

# The influence of Don Bradman on contributing to an Australian sense of nationalism during times of hardship

## ***Introduction***

In this essay I will be attempting to discuss the influence of Sir Donald Bradman on contributing to a sense of Australian nationalism during periods of extreme hardship in Australia. I will be focussing particularly on the influence of Bradman during the period of the Great Depression of the 1930s. I will also be looking briefly at the influence of Bradman immediately following the Second World War. In the essay I will be examining what it means to have a sense of nationalism or national identity, particularly in Australia, as well as looking at what life was like for ordinary Australians during the Great Depression and after World War 2. The discussion will also briefly incorporate other influences on Australians at those times as well as the national mood during those years.

## ***Definition of Nationalism***

The events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, namely the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C., have brought forth a great sense of nationalism in the citizens of the United States. It was reported that, in the days immediately following the tragedy, many shops sold out of American flags, as people displayed their fervent patriotism by uniting together in the face of their adversity and struggle.

The events in the United States are one example of how a deep sense of nationalism is often created and maintained during a major national or international crisis. In studying nationalism it is imperative to look at what nationalism is and how it is defined.

The Heinemann Australian Dictionary defines nationalism as simply "a sense of national unity" (Heinemann Australian Dictionary, p. 693). However nationalism involves more than simply having a sense of national unity, although this is a very important part of what it entails.

There are also different types of nationalism. These types range from cultural nationalism which, in the Australian context, has to do with "the idea of distinctive Australian characteristics and with the development of an Australian culture" (Alomes & Jones 1991, p. 3); social nationalism which is "often expressed in popular form, whether in ballads and yarns, or in T-shirts and Australian design" (Alomes & Jones 1991, p. 3); political nationalism, which has to do with such issues as "support [or otherwise] for Australian Federation or for policies for the Australian people" (Alomes & Jones 1991, p. 3); and economic nationalism, which "can range from support for Australian control of Australian industries and jobs for Australian workers to simple ideas of national economic progress or development" (Alomes & Jones 1991, p. 3).

The type of nationalism I will be dealing with in this essay could be said to be of both a cultural and social nature. This sense of nationalism was inspired by the cricketing feats of Don Bradman during the 1930s and 1940s.

The effect of nationalism inspired by people such as Bradman is such that it often "distracts attention from difficult economic problems" (Alomes & Jones 1991, pp. 3-4). This was certainly the case during the years of the Great Depression of the 1930s when the cricketing exploits of Don Bradman gave Australians cause for hope, became a great distraction from the despair of life for so many, and helped create a sense of what it means to be Australian.

## ***Australian national identity***

When Sir Donald Bradman passed away in February 2001, it was said by many that he epitomised everything it means to be Australian. In trying to decipher the meaning of such a statement however, one could come up with many different answers. The issue of national identity, or what it means to be Australian, has become a major issue in recent times, particularly in 2001 with the centenary of Federation celebrations.

There has been a problem however, in defining our national identity. The problem has arisen from the idea that "our national identity, independently of others, has yet to emerge. The problem essentially derives from the difficulty of defining an Australian" (Tran 1999, p. 19). A typical image of Australia has to do with "a long tradition of bush legend, free spirit, of democracy, of fair go [and] of mateship" (Tran 1999, p. 19). Australians are also generally seen to be committed to "what are seen as core Australian values and principles, exemplified by our legal and liberal democratic traditions" (Tran 1999, p. 20). From this "it can be affirmed that most Australians do share a common identity through the support for these common legal and political institutions" (Tran 1999, p. 20). Australian national identity can also be seen in our sense of multiculturalism to the extent that "multiculturalism in its inclusive sense is very crucial to our developing nationhood and Australian identity" (Tran 1999, p. 21). Another major issue of national identity for Australians is that of reconciliation with indigenous Australians.

All of the issues mentioned above can and do contribute to a sense of what it means to be Australian. However, the issues that constitute a sense of Australian national identity today are not necessarily the same as those of Bradman's

time – the 1930s and 1940s. For instance, the multicultural ideal that we celebrate in Australia today was still a long way off when Bradman strode the cricket fields of the world. Another difference is that, in Bradman's time, national identity had much to do with our "shared Britishness which...is central to early Australian conceptions of themselves" (Archer 1997, p. 30).

A major way in which we identify with being Australian that has endured throughout the years however is in the sense of what has been termed 'active citizenship'. This sense of participation in the creation of a nation goes back to the ANZAC tradition, where Australians learnt about "the willingness to participate, the ready desire to perform a public duty, to define by action my nation, my community and myself" (Vizard 1999, p. 5). It is in this sense of active citizenship or participation that Bradman contributed greatly to what it means to be Australian.

There is also a point at which national identity and nationalism merge. This is the point where Australians are able to "have and to feel a sense of belonging, of being accepted, of having true chances to excel oneself, of contributing to Australia's wellbeing on some capacity, and of togetherness with fellow Australians, in good times and bad times" (Tran 1999, p. 21).

As mentioned above, Australian identity is forever evolving and it would be wrong to state that those characteristics that identified us with being Australian in the 1930s and 1940s, are exactly the same as those that define us as being Australian today. Nevertheless, it is the characteristics mentioned above that have been the ones in which the influence of Sir Donald Bradman was greatest in contributing to a sense of Australian nationalism and national identity during some of the hardest times in Australia's history.

### ***The Bradman phenomenon***

It is a fact of life that the image of many public figures becomes more legendary following their passing. The image of Sir Donald Bradman however could be seen to be different. There is almost nothing that has not been written about the man who dominated Australian and world cricket for approximately 20 years. Bradman was truly a legend in his own lifetime. Ever since he first burst onto the first class cricket scene in the late 1920s, until his retirement from the game after World War 2, his name has become synonymous with all that it means to be Australian. During the latter years of his life he was often quoted as being the most famous living Australian. It is my contention that it was more than Bradman's extraordinary cricketing prowess that led him to have such an influence over the Australian psyche. I believe that the reason Don Bradman had such an impact is because, apart from his cricketing deeds, there were other characteristics about him that gave Australians such hope during some of the darkest years in Australian history. He showed that an Australian could take on the world and win. His influence during those years is described by one of his team-mates on the 1948 tour of England, Sam Loxton, who, at a sporting function earlier this year simply said that, as many Australians struggled through the grim days of the Depression, Bradman "lit up the nation" (Loxton 2001). While the focus of this essay is the influence of Don Bradman on contributing to an Australian sense of nationalism and national identity, to do this it is necessary to take some time to explore his cricketing record on its own and to gain a glimpse of his domination of the cricket world during his playing days and how this relates to his contribution to Australian nationalism during that time.

### ***The Bradman Record***

Bradman's rise to prominence in the cricketing world began from very early on in his cricketing career. In fact, his maiden first-class performance resulted in the first of his 117 first class centuries when he scored 118 for New South Wales against South Australia in Adelaide in December 1927. Even at this early stage, Bradman was developing a reputation for being a modest champion. He was known for his "unassuming attitude...his deference towards his seniors, willingness to learn, and readiness to accept criticism" (Page 1983, p. 18). These were "qualities with a particular appeal to cricket lovers of that era. Australia had inherited not only the game of cricket from England but also the ethos which saw it as the essence of good sportsmanship...in which a real man should accept triumph and disaster with equal modesty, courage and good humour" (Page 1983, pp. 18-19). A.G. Moyes, a well-known cricket selector and journalist of that period, also saw in Bradman "the epitome of everything good and wholesome about the game of cricket" (Mallett 2000, p. 25).

Societal attitudes in Australia in the 1930s were also quite different from those of today, and this extended to the cricket field. "The phrase "it's not cricket" was commonly used as a comment upon tricky behaviour in any activity, with the implication that the noble game provided a model for society as a whole" (Page 1983, p. 19). It can already be seen then why Bradman, with the influence that the game of cricket had on society, had such a great impact on Australia as a result of his cricketing deeds throughout this era.

Apart from his modest attitude, the way in which Bradman played his cricket also drew acclaim from the media of the day. In describing his maiden first class century against South Australia, one newspaper remarked that "when nearing the century, he did not potter about for singles in order to claim the coveted honour of making a century in his first Sheffield Shield match, but smacked boundaries with a delightful abandon and received an ovation on getting three figures" (Page 1983, p. 27). The way he played was exciting to watch and was another factor in drawing the masses to

watch him play.

In 1927, when Bradman made his first-class debut, Australia was still seen as a land of opportunity. The full force of the Great Depression was still a couple of years away. In a sign that Bradman's deeds would provide a beacon of hope for the years that followed, another newspaper described his maiden century by stating that his effort was "yet another instance of the opportunities which await persistent effort in this sunny land" (Page 1983, p. 27). Bradman was seen as an example that people could succeed in life in Australia if they applied themselves wholeheartedly. Such an attitude would provide much hope for many Australians as the Depression took hold, and would also be instrumental in creating and forging a sense of national identity that would see Australians known for this determined way of thinking in years to come.

By the time of Bradman's first Test match in the 1928/29 season, the "fiscal mood had begun to change" (Mallett 2000, p. 26) in Australia and it was at this time that Australia needed something to lift the spirits of its people as the Great Depression loomed.

Bradman's first Test appearance however was a failure. In the first Test of the 1928/29 series against England he scored 18 and 1. Dropped for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Test he then was selected again for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Test in Melbourne where he made the first of his 29 Test centuries, 112 in the second innings. His reputation already high as a result of his success from playing for New South Wales, the Australian public finally had justification for their faith in Bradman when he made his century at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The public reaction was enormous. In the centre of Sydney, "as the steadily mounting score was telegraphed from Melbourne, homegoing crowds crammed the streets outside the offices and ignored the trams waiting to take them home" (Page 1983, p. 42).

Another century from Bradman in the final Test of the series helped Australia win that match, although they lost the series easily. Despite this however, Bradman's reputation was growing tremendously. As a result of his first Test series, he was already being compared with the greats of the game and was being described as the 'hope of Australia' (Page 1983, p. 42). One newspaper even declared that Bradman was already "on a pinnacle never reached by any other Australian cricketer not yet 21 years of age, and paralleled only by the immortal W.G. Grace of England" (Page 1983, p. 48). Such comparisons were high praise indeed as Grace was, and arguably remains, England's most famous cricketer.

During 1929, Bradman accepted a job with the sporting goods distributors, Mick Simmons Ltd. In this position he was employed mainly to take part in public relations activities. Everywhere he went with the firm, he was greeted with enormous acclamation. In the towns, "retailers were delighted to meet the young batsman...[and] in Sydney, his presence in George Street was a valuable creator of 'store traffic'" (Page 1983, p. 54). It was evident that his success during the Depression years, apart from lifting the spirits of Australians and helping them to define themselves, also played its part in helping business to survive, particularly in Sydney.

Despite the success of Bradman's first Test series and the enormous media acclaim accorded to him, it was in 1930 that Bradman left no one in any doubt that he was the greatest cricketer the game had seen and, in a sport loving nation like Australia, that he was someone who would become a defining character in the way Australians would see themselves in the uncertainty of the years to come. In January 1930 he broke the world record for an individual score in any first class game by scoring 452 not out for New South Wales against Queensland in Sydney. This performance merely enhanced his hero status among Australian from all walks of life. He received telegrams from "friends and relations. Many others were from admirers unknown to him, and a number came from cricket clubs and associations in many parts of Australia" (Page 1983, p. 60).

It was the 1930 Test series against England however, played at the height of the Great Depression, that gave thousands of Australians such hope and inspiration as they listened to stories of his extraordinary performances coming back from the 'Mother Country'.

During the five Tests, Bradman scored 974 runs at an average of 139.14; including the then world record score of 334 at Leeds; as well two double centuries and one century. These previously unheard of feats of Bradman simply caused him to become more famous than he already was. Despite his success however, it was his modesty that equally endeared him to the English people and helped cement the Australian image of a people just going about their tasks in life with little fuss. A London newspaper, writing after Bradman's 334 at Leeds, stated, "a more level-headed young man or one less likely to become spoiled by admiration never wore flannels" (Page 1983, p. 97).

Bradman's response to his own fame was usually the seeking out of solitude and a quiet place to rest. In responding to criticisms of his apparent aloofness, Bradman described his response to such criticism by saying, "I was often accused of being unsociable, though I fear the charge was applied in a very loose sense. In substance it boiled down to my dislike of artificiality and publicity" (Page 1983, p. 100). Such intolerance of pretence has become a defining characteristic of Australians and it was certainly true of Bradman.

The response of the Australian public to the return of the Australian cricket team at the end of the 1930 tour was nothing short of frenzied. At a time when "Australians badly needed a tonic for their spirits, because the Great Depression was biting home and unemployment was close to thirty per cent" (Page 1983, p. 108), the return of the Australian team, and in particular, Bradman, gave a much needed lift to the general public. This was also the time when "Art Leonard recorded *Our Don Bradman*, soon to become Bradman's personal anthem" (McKernan, 3 March 2001). This song was to become famous as Australians could laud the world-beating feats of 'our Don'. On returning home from the 1930 tour, everywhere Bradman went people flocked to see him. He was constantly being asked to make numerous speeches and attend frequent receptions in front of adoring crowds.

### **Bodyline**

The incredible performances of Bradman in 1930 gave birth to probably the most controversial Test series ever played. The 1932/33 Test series against England, infamously known as the 'Bodyline' series, cemented in the hearts of Australians the hero status of Don Bradman. Bodyline involved packing the leg side with fielders close to the batsman and bowling fast, short-pitched deliveries aimed at the batsman so that, in playing the delivery the batsman risked being caught out or else being physically hit. It was quickly seen as going against the very grain of cricketing sportsmanship.

There is debate as to the origins of Bodyline. Probably the most commonly held belief is that it was conceived in the final Test of the 1930 series in England. Although Bradman scored 232 in this match, some of the English bowlers thought they detected a weakness against short-pitched bowling in Bradman's batting technique. One of the English bowlers in this match was Harold Larwood, who was to become the prime English weapon in the implementation of Bodyline bowling.

The main instigator of Bodyline however was the English captain, Douglas Jardine. It is widely regarded that Jardine devised Bodyline purely as a means of curbing the run getting of Bradman. The fact that it succeeded to an extent (Bradman's average for the series was reduced to 56) pales into insignificance when compared to the friction it caused in relations between Australia and England, as well as its role in the creation of a sense of Australian national identity.

At a time when Australians were being asked by the English to reduce their standards of living by the English as a means of countering the problems of the Depression, Jardine was, to Australians, "the personification of the 'toffee-nosed Englishman': arrogant, aloof, almost incapable of expressing himself to anyone outside his own strata of English society" (Page 1983, p. 189). Also characterised as "the Australian notion of the type of upper-class Englishman who looked condescendingly upon 'colonials'" (Page 1983, p. 189), it is of little wonder that Jardine was hated by a young Australian nation with a short history of mistreatment by British authority.

It is against this background that the Bodyline series became a defining event in the creation of an Australian sense of national identity. The performances of Bradman during the series were highlighted firstly during the second Test in Melbourne, when, before a world record crowd of 68,188, he scored 103 against Jardine's bodyline tactics. The crowd were inspired by Bradman's performance and enraged at the unsportsmanlike approach of the English team. Upon returning "to the pavilion [after his innings], the crowd burst into a frenzy of acclamation" (Page 1983, p. 181). Already a hero in Australian culture, this performance only heightened his status as the hope of Australia and an inspiring example of someone who could challenge the might of the British Empire and succeed.

The next Test in Adelaide saw the Bodyline controversy reach its crescendo. However, the scene had been set in the Melbourne Test, and in the period between the two Test matches the public outcry against Bodyline gained enormous momentum. The feeling at that time has been described "as that of a nation waiting for the declaration of war" (Page 1983, p. 182), remembering that this 'war' was against Mother England.

Against the background of the Depression, "the bodyline affair soon became infected with chauvinism and nationalism. Australia's economy was suffering...and many people blamed this on the Bank of England's insistence on prompt repayment of...loans" (Page 1983, p. 182). This attitude was "contrasted...with Australia's unstinting sacrifice during the first world war, when so many young Australians suffered in 'England's war'" (Page 1983, p. 182). As a result of these attitudes, "English cricketers became the target for venomous criticism" (Page 1983, p. 182).

During the Adelaide Test, Australian captain Bill Woodfull was hit over the heart by a ball from Larwood. Although this did not occur with the use of bodyline tactics, the crowd nonetheless became incensed; tensions already being at breaking point as a result of the methods employed by the English team. The fury of the crowd erupted however when, after Woodfull was hit and ready to face the next delivery from Larwood, Jardine clapped his hands and called his team to move into bodyline positions. Bradman, standing at the other end, has said that at this time he thought a riot would erupt. The atmosphere was so intense that "the crowd exploded for the second time, and they did not quieten down. Every man and woman behind the boundary fences roared and shrieked their fury at the Englishmen. The Australians played the rest of the innings in a continuous fusillade of barracking" (Page 1983, p. 183).

As a result of the drama of the Adelaide Test match, a cable was sent to the MCC, English cricket's governing authority, protesting at the tactics of bodyline bowling, stating that it was a "menace [to] the best interests of the game" (Page 1983, p. 185) and that "unless stopped at once, [was] likely to upset the friendly relations existing between Australia and England" (Page 1983, p. 185). Bodyline was now a political issue and Bradman has since "recalled it as having threatened the future of the game" (Smith, 2 March 2001).

Bodyline was instrumental in creating a sense of national identity for Australia in that it cemented in the minds of Australians a sense of determination against the odds, of standing up to the might of the British Empire. In Jardine, Australians also saw "a personification of British greed and arrogance, and bodyline as a symptom of Britain's determination to keep Australia inferior to the homeland" (Page 1983, p. 188). Against this, Bradman "represented the hopes and dreams of a young nation" (Sports Illustrated 2001). With the Great Depression also hanging over their heads, Australians saw Bradman as "an icon for an Australia which was flat on its back" (Smith, 2 March 2001).

The Bodyline series of 1932/33 highlighted the fact that Bradman fitted the national psyche and the image of the laconic, understated, small Australian fearlessly taking on all the upper class, superior sounding British (Hewett, 2 March 2001). This sense of Australia drifting away from dependence on Great Britain and attempting to forge its own identity has continued to evolve over the years as a way of defining our nation, to the extent that most observers see it as inevitable that Australia will, in the not too distant future, become an independent republic.

In attempting to explain Bradman's influence and the reason why he made such an impact on Australian nationalism, it is necessary to take a slightly more detailed look at the conditions of the time in which Bradman lived. For whilst it is true that Bradman's cricketing record is far above that of others, it was the time at which he produced his extraordinary deeds and the manner in which he performed them that had such a startling impact on creating a sense of nationalism in this country.

### ***The Great Depression***

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a time when about one in every three Australians was out of work. Hope was at an all-time low and the nation was crying out for a saviour.

The Depression followed a time of economic prosperity in Australia. As previously mentioned, a description of Bradman as late as 1927 stated that his maiden first class century showed that there was opportunity for those who displayed the effort to succeed. The effect of the Depression though was to increase people's despair as the "disillusionment double[d] personal bitterness and sense of individual failure" (Cannon 1996, p. 3). While official figures say that, "at the depth of the Depression, twenty-eight percent of Australian workers were out of jobs and on the dole" (Clarke 1983, p. vi), other estimates say that the actual figures of "workless for 1930-32 would be double, possibly treble, those rates" (Cannon 1996, p. 15).

Possibly the saddest image of the Depression was that of returned soldiers from the First World War. The way in which the ANZAC diggers are lauded today, especially with the resurgence in the popularity of ANZAC Day in recent years, was not a defining element of Australia in the 1930s. Returned soldiers were generally not liked by a large section of the population as "the very dominance of the war in Australia had changed its meaning" (McKernan, 3 March 2001). One example of the magnitude with which the Depression hit returned soldiers was in "Abermain on the South Maitland coalfield...the local RSL official reported that there were 39 members in the sub-branch: of this number only eight were employed and one of them was in casual work. The other 31 were unemployed. And there was a policy of employment preference for returned men; still there were no jobs" (McKernan, 3 March 2001).

The roots of Australian mistrust of the English that manifested itself during the Depression began in the 1920s. During this time Australian "governments borrowed heavily abroad, mainly in London, to finance much-needed public works and to try to maintain prosperity" (Masson 1993, p. xv). As the Depression grew worse however, loans from England began to dwindle. This caused the Australian Government of the time to cut costs, forcing more and more people out of work. As the finance from Great Britain dramatically reduced, relations between Australia and the Mother Country became more tense. The situation was heightened when a leading financier named Sir Otto Niemeyer visited Australia in 1930. Niemeyer was a representative of the Bank of England, through which Australia had obtained its loans. Niemeyer's "report that Australia was 'living beyond its means' strengthened the pressure for severe cost-cutting" (Masson 1993, p. xxi). As Niemeyer was seen by many as "the embodiment of 'money power', out to 'suck blood' from Australian workers" (Masson 1993, p. xxi), this only heightened tensions between Australia and England and increased Australia's need for someone to look up to and to show that "Australians could stand tall in any company" (McKernan, 3 March 2001).

### ***Australians and cricket in the search for national identity***

As has been discussed throughout this essay, there were a number of factors that led to Don Bradman having a major influence on the creation of an Australian sense of national identity and nationalism during the 1930s. While he is commonly seen to have "inspired a despairing nation during the Depression" (Hewett, 2 March

2001), he was not the only sporting hero to have given Australians hope during this time. The famous racehorse Phar Lap was also seen as a hero during the Depression years. As with Bradman, Phar Lap's "capacity to triumph over adverse conditions...endearred him to the people of Australia" (<http://136.154.202.14/pharlap/plgallop.htm> 18 August 2001).

Australians' reasons for turning to sporting heroes for inspiration and encouragement during hard times have been a major issue in the examination of Australian national identity. Australia has always been a nation that has prided itself on its sporting achievements and the success of its sporting heroes. In the early years of the Australian nation, it was generally Australia's cricketers that were the greatest inspiration for the creation of a sense of nationalism and national identity in Australia.

One of the reasons for this phenomenon of Australia as a nation finding its identity at least partly in the deeds of its sporting (and particularly cricketing) heroes is explained by Charles Williams, who wrote a biography of Bradman in 1996. He states that, because of our history, Australia has never had a military or political hero like the USA or other prosperous nations have. The Australian nation "has never had a war of independence, it's therefore never had a George Washington, it's never had a civil war, never had a Lenin, it's never had a war against a close enemy, it's therefore never had a Joan of Arc, and so on and so forth" (Smith, 2 March 2001).

Other reasons given for this attraction to sporting heroes have to do with "the climate and individualism of Australia and those who live there" (Smith, 2 March 2001). This has made outdoor sports; cricket being the major one (at least in the summer months), an attractive proposition for many young people.

It is interesting to note the comparison given between Australia and other nations with regards to their national heroes and people who have given them a sense of national identity, especially during hard times. Firstly, the fact that nations turn to another human being reveals the basic human desire for someone to lead them. Bradman has even been referred to as Australia's Churchill in hard times, a man who was able to lead his people through difficult times. Just as Churchill "gave his people the spirit to keep on fighting when defeat looked inevitable" (McKernan, 3 March 2001), Bradman was also seen "as the symbol of his country's indomitable spirit" (McKernan, 3 March 2001).

Another comparison to other prosperous nations can be made in the sense that other nations who love their sporting heroes do not apparently share the same amount of hero-worship for them as Australians do for theirs. For instance, when "baseball great Joe DiMaggio died [in 1999], he received considerably less coverage in the American media than Bradman did here" (Hewett, 2 March 2001).

The origins of how cricket became the sport that helped give Australia a strong sense of national identity can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As has been previously mentioned, cricket was a sport that was brought here from England. As a result of this, as Australia developed as a nation, beating 'the old enemy' at its own game became a major goal in our sporting endeavours. In the late 1800s, cricket "was the one area where Australians could match it with the rest of the world, which, in practical terms, meant the English, so it was only natural that it should become the focus of national aspirations" (Derriman, 2 January 2001). As Australian cricket teams began to be more successful against the English, their success became a source of national pride.

Another reason that cricket became a major force in the forging of an Australian sense of nationalism is because, during the late 1800s, the Australian nation had not yet been formed – Federation was only to become a reality in 1901 – yet we had a cricket team representing the nation of Australia. As the team became more successful, the surge of national pride this brought to Australians was so great that "those spectators...as they passed through the gates they did not think of themselves as New South Welshmen, or Victorians, or South Australians, but as Australians" (Derriman, 2 January 2001).

The period of the late 1800s up until the time of Bradman in the 1930s saw quite a dramatic shift in the attitudes of Australians to the 'Mother Country'. In the late 1800s, beating England at cricket was seen as being "accepted as being as good as the English, for them [Australians] the ultimate compliment" (Derriman, 2 January 2001). By the time that Bradman made his entry into first class cricket however, in the late 1920s, the First World War had been fought, costing 60,000 Australian lives, and the Great Depression was starting to adversely affect the lives of thousands of Australians. As a result, Australians' attitudes towards the English soured to a large extent.

At this time there were also sectarian divisions between Protestants and Catholics in Australian society. These divisions manifested themselves in the Australian cricket team as well. Players such as Jack Fingleton and Bill O'Reilly were players with strong Irish-Catholic backgrounds and therefore quite anti-English in attitude, while Bradman was from a Protestant background. When Australian cricket teams toured England in the 1930s, Bradman saw it very much as going 'home'. It can be seen as somewhat of an irony then that Bradman's extraordinary influence on Australian nationalism during his career actually helped Australia to distance itself from the 'Mother Country'.

## **1948**

Don Bradman's influence in contributing to a sense of Australian national identity was not only seen during the 1930s.

Following the Second World War his influence was probably just as great as Australians attempted to return to a semblance of normality in their daily lives.

During the war, which lasted from 1939 to 1945, Test cricket was not played. It resumed in Australia in 1946-47 when an English team toured Australia to resume the Ashes contests. At the beginning of this season there was much speculation about whether or not Bradman would resume his Test career. He was suffering from ill health and there was the inevitable talk that he would not be the player he was in the 1930s. Despite this however, to not play against England would have been to Bradman "like desertion of the game which meant so much to him – and still needed him so badly" (Page 1983, p. 274). He also personally felt "a strong obligation to re-establish post-war Test cricket" (Allen 2001, p. 24) and that "he owed a final debt to cricket" (Allen 2001, p. 25) before he retired. This principled attitude of Bradman to the game of cricket was significant in the creation of a sense of national identity in Australia after the war. He was always one to put principles before his own self-interest. His decision to play once again for Australia comes across as all the more noble today as it "fuse[d] nationalism and sport in an heroic and pure way that has now been lost forever to the trivialities of commercialism and celebrity" (Sydney Morning Herald, 27 February 2001).

The type of nationalism that Bradman's decision to play inspired however was slightly different to that in the 1930s when, during the time of the Great Depression, Australian relations with England were rather tense. Following the war, the feeling of England being the 'Mother Country' was quite strong once again for many Australians. Bradman's significance at this time was that he helped bring not only Australia, but also England, together as a nation again by his decision to resume playing cricket. In a gesture that helped to cement the good relationship between Australia and England, Bradman decided that the 1948 Australian team to tour England would provide "200 food parcels for presentation to the British Ministry of Food to ease the exigencies of continued rationing, in advance reciprocity of that which the Australians would consume on tour" (Haigh, 28 February 2001).

As well as this, with the war having ended so recently, people were yearning for a sense of normality to return to their lives. Bradman's significance to Australian life at this time rested a lot on his reputation, on being known as Australia's great hope during hard times. The years following the war were still hard times for Australia as well as England and people needed Bradman to play to help restore hope in their lives. Commenting on the opening of the First Test of the 1946-47 series, one newspaper "described Bradman as 'the young man who has arrived in our lives again to take our minds off post-war problems'" (Page 1983, p. 277).

The 1948 Australian tour of England, in which Bradman captained Australia for the last time, was, in terms of Bradman's influence, the most significant post-War event that helped cement a sense of national identity in Australia. As mentioned, life in Australia immediately following the war was difficult. It was a time when "there was such a housing shortage that Australians entered ballots for newly built houses, lived in fibro garages or – in the outer suburbs – in tents on vacant blocks" (Allen 2001, p. 8). As the Australian team was preparing to tour, "rationing on meat and petrol was only just being phased out" (Allen 2001, p. 8). The 1948 team, and Bradman in particular, helped fuse a sense of nationalism once again in a nation that had been ravaged by the war. It has been mentioned that because we did not have any real Australian icons "all our desires for national validity were tied up with this extraordinary team" (Allen 2001, p. 8), particularly with Bradman leading it. As well as this, as previously stated, throughout Australian history, "sporting dominance was our way out of any sense of colonial inferiority" (Allen 2001, p. 8) and the fact that Bradman was playing once again caused Australians to be "one big family" (Allen 2001, p. 8), taking our minds off the troubles of post-war Australia.

That the 1948 team would go down in history as the 'Invincibles' for being the only team not to lose a single match on a tour of England is an achievement in itself. However, the significance of Don Bradman's influence on the Australian national psyche at the time by captaining the team on this tour cannot be underestimated.

### Conclusion

In this essay I have attempted to discuss the influence of Sir Donald Bradman on contributing to a sense of Australian nationalism and national identity during some of the most difficult times in the history of Australia. I have deliberately mentioned that he contributed, rather than cemented, our sense of nationalism and national identity, for these qualities are forever evolving as we continue to develop as a nation.

Don Bradman, through his unparalleled cricketing deeds as well as his exemplary attitude in the playing of the game, was both an inspiration and a hero to ordinary Australians during the years of the Great Depression in the 1930s as well as during the rebuilding of Australia in the years following the Second World War. He was the one person to whom Australians could look in their desire to be recognised as equal to the rest of the world. He was the image of the 'Aussie battler' taking on the might of one of the most powerful empires the world has seen and beating them at their own game. He showed us that through determined effort and hard work, we could be as good as anyone. He lifted our national self-esteem. His example also showed that we are a determined people who will not tolerate pretence. At a time when we never needed it more, Don Bradman helped unify the nation and helped us define who we are as Australians. For leaving us this legacy, we are forever indebted to him.

### List of References

- Allen, P. 2001, *The Invincibles – The Legend of Bradman's 1948 Australians*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney.
- Alomes, S. & Jones, C. 1991, *Australian Nationalism – A Documentary History*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde.
- Archer, J. 1997, 'Situating Australian National Identity in Theory and Practice' in ed. Stokes, G., *The Politics of Identity in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.
- Cannon, M. 1996, *The Human Face of the Great Depression*, Cannon, Mornington.
- Clarke, H. 1983, *The Broke and the Broken – Life in the Great Depression*, Boolarong, Brisbane.
- Derriman, P. 2 January 2001, 'A Century Forged on Pitch Battles', <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/0101/02/sport/sport5.html>>, (accessed 24 July 2001).
- Haigh, G. 28 February 2001, 'The Bookends', <<http://www.thepavilion.com.au/halloffame/2001/02/28/FFXQWWVJJC.html>>, (accessed 24 July 2001).
- Heinemann Australian Dictionary 1978, *nationalism*, Heinemann Educational Australia, Richmond.
- Hewett, J. 2 March 2001, 'The Don was a worldbeater but it's time to move on', <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/0103/02/features/features8.html>>, (accessed 11 July 2001).
- Loxton, S. 28 February 2001, 'An evening with the Invincibles', speech, Hotel Shoppingtown, Doncaster.
- Mallett, A. 2000, *Bradman's Band*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia.
- Masson, M. 1993, *Surviving the Dole Years – The 1930s – A Personal Story*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington.
- McKernan, M. 3 March 2001, 'Behind the Mystique', <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/0103/03/handheld/sport6.html>>, (accessed 11 July 2001).
- Page, M. 1983, *Bradman – The Illustrated Biography*, Macmillan, Australia.
- Smith, A. 2 March 2001, 'Radio National's The Sports Factor – The Don', <<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/sportsf/stories/s253062.htm>>, (accessed 15 September 2001).
- Sports Illustrated 2001, 'Lasting Legacy', <[http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/cricket/news/2001/02/26/bodyline\\_bradman/](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/cricket/news/2001/02/26/bodyline_bradman/)>, (accessed 24 July 2001).
- Sydney Morning Herald. 27 February 2001, 'Vale Don Bradman', <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/0102/27/html/editorial.html>>, (accessed 24 July 2001).
- 'The Greatest Galloper of a Generation?', <<http://136.154.202.14/pharlap/plgallop.htm>>, (accessed 18 August 2001).
- Tran, M. 1999, 'National Identity' in ed. Healey, J., *Issues in Society - Australia's National Identity*, Vol. 133, The Spinney Press, Balmain.
- Vizard, S. 1999, 'On being Australian' in ed. Healey, J., *Issues in Society - Australia's National Identity*, Vol. 133, The Spinney Press, Balmain.

by Nils von Kalm  
2001