, by hitting the Englishman out of the attack. The partnership brought the then highest winning fourth-innings Test score.

Morris hit three centuries and three more fifties in the 1948 Tests, to top the averages with 87; Bradman's average was 72.57. Wisden named Morris one of the "cricketers of the year". Neville Cardus wrote: "Morris played pedigree cricket; blue-blood aristocracy." And: "Morris was once more beyond praise – masterful, stylish, imperturbable, sure in defence, quick and handsome in stroke play. His batting is true to himself, charming and good mannered but reliant and thoughtful."

Other distinguished English cricket writers shared Cardus' admiration. E.W. Swanton wrote: "Few more charming men have played for Australia and I cannot name one who was more popular with his opponents."

John Arlott said of Morris: "One of the best-liked cricketers of all time – charming, philosophical and relaxed."

Captain Bradman said: "He wasn't always straight in defence. But this was merely a sign of genius."

The Don advised other batsmen not to risk being caught by hitting in the air but thought differently of Morris, who "hit over the top a bit". He advised: "I don't know how you do it but keep on doing it."

He would have made a fortune in today's shorter forms of the game, where hitting "over the top" is often essential. Once asked what he had gained from cricket, he said: "Poverty." Test cricketers of his era were paid little more than expenses.

In a match against Queensland, Morris scored 108 in only 82 minutes before lunch to steer NSW to victory, then returned to work as a car salesman. Yet he held little envy of today's cricketing millionaires: "Good luck to them. I only hope they enjoy the game as much as I did." His enjoyment was not unqualified.

Nervous before an innings, he took up smoking. "I never thought I was good enough but sought to prove myself." He would have "a few beers to relax and get some sleep the night before". In his 90s, Morris was still enjoying red wine. At 93, he had outscored the great Bradman once more – Don died in 2001, at 92.

Arthur Robert Morris was born in Bondi on January 19, 1922, and spent five years in Sydney before moving with his parents to Dungog. His father, also Arthur, was a schoolteacher; his mother, formerly Madge Wood, was English and didn't like Dungog. She left, effectively ending the marriage.

Arthur's father took custody of his boy. Morris senior had played second-grade cricket for Waverley and believed in his son's talents from the time he played competition cricket as a boy of 12 with grown men. When the proud father told the captain of a shire team that his son would play for Australia, the captain replied: "If your son plays for Australia, you can kiss my arse."

Father and son moved to Newcastle, where Arthur showed promise at cricket, rugby and tennis. His first game for the Newcastle Boys' High XI was as a slow bowler. After Morris senior was transferred back to Sydney, the boy attended Canterbury Boys' High from 1936 to 1939. He represented the school at cricket and rugby union, and was appointed school captain.

Bill O'Reilly, the Australian bowler and St George captain, thought Morris a "moderately skilled" bowler but agreed with veteran cricketer Alec Marks that Arthur should concentrate on batting. After the young left-hander scored a century, O'Reilly told him to open the batting, which he did for the rest of his career.

The schoolboy played for the NSW Second XI in January 1939. He failed his Leaving Certificate that year but became a clerk in Sydney Town Hall's prosecutions division. Making his debut for the NSW Sheffield Shield team, at 18, in the 1940-41 season, he scored centuries in both innings with a borrowed bat. Doc Evatt, president of the United Nations General Assembly when it adopted the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and later leader of the Labor Party, sent him to Stan McCabe's sports shop for his own bat.

Like most cricketers of his time, Morris' career was interrupted by World War II. He lost five prime batting years. "But a lot of people lost their lives," he pointed out. Enlisting at 20, he served in the Pacific, mostly New Guinea, with a transport company. The soldier had time for sport. Johnny Wallace, coach of a combined services rugby team, said he was the "best five-eighth in Australia".

After the war he worked with a motor parts distributor. In an Australian XI match against Wally Hammond's 1946-47 English tourists, Morris hit 115 in a 196-run partnership with Bradman. He made a century in his third test, twin centuries in the next and another, against India, the following season.

The Invincibles tour was a lifetime highlight. Justice Sir Norman Birkett, who had presided at the Nuremberg war crime trials, wrote that the welcome given the 1948 Australians “was in some measure a thanksgiving that one of the great institutions of our common life had been restored”.

After two centuries in South Africa, Morris' Test average was 67.8, with nine centuries.

He rejected a Liberal Party offer to stand in the next NSW election. Morris' form in the 1950-51 Ashes was poor until his 206 in the fourth Test. He was less successful against England in 1953, when Australia lost the Ashes. Some critics regarded him as the “bunny” of English bowler Alec Bedser, who dismissed him 18 times in Tests. But Morris' average was 57.4 in the 37 Test innings in which he faced Bedser. Good friends, they often drank together and Morris was a eulogist at Bedser's funeral.

He hit another century against England in the first Test of their 1954-55 tour before Frank Tyson's speed bowling destroyed Australia in the series. After 111 against the West Indies in Trinidad, he came home to discover that his new wife, English dancer Valerie Hudson, had breast cancer. Morris retired at 33, with a Test average of 46.486, and took Valerie home to see her family. She died soon after. They had been married 18 months.

Cricket Australia chairman Wally Edwards said Australia had lost a “cherished link with our past” with the death of Arthur Morris.

“Arthur Morris was a great man and one of the true greats of Australian cricket who until now had been a treasured connection to an extraordinary era of the game.

“When Australia's best openers are discussed his name will always be one of the first mentioned.

“An elegant, complete batsman, Arthur peaked in the late 1940s and was the most successful batsman during the series against England that would make him an Invincible. We extend our deepest sympathies to Arthur's wife, Judith, and his family at this sad time. He will be greatly missed but remembered forever.”

In 1968, Morris married Judith Menmuir. Awarded the MBE for services to sport, he served on the SCG Trust for 22 years and was named in Australia's team of the century in 2000. The Morrises retired to Cessnock, then to the Central Coast.

Arthur leaves Judith and just one Invincible, Neil Harvey.









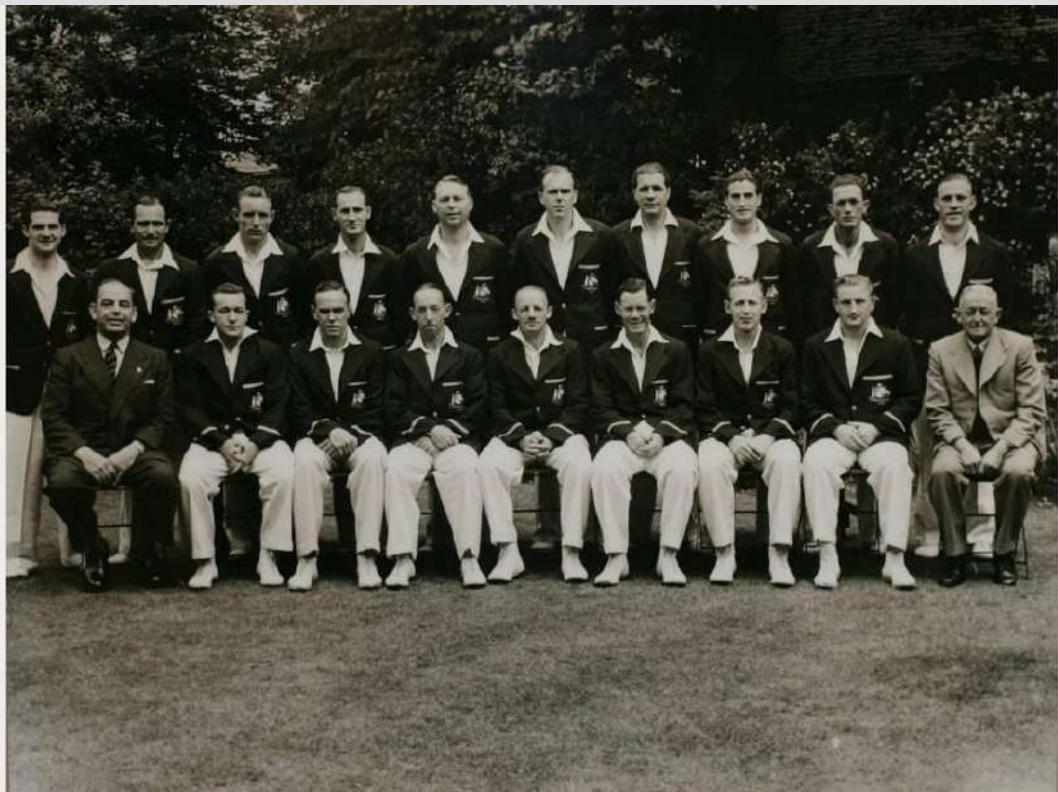


























Don Bradman and Arthur Morris walking onto Leeds Cricket Ground the 4th test in 1948.