# Then Came Massacre

## The Story of Maurice Tate, Cricket's Smiling Destroyer

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*For Caroline, Iris, Nora, Alan and Lynda*

# Introduction

THE WORDS ON the front of the bus screech into view. It is only a little bus, a single decker. No one really notices the number 46 as it begins its journey from Coldean to Southwick.

Yet the bus is not just a number; it has a name. Its name is Maurice—Maurice Tate. The words are printed above the bumper in letters a few inches high. Unbeknown to almost all of Brighton and Hove Bus and Coach Company's customers, the bored teenagers and middle-aged women waiting on a dreary afternoon, the vehicle is proclaiming the name of one of Britain's greatest sportsmen.

Maurice Tate walked along much of the bus's route, was born a street away from it, and devastated cricketing records not far from the other end of it.

He was one of the greatest bowlers ever to pull on an England sweater, and one of the greatest characters. For a decade and a half he was among the most famous men in the British Empire.

It all changed so suddenly. Maurice Tate rose, within two-and-a-half years, from being an obscure county spin bowler to being universally recognised as the best pace bowler in the world. Even the shrewdest observers instantly ranked him among the most magnificent performers in the history of cricket—an innovator, an accelerator of the game's evolution.

Tate's feats of physical endurance, and his mental and physical condition, made the front pages of the world's most popular newspapers. They provoked Fleet Street's finest to campaign against the mandarins at Lord's on his behalf. His outsized feet were a source of amazement to rank alongside the fictional King Kong. His smiling, pipe-smoking persona demanded affection even from Australians.

Maurice Tate, in his day, enjoyed a celebrity, a fascination, which transcended his sport, and all sport. On 5th July 1930 a newspaper, South Australia's *Register News-Pictorial*, printed a letter written by 16-year-old Gladys Boorman, who lived in the village of Port Willunga: "We have a sulphur-crested cockatoo named Maurice (after Maurice Tate). He is very clever. As soon as an aeroplane shows over the hilltop, he cries out 'Aeroplane' until we run and have a look. He lives in a big cage all day, but in a little round one at night that just fits a kitchen chair. After tea we all sit in the dining room reading and Morry comes out and sits on mother's lap to be petted. Early in the morning he wakes us up by calling, 'cup o' tea!' Altogether he can say about 50 phrases. You ought to see the neighbours run when he says 'Aeroplane!'"

The real Maurice was just as chatty and demanding of adoration. As young Ms Boorman's letter demonstrates, he was known well beyond cricket. His was a genial fame. There was an easy familiarity, an unusual informality.

Unlike today's stars, surrounded by security guards and publicity agents, one could knock on the door of Maurice Tate's humble home and engage him in conversation. Boys in the park could play knockabout games of cricket with him.

All the while he destroyed first-class and Test batsmen in their hundreds. He did not profess fully to understand his powers, leaving that to those of a more analytical persuasion. The success, an apparent fulfilment of a gift beyond its owner's comprehension or making, was beautifully summed up in a report published in the *Sussex Daily News* in 1925. During a spell of sustained hostility which left Glamorgan's batsmen groping helplessly, seven wickets fell entirely to Tate—no fielders or wicketkeeper needed as five were bowled, one was out leg before and the other was caught and bowled. The unnamed journalist, in the middle of an otherwise sober and factual account, wrote a simple, three-word sentence: "Then came massacre."

Indeed it did. Such destruction of wickets and opposition morale was, at one stage of Tate's career, happening at least once a week. The brilliance was so sustained that to repeat the statistics in too much detail risks becoming banal.

Yet who today, even those using the bus in his home town, could tell you who Maurice Tate was? Who could recall the wonder contemporaries showed when, by some superhuman ability, his bowling seemed to 'gain pace' off the pitch? And where is the replayed footage of the six-hitting with which he entertained crowds around the world when he had his bowling boots off?

Only a bus, one of a fleet renamed to commemorate Brighton and Hove's great and good, pays clear homage to him. No statues stand in the city whose people he gave so much entertainment in politically and economically troubled times.

There are other reminders, visible only to the few who already know of his greatness: a plaque here, a set of gates there. People who witnessed his achievements would scarcely comprehend how little is remembered.

The names of Harold Larwood, Douglas Jardine, Jack Hobbs and Wally Hammond flow quickly from the tongues of those possessing the tiniest knowledge of cricket's history. Criminally, Maurice Tate's does not.

His fame was based not only on his achievements but the circumstances from which he came. His father, Fred, had been an England cricketer, at least very briefly. Normally, having international sporting experience in the blood would be seen as an advantage, a way in to a career. But that would depend on the deeds of the father.

It is to this Fred, perhaps the most infamous and pitied man in the history of Test match cricket, that we must turn as we begin the story of the truly extraordinary Maurice Tate.

# Chapter 1

# Fred's Match.

"*Tate had not the stern fibre of character that can survive in an air of high tragedy; his bent was for pastoral comedy down at Horsham.*"
—Neville Cardus

FRED TATE'S 35TH birthday promised to be unlike any other. This increasingly rotund county cricketer—affectionately known as "Chub" by his many friends in the game—was finally going to the big time.

An uncomplaining county off-spinner, he was one of the supporting cast in what later became known as cricket's 'golden age'—the late Victorian and early Edwardian run-fest where gentleman stroke-makers were rulers of the public imagination. Tate, a little quicker through the air than most spinners, had been steadily accumulating wickets for Sussex since 1887, while the glamour boys of the team—the technically brilliant CB Fry and the sumptuously wristy and exotic Kumar Sri Ranjitsinhji, or "Ranji"—scored and scored on the batsman-friendly wickets at Hove.

Tate's career thus far had been a good one. Not a household name, he would have been well known to true devotees of the game, the collectors of scorecards and accumulators of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*. Up until now he had teased out more than a thousand batsmen, earning little financially or in plaudits for his hard work.

There had been high points, including nine wickets in an innings against Hampshire in 1891. But 1902 was different. Surpassing the expectations of others, and probably himself, Tate was consistently brilliant. By the end of the season he had taken 180 wickets at an average of just 15.71. Touring the shires and cities, this moustachioed man tormented team after team. Normally more of a containing bowler, one against whom even the best batsmen did not take liberties but could survive with a bit of watchfulness, a wet summer was helping to turn him into an insatiable, corpulent predator. Nine wickets came for 73 runs in the first innings of Sussex's match at Leicester in June and 15 wickets in the Middlesex match a fortnight later.

At the same time, England were playing Australia in what turned out to be one of the most absorbing Ashes series in history. The likes of Victor Trumper, Hugh Trumble, Monty Noble, Clem Hill and Warwick Armstrong made the side one of the greatest to have visited 'the Old Country'. England had a pretty decent line-up too, with names like Fry, Ranji, brilliant medium-pacer Sydney Barnes, dashing batsman Stanley Jackson and all-rounder George Hirst at their disposal, led by the imperious Archie MacLaren.

By the time the fourth Test at Old Trafford started on 24th July—Tate's birthday—Australia were one game up in the series with two to go. The selectors had made several changes. Out went Fry, not a success that summer, having scored only one and four in the previous Test. Barnes, later renowned as the best bowler in history, was also dropped.

Hirst, with his careful batting and accurate left-arm pace bowling, regarded then, and now, as one of the best all-rounders to have played the game, remained

in the squad. In his career he took 2,739 wickets, but that July he was out of form. In the third Test, at Sheffield, which England lost, he had taken no wickets for 99.

With England requiring two victories from the last two games of the series, the selectors felt a need for change. Tate represented some fresh, albeit 35-year-old, blood. He made his way to Old Trafford with trepidation, no doubt, but a sense of excitement and possibly thoughts that his elevation, if successful, could lead to a more permanent place with England, maybe a few overseas tours to boost the funds. And, of course, at the back of his mind, he, like anyone else who plays against Australia, would like to have been remembered as the man who won, or at least helped to win, the Ashes. How cruel a game it can be.

Ranji, who had been unable to play at Sheffield, replaced his friend Fry. Somerset batsman Lionel Palairet came in for Gloucestershire's dasher Gilbert Jessop and Surrey medium-fast bowler Bill Lockwood took Barnes's place. The Test was scheduled for three days, as was normal in England at the time.

Captain MacLaren was not happy with the 12 players he had to choose from, particularly Tate, whom he reportedly did not rate as Test-class. So, apparently in a fit of pique and to demonstrate to the selectors the folly of their ways, he decided to omit Hirst and include the Sussex man in the starting 11. Tate became the 135th man to play for England. The Yorkshire press and public, never fond of Lancastrians like MacLaren, were furious.

On a rainy Thursday so typical of the Manchester climate, the captains tossed and Australia's Joe Darling won. He decided to bat. The pitch, uncovered, was very wet. It did not have the drying-out dampness of a 'sticky dog', the type which allowed the bowler to play cruel tricks on the batsman, with leaping or scuttling deliveries making his short-lived stay at the wicket a misery. Rather it was near-sodden, deadening the ball, allowing plenty of time to play shots. But it was sure to get more difficult with a bit of sunshine and wear and tear. As the *Manchester Guardian* noted: "The winning of the toss, one said at the time, meant the winning of the game… It was really a great slice of luck to them to go in first on a wicket which offered no help whatsoever to the bowler."

Luck has to be capitalised upon, though, and, in Victor Trumper, Australia had someone capable of doing so. What a joy it must have been to watch this batsman in full flow. The England bowlers were not as enamoured as, under grey skies, he and opening partner Reggie Duff scored 135 before the first wicket—that of Duff—fell. Trumper glided and drove his way to 104, reaching his century before lunch. It was an innings regarded as one of near perfection. The writer Neville Cardus, a boy at the time, remembered, probably apocryphally, being hit by one of the crisply hit strokes as he sat with his friends on the boundary, enraptured like thousands of others by the peerless opener's display.

His team-mates were not so successful. Australia collapsed as the wicket hardened up and Bill Lockwood, working up a nice pace, took six wickets for 48 runs, having come on as third change. Left-arm spinner Wilfred Rhodes opened the attack. In those days it was normal if a pitch began soft that the slower men came on first, as they were deemed more likely to get some assistance. Apart from Trumper and Duff, Clem Hill, at three, made 65, and skipper Darling, at six, hit a fighting 51, containing five fours and two sixes. No one else made much of an

impact as Australia were all out for 299, a total which still looked imposing on a pitch likely to decline in quality.

Tate, at first change, bowled 11 overs for 44 runs, a run rate lower than the rest of the attack except Lockwood. Observers complained that he had bowled a little too short, but it was still a fairly tidy start. It was especially commendable considering Tate who, like all professionals, had to sort out and pay for their own accommodation, had spent a fitful night trying to sleep in a Manchester attic. There was little else in the way of places to stay as the city thronged with excited cricket fans.

England got into a dreadful mess when they began their reply on the Thursday evening. Hugh Trumble, the tall and devilishly difficult off-spinner, opened with the slow left-armer Jack Saunders. Batting became as grim as the smoggy cityscape of Manchester itself. With the total on 12, the diminutive 44-year-old Surrey professional Bobby Abel was caught in the gigantic hands of Warwick Armstrong off Saunders' bowling. One run later, Palairet was out. Another run added and skipper MacLaren, to the disappointment of the adoring Lancastrian fans, was bowled by Trumble. Next it was the turn of a nervous-looking Ranji, dismissed lbw for two by Trumble. Johnny Tyldesley, another Lancastrian, at least made a bit of a fight of it before he was dismissed by Saunders for 22.

The score read 44 for five and England were in desperate trouble. It was time for someone to show a bit of gumption. In Jackson and Len Braund, the jovial leg-spinning all-rounder from Somerset, they got just that. At first, the pair played ultra-cautiously, dead-batting everything away, as Trumble, Saunders and the accurate, medium-fast Noble bombarded them. They survived until close of play. On Friday Jackson and Braund returned to the crease and began to open up a bit, as gusty winds dried the residue of overnight rain in such a way as to reduce the pitch's stickiness. Jackson, the slim Yorkshire amateur, soon looked imperious, second only in quality in that match to Trumper himself. Braund contributed a valiant 65 off 165 balls, including nine fours. By the time the pair were separated, when Braund was bowled by Noble, they had advanced the total to 185.

Jackson, running out of partners, went on the attack. At number 11 came the new man, Tate of Sussex. He had never been regarded as a batsman but he could hold an end up and even hit a few. Remain at the crease he did, as he and Jackson put on 27 for the last wicket. Jackson was last out for 128 off 255 balls, including 16 fours. They returned to an ovation. Tate, five not out, was happy with his efforts so far.

The team had scored 262, conceding a lead of 37 to the Australians. The visitors were still favourites, but not by much. The weather was still changeable on that Friday afternoon as Australia went in to bat again and, in an enthralling couple of hours, Manchester became the scene of mayhem and mishap. This time England opened their attack with Lockwood and Braund. Lockwood dismissed Trumper for four, Hill for a duck and Duff for three. The score was 10 for three and England had an excellent chance of taking the game.

In Hollywood films, sporting contests come down to one moment when the protagonist is under the most pressure. Almost without fail they succeed, modestly accepting the acclaim of the masses, entering legend. The chance comes to very few people. Fred Tate, on only his second day in Test cricket, was one.

Captain Joe Darling, a belligerent left-hander, decided the best way to regain the initiative was to take the attack to the England bowlers. Syd Gregory, a right-hander, joined him at the crease. During an over from Braund, Gregory hit a single to give Darling the strike. MacLaren then made a decision for which he has been damned for more than a century.

Palairet, a Somerset team-mate of Braund, had been fielding at deep square leg to his bowling, his specialist spot down at Taunton. Rather than asking him to cross the entire ground to assume the same position he was in for Gregory when Darling was facing, MacLaren decided to move Tate out to the boundary. It hardly seemed worth making him traipse a hundred yards or so for the last ball of the over. So Tate, instead, trotted towards deep square leg. For Sussex, though, Tate, with no throwing arm to speak of, always fielded at slip or in the covers.

The field settled, Braund came in to bowl. He let go of a leg-break which spun in to Darling. Still only on 17, Darling played a hoick-sweep, sending the ball travelling through the air towards Tate. It seemed to sway this way and that, the pressure of the situation making the task he was about to attempt all the harder. Tate watched as the ball started to descend, buffeted by the cool breeze. He opened his hands, hoping he could do his bit for the team and return happily to slip, where a dropped catch is more forgivable and less humiliating. The crowd watched too. Tate's hands were all wrong. Down came the ball. Towards his hands. Would he take the catch? Surely he must. He had to.

Then *it* happened. Tate tried to grab the ball with his left hand—and dropped it. The most famous fielding error in cricketing history played out in front of thousands of shocked Mancunians. They shook their heads, probably wondering if George Hirst would have held it, whether even they themselves would have held it. It was an abject moment, no doubt, but the full significance was not yet known. After all, the pitch was difficult and Australia were three down for next to nothing. Anything could still happen.

Tate returned to slip to ponder his failure. His sadness and embarrassment turned to horror, as Darling and Gregory pushed on. They put on a partnership of 54. At least Tate made some amends when he dismissed Gregory lbw for 24, a good first Test wicket. The enterprising Darling continued, finally going for 37, ironically caught by Palairet, the fielder who had been eminently more qualified than Tate to take him in the outfield earlier on. Rhodes, then but a youngster, was the bowler.

In the context of the match Darling's was a supreme captain's innings. Apart from his and Gregory's efforts, the highest score by any batsman was four. Australia finished the Friday night on a still-parlous 85 for eight. It could have been even better for England, had it not been for Tate. *Wisden* reported: "If the catch had been held it is quite likely, as Lockwood was bowling in such wonderful form, that the Australians would have been out for a total of 50 or 60."

Early on Saturday morning it rained solidly for five hours. When the players took the field just before midday, Australia's tail, like most of the top order, showed little resistance. Tate quickly gained his second wicket: Trumble lbw for four. Rhodes snaffled Saunders for a duck to leave the visitors all out for 86, a lead of just 123. Tate's figures—two for seven off five overs—were rather

impressive, and he took the catch at slip to give the sensational Lockwood the fourth of his five wickets in the innings—and tenth of the match.

Requiring only 124 to win, the 20,000-strong crowd and the press now had England as favourites to square the Ashes with one match, at the Oval, to go. But Tate's drop had turned winning from a formality into a mere probability.

The final innings opened at 12.40pm. MacLaren, determined to lead by example, promoted himself to open with Palairet and they made a steady start. Palairet was first out with the score on 44—80 more to get, with nine wickets in hand. Trumble was bowling brilliantly on a pitch not deemed to be quite as lively as at some points during Australia's collapse, and Saunders, after a few opening overs from Noble, was landing his slow left-armers—interspersed with rapid arm-balls—on the spot.

At 68 Lancashire's Johnny Tyldesley was caught by Armstrong off Saunders for 16. Then came a baffling display from Ranji. This most fluent of players, Tate's captain at Sussex, stuttered and stumbled. His timing and composure deserted him, to the astonishment of the crowd. However, MacLaren was the first of the pair to go, caught in the deep by Duff off Trumble for 35. The score was 72 for three and, without the doughty captain at the crease, the dressing room became more jittery, as the players contemplated Ranji's difficulties. Still, there was no need to panic—which made MacLaren's behaviour even harder to understand. Furious with himself, he flung his bat across the dressing room and declared he had "thrown away the match and the bloody rubber". This showed little confidence in his team-mates. Quite simply, it was rotten leadership.

Ranji was joined by Jackson and continued to scratch around, perhaps justifying MacLaren's concerns. It was almost a kindness when he was lbw for the second time in the match to Trumble, this time for four runs. The score read 92 for four. Surely England had to win. Abel, at five, made some pretty strokes in his 21, but he became another victim of Trumble—97 for five.

Tate waited quietly in the pavilion, surely hoping that he would not be called upon. Jackson and Braund, the heroes of the first innings, were in, but the crowd were looking ahead fatalistically to a tight finish. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that it was "darkly whispered that Tate had some time or other been known to make his fifty". The rumour spread through the pavilion, gaining optimistic momentum. Some began to ask whether: "Tate had ever made a hundred against anybody. The evidence was not forthcoming concerning the doings of our last man in. All this in the way of cheerfulness."

The crowd became less sanguine when Jackson was unable to reproduce his first-innings brilliance, going for just seven as he played too early at Saunders, and was caught at mid-off. Braund was dismissed for three, those runs the result of a streaky edge through the slips to make it 109 for seven. Just 15 needed.

Then it started raining again, but not hard enough to force the players off. Lockwood, the bowling star, got a huge reception as he strode to the wicket. A highly strung character, he looked overcome with emotion as he was out immediately for a duck, the magnificent Trumble knocking out his leg stump.

If Tate's drop will be remembered for as long as cricket is played, Clem Hill ought to be immortalised for more positive reasons. The England wicketkeeper, Dick Lilley, batting at number eight, should have been run out by Hill, but a

rather wild return prevented this. However, he quickly gained a chance to atone. In the same over, bowled by Trumble, he achieved something wondrous. Lilley—determined to get on with things—had a hit and sent the ball skimming towards deep square leg. Unlike Darling, Lilley did not have the good fortune to find a nervous debutant waiting. Instead, Hill, who had been placed elsewhere, raced around the boundary at full pelt and held a marvellous catch, continuing for 20 yards along the turf, such was his momentum. Cardus, watching his first Test match, wrote many years later that a watching parson had called it a "sinful" piece of fielding. Lilley was out for four and England were 116 for nine. It was Tate's turn.

Eight runs to get.

In came Tate. Rhodes, at number ten, played out an over from Trumble. Then Manchester created its own drama. A heavy shower drove the players back to the pavilion for three-quarters of an hour. Tate and Rhodes waited. The time scheduled for play was running out. Would they get back out again? If so, would they be vanquishers or villains? One can barely imagine the tension within Tate and Rhodes, a future Test opening batsman, miscast as a number ten, as they came back out. "Two fours and we have won," some spectators shouted, as if they needed reminding.

Tate took guard and prepared to face the first ball. Desperately trying to remind himself to concentrate, and still possessing a Test batting average of infinity, he watched as Saunders ran in to bowl. The left-armer sent down a quicker delivery which moved to leg. Tate managed to get a touch on it and it raced down to fine leg. Warwick Armstrong, a big man but not yet as bulky as he would one day become, gave chase but failed to stop the ball with an out-stretched foot. Four more runs were added. England were now just a four—a single hit—away from squaring the Ashes. Victory was a tantalising distance away. Yet the Australians were glad Tate had scored a boundary rather than run three, as it meant the far superior Rhodes—who, in his career, scored just shy of 40,000 first-class runs—was off strike. Some England supporters expressed their annoyance.

Tate managed to block out the second ball of the over. Gathering all his watchfulness, he did the same to the next. All he had to do was stay in for three more balls and let Rhodes do the rest. Saunders summoned his composure and ran in again. Then it happened. He sent down a quicker, swinging ball. It kept low and skidded on, the sort of delivery which might have done for the very best.

Tate was bowled.

Australia had won one of the most superb Test matches of all time by three runs. They could scarcely believe it as they skipped and jumped and shouted at the tops of their voices in a show of emotion most unusual on an Edwardian cricket field. Tate stood, crestfallen.

In the 1957 film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, prisoner of war Lieutenant Colonel Nicholson, played by Alec Guinness, suddenly realises that, in his zeal to get the project finished, he might have scuppered an attempt by British forces to blow up a Japanese railway bridge built using the slave labour of troops under his command. He simply stares ahead and quietly utters the line: "What have I done?" Then he dies. Sport is infinitely less serious than war, but Tate's sense of guilt must have been unbearable. Worse still, almost as soon as the game ended, it

started raining so hard that no more play would have been possible on that Saturday. The match would have been a draw if those clouds had moved just a tad quicker.

The batting of Trumper and Jackson, Lockwood and Trumble's bowling, Hill's catch: all are as nothing in popular memory compared with Tate's dropped catch and his dismissal. The Manchester Test is recalled as "Tate's" or "poor Fred's" match. Among those more charitably disposed to the Sussex player, the blame game persisted for decades. Why did MacLaren leave George Hirst out of the team? Why did England's batsmen fail to reach such a small target? Could the top order not have adopted an approach somewhere between prodding and slogging? Why did it not start raining ten minutes earlier? Why on earth did MacLaren move Tate, and not Palairet, to deep square leg?

Tate never played for England again. Hirst was recalled for the Oval Test and took six for 84 in the game, a glorious show of "I-told-you-so" Yorkshire defiance. Another returning player, Gilbert Jessop, stroked a sublime 104 in 75 minutes. The match was as exciting as at Old Trafford. Last man Rhodes joined fellow Tyke Hirst to take the team home by just one wicket. If only Fred had been able to do the same. The Old Trafford and Oval games represent the only time in history that all results—win, loss, draw, tie—have been possible on the last ball of two Tests in a row. But it was a 'dead rubber' when Hirst and Rhodes prospered, with the Ashes already lost. The recriminations over Old Trafford continued for years. Ranji, like Tate, never played for England again.

The Hirst-worshipping, 'what-might-have-been' tendency in Yorkshire vented its anger, with one writer proclaiming of the England selectors and MacLaren: "Ministers of religion publicly prayed that heaven would open the eyes of these misguided men… When England lost by three runs, we felt this was the clearest instance of Divine retribution since the destruction of the Cities of the Plain."

MacLaren's reputation as a captain suffered. Even *Wisden* criticised his choice of starting XI, calling the inclusion of Tate instead of Hirst "a blunder". "The condition of the ground—very soft and slow after a lot of rain—offered some excuse for the course adopted," it said, "but it meant playing a bowler pure and simple in preference to a first-rate all-round man, and the result proved anything but happy."

But Warwick Armstrong, who later led possibly the best Australian team of all—the Ashes tourists of 1921—eventually offered some consolation. In 1934, he wrote an article in the *West Australian* newspaper, arguing that the reporting of MacLaren's field-placing—albeit corroborated by pretty much everyone else watching—had been inaccurate. He claimed that it was actually Braund who had asked for Tate to be placed in his alien position. Armstrong added wryly, from experience: "Onlookers do not always know what is going on in the field, and at times a captain is undeservedly blamed."

The selectors, led by Yorkshire supremo Lord Hawke, were also castigated. Hawke reportedly chose not to include Yorkshire fast-medium bowler Schofield Haigh, a specialist in wet conditions, and instead pick Tate, to protect his own county's chances of winning the championship. However, Tate was also reckoned to be very good in the damp, so it was hardly one of the unlikeliest 'horses-for-courses' selections imaginable. Anyway, it was still MacLaren who included him in

the final XI. Apart from one dropped catch, Tate did little wrong. He was, after all, just a number 11 batsman.

Tate stayed loyal to his one-time leader in later years. “As a captain I only once had the great honour of playing under Mr Archie McLaren [sic],” he wrote in a letter in 1937. “That was for England in 1902 but I always adhere to the assertion that he is the finest Captain I ever played under and it would do no harm to see him again Captain England once more.” This was a peculiar sentiment, given that MacLaren was 66 years old at the time.

Tate went on: “I have not yet seen his equal. Some only think of changing bowling but he thought of changing their minds, in which he was ever a successful venture.” Darling’s mind had seemed clouded by MacLaren’s tactics, but for only one ball. He was clearer-headed thereafter.

Tate suffered more than anyone after the 1902 Old Trafford Test, starting the moment he was bowled out. Some of the crowd booed him as he walked off, as if he had committed his twin batting and fielding failures on purpose.

When he returned to the dressing room, Tate simply sat in silence and cried, as the Australians celebrated.

The ever-jovial Braund recalled trying to cheer up his fellow professional, by joking: “Go on, Fred, get upstairs and get your money—it’s only a game.” It did not work. Tate’s train journey back to his home in the mid-Sussex town of Haywards Heath was to prove a traumatic one. At the waiting room in Manchester, feeling as if everyone was watching him, he again broke down in tears.

Tate travelled down to London with Braund and, as they trundled through the Midlands, they had a conversation. Braund recounted that he had told his friend: “Cheer up, Fred, it’ll all be forgotten in a week or so.” The Sussex man reportedly replied: “It never will.” Braund then revealed that Tate, knowing his own reputation was ruined, had told him: “I’ve got a little kid at home who’ll make it up for me.”

This is the only evidence we have that these famous words were spoken. Maybe they were. Maybe they were not. But how true they became.

# Chapter 2

## From Humble Beginnings.

“*Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.*”
—1 Corinthians 6:20

FRED TATE WAS, by most accounts, never the same man again. Within three years he had retired from county cricket. He took on a succession of coaching jobs away from Sussex, uprooting his family in a quest for success, but never seemed to achieve any peace of mind. Not that he had ever had it easy.

Frederick William Tate was born on 24th July 1867 in the infirmary of the Brighton workhouse. Sarah Tate, a 30-year-old woman from the town, was listed

as the mother. The birth certificate names no father. Fred was illegitimate, a great source of stigma in those times. Years later, romantic stories circulated within the family of him being the son of a mysterious Russian prince. Such claims are unprovable, and unlikely.

The cold, imposing Brighton workhouse building was designed to loom above the town as a deterrent against fecklessness and immorality. It could have been worse, though. As workhouses in the mid-to-late-Victorian era went, it was one of the more humane.

The *Lancet Commission*, set up in 1865 to look at the standards of care in these institutions, described Brighton as a "model" for others. Dr E Russell, the workhouse's medical officer, wrote to the commission, reporting that "the lying in wards held a large preponderance of single women, mostly servant girls". The institution's role, as far as Sarah Tate was concerned, appears benevolent: to provide sanitary conditions, irrespective of circumstance, in which to have a child. There is no evidence that she and Fred stayed there afterwards.

Unlike many "fallen women", Sarah Tate's family did not abandon her. By the 1871 census, three-year-old Fred was living at 9 Chichester Street, Brighton, one of a row of small terraced houses just across from The Level, the park next to which Sussex had once played their games before moving to Hove. Also resident were mother Sarah and grandmother Priscilla, and Sarah's younger brother, a decorator. Fred was still there in 1881, by which time the name of the road had been changed to Kingsbury Street. It is likely the youngster, a confident, extrovert figure, indulged in some knockabout games on the open grass of The Level, learning from experience rather than the guiding hand of a father.

Priscilla and Sarah are recorded in the census as "upholstresses". It was not an unusual trade. Some 71 upholstery firms or providers were listed in the 1868 edition of Pike's Directory, detailing people's addresses and businesses.

Fred was lucky in one respect. He was growing up in Sussex, the crucible of bat and ball games. A pub called the Bat and Ball still overlooks The Level today. It was not named after cricket but a curious sport called 'bat and trap'. In it, a batsman uses his bat to smack a wooden 'trap' which flicks a small ball into the air. He then whacks the ball, aiming to hit it between two white posts 21 yards away. Doing so achieves a 'run'. Hitting wide of the posts results in a dismissal. After a run is scored, the bowler's job is to try to roll the ball all the way back along the pitch and knock over a small board at the end of the trap. This also achieves a dismissal.

Teams, consisting of eight people, usually have three innings each, the one with the most runs winning. Bat and trap is a curiously non-interactive game, with the batsman and bowler not really affecting each other's performance. It is nowadays played mainly in pub gardens.

Stoolball is another game native to Sussex. Batters defend boards placed on sticks at each end of a pitch. The ball is bowled underarm thrown through the air. Runs are scored by hitting the ball with the banjo-shaped wooden bats. Such activities, along with cricket, would have been seen frequently on The Level, giving Fred an early familiarity with the arts of propelling and repelling a ball. It would provide a decent grounding.

As a boy, Fred made use of Brighton's most famous natural resource, delighting in clambering across the pebbly beach for a swim in the ever-chilly English Channel. Even into adulthood, he thought nothing of circumnavigating the West Pier, which opened the year before he was born, but which is now sadly derelict.

Fred had more physical freedom than most children today, but this is not to say his upbringing was in any way feral. Sarah raised him to be respectable, polite, articulate and modest. Part of this involved becoming a chorister at nearby St Peter's Church, which had become Brighton's parish church in 1873. Joining proved fortuitous.

The church decided to do its bit to promote "muscular Christianity", the theory that playing organised games can be good for the soul and create discipline, partially based on a passage from Corinthians: "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

In 1883 St Peter's, keen to ensure the choirboys' spiritual cleanliness, set up its own cricket team. Among the first participants was Fred. In 1884 the team expanded its intake, and started competing in Brighton league competition in 1888. One of Fred's team-mates was a young cleric, the Reverend FLP Maurice. He evidently became a father figure, which had previously been lacking. The Rev Maurice was also associated with an important development in the county cricket scene of the time. He played quite frequently in games organised by the sports-mad third Earl of Sheffield at his purpose-built ground in Sheffield Park, East Sussex.

The Earl had ambitions higher than organising his own social matches and devised one of the most innovative talent-spotting ventures of the time. Alfred Shaw, the leading bowler of the 1870s, was taken on to oversee trials involving boys in locations around Sussex. Those who showed ability moved on to coaching sessions at Sheffield Park. The aim was to turn this raw talent into county players of the future. Fred, possibly being touted by the Rev Maurice, was one such teenager. Once 'discovered' he quickly became involved with Sussex. He made his first appearance for the county's Colts at Hove in May 1885, aged 17, a week after taking five for 21 for RT Ellis's XI against Alfred Shaw's XI. He also played in trial matches at Sheffield Park that year and in 1886.

Fred's first-class debut came on 20th June 1887, the day of nationwide celebrations for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. A large Bank Holiday crowd ensured a good atmosphere against Yorkshire at the Bradford ground. Tate scored one and 26 in the match and bowled 12 overs for 26 runs and no wicket. It was his only appearance that year.

The next year, 1888, saw his first full season and one of the more remarkable feats in county cricket history. On a soggy pitch at Tonbridge, Kent required only 45 to win. They made it, but only just, as Fred took five wickets—all bowled—for just one run.

Sussex's pitches during this era, however, were best described as "heart-breaking" or "soul-destroying". Hard years of toil on surfaces designed for his more famous batting colleagues to prosper were just beginning, eventually to culminate in the unfairly career-defining ignominy of his sole Test appearance.

While with Sussex, Fred stayed in touch with his club. St Peter's has kept its records from the 1890s, when he continued to turn out whenever he could, even amid the grind of the county season. In 1890, a year when he did not feature for Sussex for reasons unknown, he was listed as "vice-captain" of St Peter's. It seems, though, that money was a problem. At the end of the season he was 11 shillings in arrears on his annual subscription.

But in most seasons he featured top, or near the top, of the bowling averages and, sometimes, the batting averages. The records reveal some information which would have surprised the apprehensive crowd at Old Trafford in 1902, who wondered whether Tate had ever scored a century anywhere. He had. In 1891 he made exactly 100 not out for St Peter's, although the location and opponent are not recorded. The performance was part of a streak of 244 runs in just five innings. Tate's average of 61 was more than double that of anyone else.

He could bat a bit, but will forever be remembered as one of cricket's—and sport's—most notorious failures.

# Chapter 3

## Sprint to the Altar.

"*For Gawd's sake, get me to the church on time.*"
—Eliza Doolittle, My Fair Lady

IT WAS VIA St Peter's and the Earl of Sheffield's scheme that the conversationally gifted Fred, later a noted raconteur on the county scene, began to mix in higher social circles than he had known as a fatherless youth. Sussex's festival weeks at Hastings, Eastbourne and Horsham provided ample opportunity for a sturdily handsome man like him to prosper. Dances were held and romances flourish, with cricket being a way to get to know women.

This was probably how Fred met his wife, who came from an altogether more well-to-do background. Gertrude Maria Beach was born in 1872 to William and Eliza Beach. William Beach was a civil engineer and architect who designed many of the best houses in mid-Sussex at the time. The Beaches, who lived in Wivelsfield, the next stop down the London-to-Brighton line from Haywards Heath, appear to have been a warm, loving family. They might not entirely have approved of Gertrude's partner, though.

Over the years the date of Fred and Gertrude's marriage has been vaguely referred to as taking place in Brighton in the year 1894. However, hours of trawling through the public records available provided me with no such information. So I decided to widen the search, looking at 1893. Still nothing came up.

It was only when the records for 1895 were checked that a Frederick William Tate appeared, listed as having married in Brighton during the second quarter of that year. I cross-referenced the entry to find a Gertrude Maria Beach had become

his spouse. An inquiry to the General Records Office resulted in my ordering a copy of the marriage certificate, to find out the specific details. It provided one hell of a surprise.

Frederick William Tate and Gertrude Maria Beach, it can be categorically stated, became husband and wife at St Peter's Church, Brighton, on 29th May 1895. The reason for the ongoing cageyness about the date was that Gertrude was, by this time, heavily pregnant with their first child. Very heavily pregnant.

The late Victorians took a dim view of pre-marital sex and no family would have wanted details of such activities to become a cause for gossip and dishonour. But illegitimacy was an even bigger stigma. Some women killed themselves after giving birth out of wedlock, usually having been disowned by their families.

Even more hideous was the practice of 'baby farming', which quite rightly created a moral panic at the time. It involved a mother, keen to avoid the ongoing trauma of social exclusion over illegitimacy, handing her child to another woman for nursing, fostering or even adoption. It usually involved a payment to the 'carer', considered worthwhile if it kept the birth secret.

Some baby farmers intentionally neglected the children in their charge. They dosed up infants on opiates, thereby suppressing their hunger, allowing them to starve to death. Some mothers gave their tacit approval. Others who had handed over their babies with better intentions found it hard to go to the police, as this would re-awaken the chance of social disgrace they had tried to avoid in the first place.

A minority of baby farmers simply killed the children in their charge, strangulation being a preferred method. In 1896, a hard-faced former nurse called Amelia Dyer, who had been in and out of lunatic asylums for several years, was hanged for the murder of four-month-old Doris Marmon. Dyer, before her execution, wrote a confession, but the total tally of her victims is still a matter of conjecture, as she failed to mention numbers. A widely held estimate is around 400.

The efforts of Sarah Tate to bring up Fred in the context of so much ill-doing elsewhere are little short of heroic. Her mother Priscilla's decision to stand by her and offer her a home was also noble. Fred had almost made the same 'mistake' as his mother, although to his credit, seemingly unlike his own father, he was ready to remain with his partner and prevent his child being dubbed a 'bastard', with all the attendant disadvantages.

Perhaps instigated by the Beaches, who were present at the wedding, there was a dash to the altar—or an uncomfortable waddle in Gertrude's case.

For, the very next day, the couple's first child was born.

# Chapter 4

## The Making of Maurice.

"*My baby milk was diluted with cricket.*"

—Maurice Tate

FAMILY RESPECTABILITY JUST about maintained, Maurice William Tate was born at 28 Warleigh Road, Brighton, on 30th May 1895. It was the hottest May day for 27 years, the temperature reaching 86.2 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade. The reason for leaving the marriage until just one day before Maurice's birth will probably never be known. Did Fred prevaricate over his commitments? Was he frogmarched there by the Beaches? Of course, the exact birth date cannot be predicted, but Gertrude's waters might even have been breaking by the time of the ceremony.

Whatever the situation, Fred took three weeks off work after the birth, not appearing for Sussex again until 20th June. This may have followed an offer of compassionate leave on the club's part, or a granting of the player's request for time off to sort out his affairs. It may even have been an attempt to allow the scandal, or near-scandal, to blow over. But, like his mother Sarah, who had not abandoned him in 1867, Fred did the right thing.

Throughout his life Maurice's date of birth was wrongly listed as 28th April 1895, rather than 30th May. It was a mistake which, had anybody bothered to investigate, would have made him appear to have been born out of wedlock. There is the possibility that the birth certificate was forged to hide such a fact, but this is unlikely, and certainly unprovable. And, if the family had gone to such lengths to avoid disgrace, why would they then mention the earlier date? It is most strange.

Maurice was baptised on 25th August, in Preston parish, a quiet area then on the outskirts of Brighton. No godparents were listed as present. It was all rather low-key for a well-known sportsman and the daughter of a prominent family.

The baby's middle name William was a Tate tradition. Conveniently, it was also Gertrude's father's name. The forename Maurice was after Fred's vicar friend and mentor FLP Maurice. It derives from the word 'Moorish', the European description of the African Muslims who ruled much of Spain for more than 700 years during the Middle Ages. Its meaning is 'dark-skinned', one of the physical characteristics for which the perma-tanned Maurice, exposed to more sunshine than most, later became known.

The Anglo-Scottish surname Tate comes from the Old Norse word 'teitr', meaning 'glad' or 'cheerful'. The Tates, fittingly for believers in nominative determinism, were outwardly happy folk, Fred never one to complain about his lot, at least in public. The deferential nature of the gentleman-player system of the time precluded too much moaning, and he was, after all, getting paid for doing a fulfilling, in its own way rather glamorous, job. It was certainly better than the workhouse.

County professionals of the late 19th century were not well remunerated, but they earned more than manual and even skilled labourers. Warleigh Road was one of the elegant, recently built streets full of spacious terraced houses constructed in what were then the outskirts of a rapidly expanding Brighton and Hove. The population had increased by more than half between 1861 and 1891, going from 88,361 to 136,419.

A fading plaque still commemorates number 28's once-famous connection. It seems like a comfortable place to be born. Yet Fred was not the owner. That role

fell to William Leppard, who offered lodgings, the name of the building being Arundel House. It was a relatively anonymous setting for young parents who did not wish to be seen by friends and neighbours. Leppard probably made a living out of being discreet.

Young Maurice's time in Brighton was short as, replete with the takings of a record Sussex benefit of £1,051 in 1901, Fred bought the Burrell Arms in Haywards Heath. He and Gertrude became publicans, part of a long tradition of playing 'mine host' among sportsmen. Just opposite the railway station, the pub was a good location for a journeyman cricketer to complete the many trips expected of him during a summer when two three-day games were played on most weeks. It must have been quite a grind travelling around in third-class carriages with heavy bags full of bats, pads and clothing.

The Burrell Arms, which keeps its name to this day, was a couple of minutes' walk from a recreation ground, where the boy Maurice was to spend much of his time. Growing up in and around an expanding commuter and market town, he was always to maintain his soft Sussex burr, an accent these days all but disappeared as the South East of England becomes one large linguistic adjunct of London.

Probably funded by grandfather Beach, Maurice attended a small private day school, called Belvedere, in Haywards Heath. Another, later, alumnus was "Young" Jim Parks, the Sussex and England wicketkeeper-batsman of the 1950s and 1960s. During Maurice's youth several other stalwarts of the county game lived in the area and he mixed freely in the company of cricketers, with whom he always felt at home. There were social trips to Hove and other Sussex grounds.

A photograph shows Fred and Maurice standing on the large common at Lindfield, a picturesque village just outside Haywards Heath, in 1900. It bears the punning caption "*Tête-à-Tête*". They were probably there for a Sunday cricket match. The upstanding father, wearing his whites and blazer, rests his hand on his shy-looking son's shoulder in a picture of respectability.

Yet, as his rushed wedding showed, Fred had a lot of 'lead in his pencil'. Eventually he fathered ten children and his financial woes continued, with ever more mouths to feed. In the 1901 census, Maurice is listed as living in Wivelsfield with grandfather and grandmother Beach, along with three uncles and an aunt. Fred, by this time, had four children, three of whom lived with him, his wife, and his now 64-year-old mother. It seems he could not afford to keep his entire family and had to farm out offspring to the Beaches. By 1911 he had nine children, four of whom were listed as living with the grandparents, and five with Fred and Gertrude. The Tates were not good with money. They never had much with which to be good.

Unlike those of many great sportsmen, Maurice's childhood was conspicuous for a near-total lack of success at cricket. He often told the story of how he was unable to break into the team at little Belvedere School, even if he offered bribes to the captain. The teachers were discouraging too. The tales were always recounted in a humorous, ironic way, but rejection as a child is never easy to handle and Maurice was not good at hiding resentment. Despite his obvious enthusiasm, "at school the headmaster did not consider me good enough to play regularly", so he took part in only a "few" school matches.

A gangling, unathletic-looking youth, he did better at football early on, but cricket meant more. As the eldest of the Tate brood, Maurice was seven when his father's disastrous Test appearance happened. Fellow pupils are not noted for their sensitivity when a family member is publicly humiliated. It is not difficult to imagine a fair bit of ribbing coming Maurice's way. He would have been made acutely aware of what had happened to Fred during his most formative years.

And what of Fred's alleged assertion that his son would one day right the sins of the father by becoming a successful Test match player? Here, as elsewhere, much of Maurice's life story is contradictory and confusing. He always maintained that his father had not coached him or offered any advice on how to play the game. However, the newspaperman John Marshall, who knew Maurice well, reported a slightly, but significantly, different version of what Fred Tate had told Len Braund on that famous train journey back from the Old Trafford Test: "I've got a little kid at home who'll make it up *to* me [my italics]." 'To' Fred, not 'for' Fred. Helping a man more sinned against than sinning. Perhaps this was nearer to Fred's true feelings. He had been wronged and humiliated in 1902. Maybe he, rather than England's fans, players and officials, required recompense.

A fascinating article appeared in the *Adelaide Mail* in November 1929, appearing to contradict Fred's image as a *laissez-faire* figure. Maurice was quoted as saying: "The story of that [1902] match was one of the favourites of mine when I was a boy small enough to sit on my father's knee. More than once, as he finished the story, he said to me: 'I couldn't make the winning hit for England that day; but one day you must help England to win.' Possibly, nay, probably, that story inspired in me the desire to play cricket for England."

Two years later, he elaborated in *Reynold's Illustrated News*: "When I was still a toddler, he used to say: 'One day you will make up for that missed catch of mine.'" However, Maurice stuck to the story that Fred had offered him no coaching, that he was a "natural bowler".

Despite all the outward bonhomie and contentment which became Maurice's trademark during his years of fame and success, his childhood might not have been the easiest. His father's expectations, even if not manifested in actual coaching, were definitely present. Combined with failure to gain a place in the school team, this must have caused a sense of frustration and failure. Maurice felt he had been a "disappointment" to his father as a youth.

In 1905, Fred, aged 38, ended his cricket career. He later sold the pub and moved the family to Oundle, the well-known public school in the East Midlands, where he became a coach. The assignment did not last and, within a few years, the family followed Fred to jobs at the Royal Engineers' Ground in Gillingham, Kent, and at the Woolwich Academy in south-east London.

Signs of the boy's future greatness were few. At the beginning of 1925 a reporter for the *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham News* visited the Wesleyan School, in Gillingham, which Maurice had attended. The headmaster, JH Salmon, had no idea of the connection. After some research, the records showed that Maurice had enrolled in 1906, aged ten. Salmon was delighted, adding: "But sport was little encouraged in those days, and there were no school teams to speak of."

In fact, hardly anyone seemed to remember Maurice. Mr Turner, who had been sports master during Maurice's time there, said: "I thought [rival school] Napier Road claimed him as an old pupil, but they all do when anyone achieves fame."

Finally, the reporter came across someone aware of the famous former pupil. Mr A Evans, who ran a small shop across the road from the Royal Engineers' Ground, reminisced: "He was a pale-faced boy, rather delicate-looking, with prominent front teeth, and dark, straight hair. Tall and lank, he was a characteristic figure in his cream knickers and woollen sweater. He was a saucy lad, full of devilment, and often received a clip under the ear for his cheeky manners." Metaphorically at least, the same behaviour and treatment continued throughout Maurice's life. He was not an out-and-out rebel, but stayed less than totally deferential towards the many authority figures with whom he had dealings.

Sometimes being away from home breeds a stronger emotional attachment, and Maurice Tate was always a Sussex boy at heart. He described his restless father as a "regular rolling stone". This was not a compliment. Sussex was his county and he wanted to be there.

Sir Home Gordon, the waspish Sussex County Cricket Club chronicler, gave Fred a mixed posthumous pen portrait in his book on the club in 1950: "Fred Tate may not altogether have been satisfactory as a man, though invariably smiling, but as a bowler he was utterly indefatigable and willing." His judgement on Fred's moral fibre was biting, licensed somewhat by the Old Trafford debacle, and maybe a gossipy knowledge of his pre-marital activities. Sir Home also became Maurice's greatest critic, at least within the Sussex club.

When he left school, 14-year-old Maurice was apprenticed to be a gas fitter, a respectable trade but not very exciting. Then, for no good apparent reason, Fred received a letter in early 1910 asking his son to take part in a fortnight's trial at "The Nursery", the respected finishing school for cricketers at Sussex's headquarters at Hove. In his case, though, it was more of a starting school. For, although he had spent many hours on the recreation ground at Haywards Heath, and observing his father at work, he had achieved little and received even less in the way of direct coaching.

Maurice was later to suggest that there had been "probably a considerable element of sympathy" for his father in the offer. Fred's life had not been hugely successful since leaving the game but, given Sussex's often terrible treatment of its professional players, then and later, any sense of pity is unlikely to have provoked such a response from the committee. Someone, somewhere, had seen qualities in Maurice which Fred had exhibited. It was worth a punt.

# Chapter 5

## At the Nursery.

"*Nature helps him so much.*"
—Fred Tate

SUSSEX, UNDER THE captaincy of Charles Burgess "CB" Fry and the less distinguished Charles "CLA" Smith, were an improving side. They finished 13th out of 16 teams—no Glamorgan or Durham in the championship in those days—in 1907, but rose to fifth in 1908 and fourth in 1909. Little were those involved to know that it would take almost another hundred years before they won the title.

Maurice joined a talented group of 15 young men at The Nursery. They were coached by Arthur Millward, a long-serving off-spinner for Worcestershire in their pre-first-class days. The group included the future England all-rounders Percy Fender—one of the true characters of the game during the 1920 and 1930s, sadly opting, in 1914, to play for Surrey instead of Sussex. Another future England man, the gloriously named Vallance Jupp, was among the cohort. In Maurice's second year, a talented batsman called Ted Bowley, destined to be a good friend and ally, joined. Even though he was older than Maurice, he was treated as his junior, such was the hierarchical nature of the county game at the time.

Living with the Beaches in Wivelsfield, Maurice was paid £1 a week during the season but no retaining fee for the off-season. He spent the winter playing football and doing agricultural labouring. With no other career in place, a lot was riding on Maurice's performances. While at The Nursery, he was at first considered "the worst cricketer of the lot", he thought, but it was 'discovered' that he could bowl off-spin at a pace a bit below medium pace, very much in the style of his father. In fact, observers remarked that their actions were identical, with an economical trot up to the crease and a strong body action imparting pace and 'zip' to the ball. Perhaps Millward, after his career as an off-spinner, saw some special potential.

Tate reported later that he had never been coached as a bowler, even under Millward's watchful aegis, always preferring to regard himself as a natural. This seems disingenuous. Are bowling styles in the genes, or would a child not at least observe and mimic his famous father?

Fred, with hindsight, remarked: "[It was] as an old cricketer that I recognised his gifts. Nature helps him so much. He has supple wrists, elasticity of body, and height." He praised his son's poise at the point of delivery. There is more than a hint at advice having been offered: "I told Maurice to cultivate quickness off the pitch, and it is the last body swerve which tells so much in his bowling, not the spin on the ball." So, in a way, Tate could have been coached, or at least guided in the right direction, by his father. Often coaches are vilified for strangling natural talent with too much advice. Sometimes a quiet word and the adoption of an 'if-it-ain't-broke, don't-fix-it' approach is best.

Nature indeed gave Maurice advantages, including a height of around six feet two inches—four inches or so taller than his father—and great strength. But nurture is about protecting, as much as exposing to new influences. Fred knew that.

One skill in which Maurice was coached rigorously, however, at least at The Nursery, was his batting. Fred's top score during his 19-year Sussex career had been 84, with a first-class average of 9.58. Yet Maurice, no stylist but the possessor of a decent technique and a good eye, developed quickly.

From the outset of his career Tate wore a tie around his waist while bowling, as had Fred. He was also highly superstitious, keeping a rabbit's foot on his person,

wearing a sprig of heather, avoiding walking under ladders, and always keeping a set of 'lucky coins' in his pocket. He started smoking a pipe, then less exclusively an old man's delectation. It was a habit he maintained for life.

His pipe-smoking possibly an attempt at conveying an image of wisdom beyond his teenage years, Tate had a penchant for odd statements, delivered with a sense of unwavering, and unintentionally humorous, gravitas. Often these were delivered furtively, via a cupped hand, as the bemused recipient stood and listened, trying desperately to understand.

Tate usually had a big smile on his face, but his most noticeable physical attribute was a pair of very large feet. Walking with his size 13s at a splayed angle, he encouraged comparisons with a clown. The feet later became famous throughout the cricketing world, acquiring a mythical enormity which enthralled newspaper readers and had crowds scrambling to gawp at them.

Tate was a thoroughly endearing figure, but deadly serious about his vocation. The writer and broadcaster John Arlott, who later became a friend, recalled that Maurice had "tried and worked and worked and tried and, in fact, he loved life 'on the staff'. With the copying idolatry of the child, he bowled exactly like his father; and batted a bit".

Tate, along with Fender, was the star bowler in The Nursery team, taking most of the wickets as they played club sides around the county. So Sussex decided to give the young man a go.

# Chapter 6

## A Slow Start.

"*A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.*"
—Lao Tzu

ON 8TH AUGUST 1912, seven years after Fred had left the first-class game, Maurice made his debut against Northamptonshire. Called in at short notice from a league fixture at Eastbourne, where he was working as the club's professional when not at The Nursery, he had to make his own way up to the Midlands. "I was a proud lad as I travelled to Victoria with my little bag, and crossed London to Euston," he wrote.

Ranji, in the country on one of his periodic returns from his princedom in India, was hosting a meal in London for the Sussex team. Tate, chosen too late to receive an invitation, was told to make sure all the kit got to the ground, via train. It was a logistical pain, but it was all still highly exciting for a 17-year-old who, just over two years previously, had been preparing for life as a gas fitter.

The weather was changeable as the game began on that Thursday morning. Northamptonshire, who were pushing for the championship but eventually came second to Yorkshire, won the toss and decided to bat. They were soon in trouble, subsiding to 44 for five against Sussex's England all-rounder Albert Relf and

Australian-born paceman Harry Simms. As Northants started to accumulate runs more steadily, Tate was brought in to the attack as first change. He bowled against the captain George Vials and soon had him in difficulty.

The players came off amid a sharp shower. When they returned just before 3pm, Tate bowled to Vials again. "The wicket was very wet and the light was bad," the *Brighton Evening Argus* reported. "With seven runs added, Mr Vials was bowled by a 'Yorker'. He waited for an appeal, thinking the ball had come back off the stumper's pads." It was the first of Tate's 2,784

first-class wickets. Vials was the first of many county players to wonder how on earth Tate had dismissed him. For a mediocre batsman it is at least what one might call a "footnote in history". Vials' nickname was "Tubby". Tate's, just like Fred's, was to become "Chub" or "Chubby" as he filled out during adulthood. "Tubby, bowled Chubby": it has a nice portly ring to it.

Tate's final figures were one for 28 off 14 overs, with three maidens. It was an economical start, especially with a wet ball. Northants were all out for 172. Sussex, though, were dismissed for just 101 off 44.3 overs. Tate, last man in, at least had the pleasure of bringing up the hundred, but was bowled for four by slow left-armer Sydney Smith.

The match became like Fred's Test, as Northants were all out for 61 in their second innings. Tate did not bowl, as, opening, Simms took three wickets and the wily Relf a superb seven for 33. Sussex needed 133 to win—a low total but nine more than England had required ten years earlier when another nervous Tate, on debut, had been waiting in the pavilion for a go at number 11. Again, it was not to be. Sussex imploded to 44 for eight. Captain Herbert Chaplin and the number ten, medium-pacer Jack Vincett, stayed together to take the total to 82, when Vincett was bowled.

Tate came in with 51 left to get. It was nothing like Fred's match in intensity or importance—at least for Sussex, who had no hope of winning the championship—but what 17-year-old would not have the memories of his father's failures in mind, and the many words he had heard on the subject? Heroics were not to happen on this day either, as Tate was dismissed by former England fast-medium bowler George Thompson, who took seven wickets for just 21 runs. The debutant scored six and Sussex were beaten by 40 runs. The *Argus* opined that Sussex had the "worst of conditions". Its sister newspaper, the *Sussex Daily News*, described the wicket as "one on which the bowlers have been able—as the cricket saying goes—to make the ball 'talk'".

It was neither a terrible nor a terrific start. Tate's clearest memory of the game was more prosaic, however. As the youngest pro he was paid his match fee, all £6 of it, out of Northants' takings at the turnstiles. It came not in notes or a cheque, but in sixpence pieces, which "nearly made me round-shouldered". It was the only first-class game Tate played that season. For the sake of his developing back muscles, that was probably no bad thing.

At around this time, the Sussex committee arranged for Tate to carry out some coaching at Marlborough House, a prep school in Hove. The professional, little older than the boys in his charge, proved popular. Former pupil TCS Bullick remembered six decades later: "We boys all loved Maurice Tate for his good

humour and cheerful grin, as he bowled, correctly and sympathetically, to us youngsters, taking care never actually to frighten us."

Tate continued steadily in county cricket until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. He played four times for the first XI in 1913, the highlight taking four for 28 in his first match on Sussex soil, against Somerset on the light and airy Saffrons ground during Eastbourne cricket week. He batted at number 11 in every game, with a highest score of nine not out. It was short of spectacular but Tate was beginning to look like a bit of a prospect as an off-spin bowler. And he was only 18.

Something of the gentleman–amateur divide of the time is conveyed in an anecdote Tate told about a game against Hampshire in 1913. He scored a duck in the first innings. When going out to bat for a second time, captain Herbert Chaplin urged him to play straight down the pitch to spinner Harold McDonell, who "can't turn 'em". Acting on orders, Tate did just that and was bowled by one that turned. When he came into the dressing room, Chaplin told him off, saying he "ought to have waited for the turn". "I wasn't so cheeky in those days," Tate recalled, "and I made no reply." The word 'cheeky' is a telling one, as he was writing in 1933, when he was among the most famous cricketers in the world. To upset an unsalaried colleague was still deemed insubordinate. The divide between gentlemen and players was bridgeable, if one somehow acquired a sizeable private income or a generous and flexible employer, but it would not disappear until the 1960s.

Sussex finished seventh in 1913, up from tenth in 1912. In 1914 Tate played eight championship games. Not much happened with his bowling, the best figures being three for 49 as Sussex managed a draw against Lancashire at Old Trafford. What did improve, however, was Tate's batting. After a score of 24 not out at number 11 in that game, he was promoted to number eight in the next match and batted at ten in the one after that.

After two months out of the side, Tate returned against Gloucestershire in August, as a number ten batsman and fourth-change bowler. The next game, against Yorkshire, saw Sussex go down by an innings and 183 runs at Bradford. Batting at number seven—another promotion—he made six and 13. Yorkshire accumulated 443 and Tate's contribution was an unimpressive none for 34, coming on as sixth change.

Yet, like the Sussex committee four years earlier, one of the game's shrewdest judges had noticed some potential. George Hirst, still a professional but acting as Yorkshire's captain, offered some advice: "That's right, lad; keep ah good length." This was the Hirst whose dropping Yorkshire critics in particular had blamed for the loss of the Ashes in 1902. He was a generous cricketer, later to become coach at Eton, where the boys remembered him fondly. Hirst's advice was excellent and Tate adhered to it, never sacrificing his accuracy in the name of technical experiment.

Sussex were a little better than the previous year, edging up to sixth place in the final championship table of 1914. However, events beyond county cricket were to create a four-year hiatus in his playing career. On 4th August Britain entered the First World War. Tate played two more matches without distinction and prepared, like so many others, to do his bit.

County cricket faded away and the Hove ground and the adjacent ice rink became the headquarters of the 6th (Cyclist) Battalion of the Royal Sussex regiment. Its soldiers were to use bicycles—quieter and lighter than horses, and quicker than going on foot—for communication and reconnaissance work. The speed of movement for individual soldiers would also help mobilise them to the points where they were most needed in case of an invasion, it was argued.

Tate joined the battalion in October 1914 and it soon moved to take up a stationing on the Norfolk coast, before returning to Kent and Sussex. However, Tate transferred to become a signaller in the Gunners and served for the rest of the war on the Western Front. He remembered that he had not seen a "lot of fun" during his service. Signal work was very dangerous, involving wiring up trenches to keep communications going, but Tate spoke little of it.

Some cricket was possible during the war, a few games on leave and even knockabouts when far enough back from the trenches, but military life was not immediately appealing. His ambitions lay on the cricket pitch. "I wasn't cut out to be the youngest Brigadier-General in the Army or anything like that!" he revealed.

On leave shortly after the 1918 Armistice, he noticed a dark-haired, petite young lady in the office of the Palladium cinema in Brighton, which had opened in 1912 and boasted the swishest fittings of any picture-house in the town. They began chatting and, before long, he had fallen in love with Kathleen Miriam Freeman, an artist's daughter from Northamptonshire.

Tate was demobilised in January 1919. He returned a slightly broader man, his muscles developed by heavy lifting work. He was by now becoming known as "Chub", like his father, but his slowly increasing girth was muscle, not fat. The nickname was affectionate but unfair.

Brighton and Hove had, like most towns, been mobilised for the war effort. The Royal Pavilion had served as a hospital for Indian servicemen and Brighton and Hove Grammar School had been transformed in a similar way. At first there was doubt whether cash-strapped Sussex would reappoint the 23-year-old all-rounder for the 1919 season. There was even talk of Tate joining Middlesex, as he had achieved residential qualification through his military service. However, the continuing absence of other key players, not yet demobilised, meant Sussex took him back on and he gladly accepted. Having been signed again as professional by the Eastbourne club, he was ready to resume.

# Chapter 7

## Finding a Role.

"*He is likely to be a better all-round player than his father.*"
—Manchester Guardian

FOUR YEARS AWAY from regular bowling at a young age may be no bad thing, as adult muscles have time to develop without the unnatural rigours of pounding

in and contorting. Years of war service, lugging the signalling equipment in use long before the digital age, might actually have helped create the big-hearted stamina for which Tate would become revered.

The 1919 season, taking place in an atmosphere of relief that the war had ended mixed with considerable shortages, was different to any other. Counties still played two-innings matches, but each lasting no more than two days. It was hoped this would create brighter play and allow busy aficionados a better opportunity to watch entire matches.

Sussex opened the season later than normal, on 21st May, at Taunton. The game had been worth waiting for. Somerset scored 243, and Sussex almost matched them with 242. Tate provided some evidence that his all-round abilities might come to something, nine years after he was first taken on. Coming in at number eight, he hit 69—his first half-century for the first XI.

Somerset, in their second innings, scored 103, leaving Sussex just 105 to win. Tate, after his revelatory batting, was promoted to the previously unknown heights of number four. His willingness to take risks made him ideal for a run chase. Tate tried to play expansively but was caught for 11.

Later, the team were cruising along at 103 for six, with just two runs required. Sussex's number 11, Harold Heygate, who had injured his leg, was not expecting to bat. But when Sussex lost their seventh and eighth wickets for no extra runs, he started padding up, still wearing his normal clothes. The ninth went with the score on 104. The two teams' match totals were tied.

Heygate hobbled out to face the bowling, but Len Braund—the bowler off whom Fred had made his terrible drop—was still playing for Somerset. He appealed to umpire Alfred Street, arguing that Heygate, who was struggling to walk, had taken too long to reach the crease. Street agreed, leaving the match as a tie. Heygate was listed in the records as "absent injured" rather than timed out.

It was a hugely deflating way for Sussex to start the post-war period, but it had been a gripping match nonetheless. Although a tie, the game was listed as a draw, as there was no provision for such a result in the system for calculating the championship standings. Somerset's actions caused some moral debate. But The Times acknowledged the umpires had had to deal with "quite exceptional" circumstances.

Sussex started the 1919 season playing intermittently, but fixtures came more frequently as it progressed. Tate's figures as a bowler improved on his pre-war showing. He took four for 97 against Kent, opening the attack, along with several 'two-fors'.

His greatest achievement, however, came on—that ground again—Old Trafford against Lancashire at the end of July. In the second innings Tate scored 108, his first century, containing 11 fours and a six. The *Argus* reported: "With Mr [Norman] Holloway as his partner Tate had the satisfaction of reaching his first hundred for his county. He was loudly applauded, but when he had added another eight was stumped. His very fine display had been of the greatest possible service to his side." Sussex still lost by three wickets, Tate's none for 16 from two overs in Lancashire's second knock not helping.

In the return match with Lancashire during the Hastings festival in August, the *Manchester Guardian's* anonymous correspondent noticed potential in the off-

spinner, who took four for 28 in the first innings: “Maurice Tate came out with the best analysis, and his deliveries approached the classical standard. He is likely to be a better all-round player than his father, who was a fine bowler.”

Tate endured several low scores, interspersed with 78 against Essex. It was, in the end, a disappointing season, Sussex coming 11th, but Tate was an ever-present in an outfit weakened by the war. The start of the 1920s would bring better, supporters hoped. Off he went again for some more agricultural labouring, still living with the Beaches. He recounted that the fresh air and exercise had “developed my bowling muscles wonderfully” and helped build up the frame which was to do so much work.

The cricketing future was still uncertain, though. Tate’s role was ill-defined. He was a sort of trundling off-spinner—lacking his smaller father’s subtlety of flight—who kept it tight but failed to take wickets *en masse*, and an occasional big-hitter when batting. It is not difficult to see such a player, had he come along now, being pigeon-holed as a one-day or t20 specialist. Back then, bits-and-pieces cricketers were more plentiful among the amateurs who could pick and choose their games, rather than the professionals, who were paid to perform in their chosen skill and judged against stricter criteria.

Tate, over the years, had received many chances to take wickets, but had done so only sporadically. Ahead of the 1920 season, it was debated whether to turn him into a batsman pure and simple. Sussex captain Herbert Wilson and the club’s secretary, Major William Sarel, were very much in favour of this, but the idea was eventually discarded. Sir Home Gordon claimed at least his own share of the credit, writing: “Had I not pleaded earnestly that he should be given another season with the ball, England would have lost one of her best post-war bowlers.” The decision later proved incredibly fortuitous for Tate, Sussex and England.

Tate’s financial situation also became clearer during that winter. The professionals had been pushing for pay to be extended to the entire year. In November 1919 the Sussex committee capitulated somewhat, resolving that “£1 per week should be allowed as from Oct 1 to April 30, but that should any special case of necessity arise, the match committee should be empowered to act in the matter”.

The tone of control over the players is striking. Wilfred Rhodes, in his dotage, remarked to the cricket writer David Frith that the game, with its professional/amateur distinction, had been run along the lines of an ‘apartheid’ regime. Coming as they did in the 1970s, the remarks bear the mark of the great political struggle of that later era. Might it not be more fruitful to compare the cricket set-up—revered, preserved and promoted by the Victorians and their successors even as society changed—to the childcare regime of the time? In other words, the idea was that professionals should be ‘seen and not heard’.

Any granting of privileges or money was very much from on high. Tate would have been more affronted than most professionals by this attitude. At least on his mother’s side, he had come from some solidly middle-class stock and had even attended a private school. He was no academic but neither was he uneducated and subservient.

As the 1920 season began, Sussex still clearly had plans for Tate as a batsman. He was now coming in at five or six. After making three scores in the thirties and

forties, he was promoted to open with Ted Bowley against Northants in late May and scored 36 and 41. He picked up wickets in dribs and drabs, sometimes opening and sometimes as a change bowler. Still, the overall returns were underwhelming until he made another breakthrough, to rank alongside the previous season's century. Playing against Oxford University at Hove in June, Tate opened the bowling, taking five for 48. It was his first five-wicket haul at first-class level—in his fifth season as a player. The pitch was easy for batting, adding to the achievement. He went one better in the second innings, capturing six for 42.

Such feats were to become commonplace for Tate later on, but for now a repeat proved elusive. He took four wickets in an innings four times during the remainder of the season and was becoming a useful bowler, taking 71 wickets in total, at an average of 20.64. He moved around the batting order and managed six half-centuries, with a highest score of 90, also in the Oxford University game. He took 50 wickets and scored 1,000 runs. Sussex earned a praiseworthy sixth place. Tate's career was improving.

In January 1921 Tate married Kathleen, whom he had been visiting "two or three times a week" over the previous few months. Attempting a "flowery" proposal speech, the words came out all wrong, and Tate spluttered out the killer line: "Look here, we'll have to get married." The honeymoon was just as romantic an affair, spent coaching two Eton schoolboys at their home in Cirencester shortly before the season began.

Over the winter, Tate had secured clerical work at a London bank, something this outdoorsy type never enjoyed. He blamed it for his not being properly fit when he returned to nets in the spring. Perhaps having seen what some of the 'other half' among the bank's customers were earning, Tate was becoming more aware of his worth to the club. The committee minutes for 24 January 1921 stated: "A letter was read from M.W.Tate and E.H.Bowley asking if the Committee could see their way to increase their weekly allowance of £1 to £2, owing to their inability to gain regular employment." They go on: "It was resolved that owing to the loss Tate had received from the suspension of Farrow's Bank an increase of 10/0 [shillings] per week be made to him as from October 1st 1920, but that in the case of Bowley no action be taken."

Farrow's, known as the "people's bank", had suspended payments in December 1920 after years of mismanagement which had been covered up by its founders Thomas Farrow and William Crotch, and their accountant, Frederick Hart. They were all jailed in June 1921. Paying the customers a good rate of interest since the bank's foundation in 1907, the three men had illegally exaggerated the value of its assets. Those who lost out after the discrepancy was revealed by an investigation were predominantly small businessmen, clerks and others on middle incomes.

While the case involving Farrow, Crotch and Hart was still *subjudice*, on 17th February 1921, the MP for Islington East, Alfred Raper, asked in the House of Commons whether the government intended "to give assistance in the more necessitous cases". The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Austen Chamberlain, replied: "I am fully alive to the hardship which has been caused to the depositors by the failure of this bank, but I do not think that the circumstances are such as would justify the grant of relief from public funds." It was not an ideal financial start to Tate's married life.

Still, cricket was soon back. As the 1921 season began Tate showed an increased versatility by batting anywhere from three to five and opened the bowling. In the Lord's match against Middlesex he took eight wickets, but the scores did not come again. At the end of May against Surrey, Tate made a pair but took six for 125 in Surrey's first innings. This was his first haul of five wickets or more in the championship. The question loomed as large as ever: was he a better batsman or bowler?

As his batting deteriorated, he was moved down the order. However, two games later there came an excellent performance – four wickets in the match and scores of 151 and 47 not out batting at number six against the mighty Nottinghamshire. Sussex won by five wickets. Three quietish fixtures and he scored another century—142—batting at seven, a game in which he was first-change bowler. Then he was steady for three more games, until a notable five for 65 against Surrey at the Oval. Tate utilised the wet conditions to worry the formidable foe.

The *Argus* noted that "to begin with Mr [Alfred] Jeacocke was distinctly uncomfortable with Tate, being beaten by him three times in the course of as many overs". The victims included the future England opening batsman, Andy Sandham, and Percy Fender, while Tate also scored 83 in the first innings, coming in at four. He was doing well, but not making history—yet.

Against Northants at Hove that July Tate and Bowley proved their worth, and it was definitely more than Sussex were paying. On a scorching Wednesday morning, Sussex won the toss and batted. From the start things went their way. Captain Herbert Wilson and Ted Bowley put on an untroubled 63 for the first wicket, the Hove pitch playing as benevolently as ever. Wilson was dismissed and Tate came in at three. At this point all normality ended. The young friends decided to enjoy themselves, to the despair of the hot-and-bothered Northants attack. In the days when scoring rates were usually measured in time taken, rather than balls faced, Sussex hit their first hundred in just 65 minutes.

With Tate and Bowley at the crease, things sped up. The second hundred came in 45 minutes, as did the third. The pair went for everything, knocking drives, cuts, pulls—all shots—around the ground, thrilling the Hove crowd. The fourth hundred also came in three quarters of an hour. The Northants attack had no answers, with eight bowlers used. Tate actually outscored his specialist batting partner while they were together, showing a particular skill at cutting. He reached his first, and only, double century in first-class cricket just before tea. It had taken just two hours and 55 minutes. When he and Bowley returned to the pavilion for tea, the score was a colossal 446 for one. The crowd cheered and hollered. The pair had already beaten the best partnership made by Sussex—349 by CB Fry and left-hander Ernest Killick in 1901.

The break, as is often the case, proved fatal. Soon after coming back out, Tate was dismissed for 203, bowled by the persevering paceman William Wells. He had brought up his thousand runs for the season during the innings, scoring 30 fours and two sixes. But the team kept on going. Bowley eventually went for 228 in a comparatively pedestrian four hours and 15 minutes. The next highest scorer, after Tate, was George "The Guv'nor" Cox, the left-arm spinner and foreboding senior pro, with 70. The team declared on the second morning on a huge 670 for nine, off just 130.4 overs.

Northants were then dismissed for 251, Cox taking five for 53 and fast bowler Arthur Gilligan, who was to become a major figure in Tate's life, getting two for 59. The visitors followed on and, demoralised by the fate which had befallen them, collapsed to 128 in the second innings. Tate took no wickets in his 29 overs in the two innings, but he could be forgiven. The margin of victory was staggering: an innings and 291 runs.

The *Sussex Daily News* reported of Tate and Bowley's effort: "It is a long time since an exhilarating display in any way comparable to this has been seen at the Sussex headquarters." It described Tate's innings as "quite free from blemish". For all the supporters of 'brighter cricket'—the idea that amateurs were needed to take the emphasis away from winning at all costs to playing the game with verve and style—this was a lesson.

The two young professionals had entertained royally and allowed Sussex to win comfortably. How far this must have seemed from the days when CB Fry, as the gentleman, had ordered the talented, but waged, Joe Vine to rein in his extravagances and play a supporting role. There was no such subservience in Tate and Bowley's effort and Sussex cricket was all the better off for it.

Tate's batting was volcanic rather than consistent. Every now and then there was a huge explosion, among some low scores and a few respectable ones. During a season when Warwick Armstrong's Australians were destroying England in the Ashes, his chances of a Test call were limited, as he had shown brilliance at batting, and sometimes at bowling, but achieved little in the way of consistency. The rest of the county season passed by unremarkably, with a top score of 40 and best bowling figures of four for 33. Sussex finished ninth in a championship increased to 17 teams by the inclusion of Glamorgan.

Tate's last game for the county was against the Australians at Hove. It was a contest the tourists won easily, by 197 runs. Coming on as fourth change in the Aussies' first innings he took none for four. When Sussex batted he made seven runs. Tate's luck changed when he bowled again. Fourth change once more, he took four for 21 in nine overs, going through the middle order and tail. Those dismissed were Armstrong, fast bowler Jack Gregory, wicketkeeper Sammy Carter and Gregory's famous fellow tearaway, Ted McDonald.

Whether because of his promising season or his proximity to the ground, Tate was picked to play for The South against the Australians at Hastings on 3rd September, his first representative match. It was not the strongest side, lacking the likes of England batsmen Jack Hobbs and Frank Woolley, but Bowley and Gilligan both played. Tate did little in the Australians' first innings, coming on as seventh change and bowling just one over. He hit 30 in 17 minutes when The South batted, dismissed by leg-spinner Armstrong, and 11 at seven when they followed on. Again he was bowled by a leggie, this time the charismatic Arthur Mailey, another name who would later loom large in Tate's career.

After another season of steady progress, interspersed with brilliance and several failures, Tate was still little more than a good county player—not quite the bowler his father had been, but a far better batsman. He had, though, at least encountered, in Australia, one of the greatest teams in history and was keen for more.

In sporting terms the 26-year-old Tate was becoming middle-aged. 1922 was to be the year when his talent finally began to reach its potential.

# Chapter 8

## Gaining Pace.

"*You must change your style of bowling immediately.*"
—Arthur Gilligan

IN 1921 A Lancastrian teenager by the name of George Hoy Booth decided he wanted to make it as a comedian, just like his famous and recently deceased father. He had tried to become a professional jockey but, despite his wiry build, was too heavy and tall for the world of the turf. There was little else going on, so entering the family business seemed a logical thing to do.

However, Hoy Booth got things the wrong way round. He chose not to adopt his father's stage name. Instead, for his performances, he adopted the Hoy part of his surname—from his mother's side of the family—to become George Hoy. But the material he employed was all his father's. When appearing at southern venues, he came on to the stage and played up his northern-ness, with trite and dated gags like: "I'm fra' Wiggin. I've not been in England long." This had once been enough for audiences happy to laugh at the country's cultural divide. Not any longer. Standing in his dead father's shoes like some cut-price impersonator was not working. The act bombed.

So Hoy Booth had a think. He needed to change the act to something brighter, a bit more original and fresh. To get some instant attention, he took on his father's stage name. Then he developed a trick of his own. After seeing an actor playing the ukulele between performances, he had a go himself and liked it. In fact, he enjoyed the instrument so much that he bought one and learned how to play it properly.

Gaining in adventurous spirit and confidence, for a bet one night he agreed to strum the ukulele on stage at the Alhambra Theatre in Barnsley. Far from being a disaster, his cheeky singing style brought the house down. George Formby, the pre-eminent British comedian, singer and film star of the 1930s and 1940s, had arrived.

As time passed, the late George Formby senior—one of the biggest names of the early 20th century music hall scene—became known as the father of the film star, rather than a significant comic figure in his own right. The son's songs, such as 'When I'm Cleaning Windows', 'Leaning on a Lamppost' and the racier 'With My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock', are still widely known today. The father's triumphs, longer ago and without the benefit of preservation on film, are not.

While Hoy Booth was undergoing his complex reincarnation, the similarly likeable Maurice Tate began to have doubts about whether his own father's way of doing things suited him best. The off-spinners he had been bowling for a decade for Sussex, minus four seasons lost to the Great War, had given him a respectable

place as a county cricketer. He had played for The South against the Australians the previous summer but had never managed to be picked for a Gentlemen v Players fixture, the next step down from Test cricket. Life was comfortable, but, at some stage during the 1922 season, he was to discover, like Hoy Booth/Formby, that employing a bit of originality could result in something far, far better. Tate decided to abandon his off-spin and became, in a matter of months, the best pace bowler in the world.

Some of cricket's greatest bowlers have changed their speed. Often this occurs as quicker men get older and feel their bodies simply are not up to the task anymore. Tom Goddard, the tall Gloucestershire contemporary of Tate, switched from medium-fast to off-spin in the late 1920s, his giant hands making the ball fizz off the pitch. Australia's Colin "Funky" Miller, a late-comer to international cricket, did the same in the 1990s. His decision to dye his hair blue demonstrated the essence of a free spirit willing to gamble away comfort in his pursuit of success. Conversely, Craig White, born in England but raised in Australia, went from off-spin to pace. He returned to England to play in 30 Tests, taking 59 wickets.

Other players have alternated between the two styles, dependent on the match situation. Left-armer Garfield Sobers, a one-off in his all-round cricketing brilliance, was highly adept at bowling pace, finger-spin or wrist-spin. At a lesser level, Lancashire and England's Mike Watkinson became known as a "speamer"—a hybrid of a spinner and a seamer—because of his ability to purvey off-breaks and seam-up according to conditions.

Perhaps the most interesting career alteration, other than that of Tate, involved a decision made before the Second World War by Surrey's Bedser twins, Alec and Eric. They both bowled medium-fast, but reasoned that there would only be room for one such player in the county side. So, via the toss of a coin, they chose which brother would stick with it and which would move on to bowl off-spin. Alec kept the pace and Eric dropped his. Alec became a world cricketing superstar, overtaking Sydney Barnes at the top of England's wicket-takers' list before moving on to a knighthood. Eric, however, often struggled for a regular place in the Surrey team, albeit one containing a spin pairing of genius in Jim Laker and Tony Lock. Eric also had to focus more on his batting to justify his inclusion. Tate, in 1922, took the opposite journey to Eric, releasing his 'inner Alec' for all the world to see.

As the season began, the English game was still coming to terms with the drubbing handed out by Warwick Armstrong's tourists the previous summer. The pace pairing of Ted McDonald and Jack Gregory had caused havoc. England wanted some effective express men of their own. The cricket magnate Pelham Warner was to recall years later that the Test team "still needed a really great bowler". Little did he or anyone else know that one such figure was already playing.

In the off-season Tate had become a father. His twin daughters, Betty and Joan, were born in November 1921. The couple were unprepared, as "times were not too good", by Tate's own admission, so one of the girls slept in a cot improvised from a suitcase. The Sussex committee minutes confirm his financial struggles. On 11th January 1922, a letter from Tate was read out "asking if, owing to his heavy home expenses, he might be paid his salary weekly instead of monthly as proposed".

Money, especially given his losses when Farrow's had collapsed a year earlier, was tight.

But the responsibilities of fatherhood might have buoyed Tate's sense of manhood and his cricketing self-confidence. In early May, Sussex played Warwickshire and, in the second innings, he beat his previous best first-class figures, taking seven for 24. The *Sussex Daily News*, ever concise, described the scenes at Edgbaston. The newly appointed county captain, Arthur Gilligan, brought on Tate, and the veteran left-arm spinner George Cox, with "sensational effect", it reported, adding: "Tate has never bowled so well for the county."

There was no indication of a notable speeding-up when, a week later, Tate took five for 28 against Glamorgan, although he was opening the attack. He went on to take three or more wickets in an innings seven times over the next couple of months—a very consistent performance. But, seemingly in mid-summer, something changed.

Tate appeared to have started pushing a few more balls through at a greater pace—not absolute express but several miles per hour faster than normal. In the Lancashire game at Liverpool in early July, a Test batsman was said to have made a profound recommendation. "Ernest Tyldesley, beaten once or twice in an innings by Tate's occasional quick ball, remarked he was wasting his time bowling anything else," the England bowler Ian Peebles wrote. Peebles had not been present, but was well versed in the stories passed around dressing rooms. Tyldesley's reported comment came in a game where Tate took none for 15 off 11 tight overs. He had noticed some potential. Like George Hirst in 1914, who had advised Tate to stick to "ah good length", another canny northerner had seen something he liked.

People's versions of what happened later that season differ widely. On the one hand there is the story put about by Tate and his admirer, John Arlott. On the other is that disseminated by Arthur Gilligan, who had become Sussex's captain.

The London-born 27-year-old, who had chosen south coast county over Surrey, was keen to advance his team in all respects, to create a sense of purpose. Fielding was a particular concern and, with his dynamic displays at mid-off and mid-on, the captain liked to set an example. With the McDonald-Gregory lesson still fresh, a good fast-bowling pairing would be useful too, he reasoned. Gilligan, with his long run and accurate pace, could supply one half of the solution. Sussex, though, lacked a serious foil for him.

The words of Tyldesley provided something for Tate to think about, but they needed to be put into action. In his book, Sussex Cricket, Gilligan gave a vivid version of how this had happened "by a piece of luck". According to this, the team had a day off in July 1922 so put in an afternoon's practice following some "dreadful batting". Gilligan faced Tate in the nets. "He ran up and delivered the ball," Gilligan wrote, "and before I knew what had happened something flashed off the pitch, and there was a terrible noise behind me. A kind gentleman, standing behind the nets, politely asked me if I would like my stump back. I accepted it with my pride, like my wicket, terribly shattered."

Tate, smiling, then sent down a slower ball, which Gilligan whacked into the outfield. Two minutes later, he sent down another quicker one, which knocked out a stump. The next ball from Maurice did not knock one stump out of the ground;

it sent two instead, straight through the back of the net, according to Gilligan. The skipper then rushed up to his team-mate and exclaimed: "You must change your style of bowling immediately. I have never seen anything fizz off the wicket like those fast deliveries of yours."

Gilligan reported that the team had been enthusiastic about Tate's new-found pace and that he had tried it out the following day against Kent at Tunbridge Wells. In Kent's second innings Tate was "unplayable", he said, taking eight for 32, in what was "the turning point in Maurice Tate's career".

The Kent scorecard makes stupendous reading. The details for the top nine in the order were:

Bryan bowled Tate 8
Hardinge lbw Tate 10
Seymour ct and bowled Tate 9
Woolley bowled Tate 0
Ashdown bowled Tate 0
Hubble bowled Tate 7
Collins ct and bowled Tate 33
Taylor run out 33
Troughton bowled Tate 29

In other words he captured his eight wickets all by himself, with no need for fielders. *Wisden* reported: "Tate for the moment was irresistible."

It is an enticing tale of sudden stardom. Yet Gilligan's story contains three basic flaws. First, there was no rest day before the Kent match, which started on a Wednesday. Sussex had been involved in a fixture against Yorkshire, at Hull, ending on the Tuesday. The only chance they would have had for a net was on the Sunday, a rest day against the Tykes. Second, Gilligan's initial figures were wrong. Tate actually took eight for 67, not eight for 32. This detail was amended for Gilligan's re-telling of the tale in a *Wisden* article in the 1950s, but the initial error suggests an anecdotal haziness. Third, the wickets came in the first, not the second, innings.

However, the press reporting seems to confirm the gist of Gilligan's account. The *Sussex Daily News* recounted that "the outstanding feature was the astonishing performance of Tate for Sussex". It said: "[Bill] Ashdown stopped Tate's hat-trick, but the next ball, a beautiful delivery, broke right across and spread-eagled all three stumps." Slower deliveries do not usually have this effect. The sheer number of bowled and lbw wickets—six—tends also to imply quicker bowling at play, whether as surprise deliveries or the main mode of attack.

*The Cricketer* magazine reported, although hardly definitively: "We hear that the bowling in the Kent and Sussex match at Tunbridge Wells last week reached a very high pitch of excellence, Tate in particular sending down some splendid back breaks quite worthy of his father's best days." The likening to Fred suggests that some slower balls, indeed many, were still being used.

Gilligan continued his story of the realisation of Tate's true vocation with a self-deprecating vignette. Five weeks later Sussex were playing at Hastings, when the

old Lancashire and England fast bowler Walter Brearley, who had been watching his bowling from near the sightscreen, came rushing into the dressing room:

"'Arthur la'ad,' he said, 'do you know you've got an England bowler there for the asking?'" Thinking he meant me, I blushed! But my hopes were again shattered.

"'That young Maurice Tate, I mean. I have never seen him bowl like that before. He is absolutely international class.'"

Gilligan added that Brearley had passed on the information to a "higher quarter" in the game's hierarchy.

Gilligan must have been a wonderful captain to play under. His sporting enthusiasm made him popular wherever he went and his players adored him. One of his gestures on assuming the leadership of Sussex was to do away with the most visible differentiation between gentlemen and players. It became his habit to direct the amateurs to the professionals' dressing room, situated on another part of the Hove ground, before leading them all out together. He also championed Tate and said he could never recall referring to him as "Chub", only "Maurice".

Yet Tate, and Arlott, told a different story to Gilligan's. Tate agreed that, before 1922, he had been "still a very late change, bowling my slow off-spinners and an occasional fast one". But he insisted the alteration had happened a few weeks after the Kent game, when Sussex hosted Hampshire at Eastbourne.

Tate and his colleagues had for many years struggled against the most cussed of left-handers, Phil Mead. A protégé of CB Fry, Mead is the highest scorer in the history of the County Championship. Unlike Jack Hobbs, Wally Hammond or Frank Woolley, he did not have much of a Test career, so his name is not well known today. But, my, he was a bugger to get out.

Mead, forming a decent partnership with all-rounder Alec Kennedy, had made a typically gritty, painstaking 39, when Tate, according to Arlott, "suddenly, for no reason he could afterwards recall... decided to 'let him have one'". Coming in off the usual run, he pushed the ball through at a quicker pace. It was not the usual arm-ball, the slightly faster one that most off-spinners have at their disposal, though. This one swung away from Mead, pitched just outside his off stump and then cut back viciously to take out the astonished batsman's leg stump.

Mead, outwardly as impassive as ever, turned and trudged back to the pavilion of the Saffrons ground. The Sussex players were more excited. "Tate was both surprised and delighted," wrote Arlott. "Arthur Gilligan, the captain, standing at mid-off, stiffened, startled." He added: "It was as near to a cricketing miracle as the history of the game contains. Suddenly the sharpest attacking weapon of his time had been thrust into the hand of an industrious but rather pedestrian county all-rounder."

Mead, questioned 30 years later, confirmed the tale, saying: "First fast ball, and the best I've seen him bowl." Asked if he had made any comment at the time, he replied: "Not me, I never encourage bowlers."

The *Argus* failed to see the significance, though, reporting: "It was not until the partnership had lasted an hour and three quarters and had collected 92 runs that Tate broke it by bowling Mead, whose share was a painstaking 39." Tate ended up taking four wickets for 69 runs—off 32 overs—in the innings, so the overall effect of his bowling was attritional rather than sensational. In the second innings against Hampshire, Tate lost control a little, but took one for ten.

Tate and Arlott's version of the change is about the realisation of possibilities. Gilligan's indicates instant success. If the Mead dismissal was indeed the defining point of Tate's career, it bore a strange similarity to that of his father. Remember that Fred had been bowled in 1902 by a superb faster ball sent down by the Australian left-arm spinner, Jack Saunders, to destroy his reputation forever. Maurice had released possibly one of the best faster balls ever bowled to send himself on a cricketing journey which would right Fred's wrongs, and then some.

In Sussex's next game, against Essex, Tate took four for 25 in 25 parsimonious overs. Then, against Middlesex, in the August Bank Holiday game at Hove, he snaffled six for 30 and three for 28. *The Observer* newspaper lived up to its name, reporting: "The chief cause of their downfall was the bowling of Tate, who varied his pitch and his pace skilfully." It seemed he was not an out-and-out quicker bowler yet, but he was employing his new deliveries with improving control and greater frequency.

There was another five-wicket haul against Lancashire at Hastings. Neville Cardus reported on the match, saying that veteran opener Harry Makepeace had been "bowled by a well-pitched off-break, at which he made a stroke with an indecisive swing". It may well have been his traditional ball. But the terminology of the time is confusing to the modern reader. Spin was not always equated with slow bowlers, perhaps because a previous generation of players, especially Sydney Barnes, had been deemed capable of achieving considerable movement at a decent lick. So, this "well-pitched off-break" could have been fast or slow. It is not described as a slower ball delivered with a rip, nor is it spoken of as a ball which simply broke in naturally off a straight seam.

The following summer, Cardus wrote an article expounding Tate's virtues, headlined "A Likely Bowler". He remembered that, at that Lancashire game, Ernest Tyldesley, probably proud that the Sussex man had heeded his advice, had "assured me that Tate, on a good wicket, could bowl the most difficult ball in England to-day".

Whatever he was doing, it worked. Northamptonshire and Yorkshire suffered the same fate as Lancashire, with Tate getting two more five-wicket hauls. In Sussex's final game, against Kent, Tate was eclipsed by the diminutive leg-spinner "Tich" Freeman, who took 17 wickets. But his season had been a triumph, bringing 119 wickets at an average of 17.42. Gilligan, who had been picked for England's winter trip to South Africa, looked forward keenly to nets at Hove the following spring, when he and Tate could hone what was to become a weapon of mass distraction.

# Chapter 9

## Polishing the Diamond.

"*He was by general consent the best bowler in England.*"
—Wisden Cricketers' Almanack

TATE HAD LITTLE to do in the winter of 1922/23. So he was pleased when the Essex captain, JWHT "Johnny" Douglas, arranged some work. He was to coach at a school in the diamond-mining town of Kimberley in South Africa, helping him to keep fit and enjoy a bit of sunshine, rather than the drearier climate on offer at home.

So, he sailed out with Ted Bowley, who was to teach at another school in the area. However, Tate, who did not get on with the headmaster, suffered a bout of homesickness and eloped, catching a boat, the WINDSOR CASTLE, from Cape Town to Southampton, arriving on 15th January 1923, two months early. The headmaster was furious. More to the point, so was Douglas.

He was not the sort of man one would choose as an enemy. Nicknamed "Johnny Won't Hit Today" by Australian critics, he was, frankly, a boring player. But Douglas was also a fighter. Back in 1908 he had won a gold medal in the London Olympics as a middleweight boxer. He kept himself super-fit at a time when this was rare among cricketers and he never liked to lose, or to feel others were lacking in respect.

So, when the headmaster at Kimberley informed him of what had happened, Douglas kicked up an almighty fuss. The Sussex committee minutes for 13th April 1923 noted: "A letter was received from Lt Col JHWT [sic] Douglas with reference to Tate breaking the agreement of his engagement in South Africa during the absence of the headmaster of the school at which he was engaged and asking the Committee to inquire into the matter. He also stated that letters in connection with the matter had been forwarded to the Secretary of the Marylebone Cricket Club."

Douglas wanted to punish Tate, a professional not an amateur, lest one forget. Sussex, for once, handled the matter rather sensitively. Perhaps peeved Essex captain Douglas had gone straight to the MCC, the committee resolved: "That in the event of the MCC not taking any steps in the matter, a sub-committee consisting of the Chairman, Mr H.F [Harry] de Paravicini, and Mr A.E.R Gilligan, be appointed to interview Tate and inquire into the causes of his action." In June, the committee reported that Gilligan and de Paravicini had questioned Tate and that he "had made suitable apologies both to them and Col Douglas". It amounted to a slap on the wrist.

All this was of little concern to Gilligan as the team returned to Hove in the spring of 1923. There was more of a fear that Tate's developing bowling style, apparently so natural, should not be tampered with. So, rather gingerly, Gilligan set about teaching his colleague the finer points of swing. To their shared delight Tate grasped the technique quickly and was able to maintain his impeccable length, while achieving late out-swing and keeping 'nip off the pitch'. Tate kept his short off-spinner's run of eight paces, using his huge body strength to send the ball down at medium-fast pace. Some balls, after they swung, hit the seam and moved sideways in an unpredictable fashion. These could be unplayable.

The 1923 season began with a successful accumulation of wickets. There must have been a sense of grudgery as Sussex started against Essex at the county's unpretty stronghold in Leyton, east London. Tate, batting at number three, made 97 and 73. Douglas, a very good medium-fast bowler himself, had the satisfaction of dismissing Tate three runs short of his century in the first innings. The Essex

captain took a fine seven wickets for 110 runs. Tate failed to get Douglas out in either innings, but still enjoyed the figures of three for 62 and two for 31, as Sussex beat Essex by a sizeable margin of 290 runs.

He continued to pick up wickets at a good rate over the next couple of weeks, until Sussex once again faced Essex, this time at Hove. This time, the opposition had no answer to Tate. In the first innings, he took four for 20 off 30 overs. They could hardly lay a bat on him. In the second innings it got even better. Of the evening of the second day, the *Argus* reported: "In their three-quarters of an hour batting, Essex had a tragic time against Tate, losing four wickets for 24 runs."

Sussex returned the next morning for the last day of what until now had been a tight contest. Tate continued to bowl extraordinarily well, as the home team triumphed by 125 runs. It was always good to win, but getting a championship 'double' over on Douglas must have pleased the bowler, and his captain, immensely.

Tate took his innings haul to eight for 37—his best figures yet. Of these, a staggering seven were bowled, and the other caught. He had bowled 28 overs, 11 of them maidens. Yet the pugnacious Douglas remained unbeaten on 42, as his team collapsed around him for 110. The *Argus* remarked on Tate's "memorable bowling". Of Douglas, "one of the characters in present-day cricket", the commentator wrote, euphemistically, having watched him grind things out over the years, that he had "great patience".

The newspaper continued of Tate: "Throughout the season, his consistent good length has brought its reward, and the total figures for this match speak for themselves: 58-30-57-12." They certainly do. Stamina, accuracy, willingness to bowl and deadliness: Tate had them all. If 1922 had been the year of realisation, 1923 can realistically be called the beginning of the 'golden age', a four-year period when Tate's successes were so large and frequent that recounting them becomes so repetitive it is almost boring. Rather like reading a telephone directory, the numbers just kept coming and coming.

In among the three and four-wicket hauls, Tate took six for 22 in the first innings against Nottinghamshire and seven for 46 in the second. That made a total of 13 for 68 in the match. And it was not just the wickets, but the style in which they were achieved. Ten were bowled and one was lbw. So, 11 wickets in the game were entirely his doing. Tate was keeping it tight too, as the Argus said in its first-day report: "The main part of the scoring came off the fast bowler [Henry "Curly" Roberts], for Tate, at the other end, maintained an irreproachable length with a certain amount of nip off the pitch."

Commentators were beginning to notice more and more Tate's apparent speed off the pitch. Batsmen were certainly aware. The *Sussex Daily News* reported that, in the first innings, Notts captain Arthur Carr "lost all knowledge of a ball from Tate after it had pitched", adding: "At 60 [William] Flint was, like his captain, non-plussed by Tate, this time the ball coming in on to the leg stump."

There were, however, attempts to come to terms with this new force of nature threatening to destroy batsmanship. It later became accepted wisdom, especially early in an innings, to play forward to Tate when first in so as to smother any movement, and to do so as early as possible. Forty-three-year-old George Gunn was an early adopter, if not the originator, of the technique. "In facing Tate he

often had placed his feet before the ball had left the bowler's hand," according to the *Sussex Daily News*.

In the next match, Tate went one better, taking a so-far career-best eight for 30 in the first innings against Glamorgan. Number three William Bates had made an attractive 17 when a ball from Tate, seemingly short- pitched, went right through his defences. The *Sussex Daily News*, with understatement, said Tate's "bowling this year has been almost phenomenal" and that he "leads all the trundlers in England". It also praised his adaptation to seemingly unfriendly conditions: "The Horsham wicket was a good one. Tate and his confreres could get little assistance from the turf, but he had length and nip, and the batsmen could not play him."

On he went. A quiet game against Kent was followed by ten for 65 in the match against Gloucestershire—off 44.2 overs. It was time for a higher standard, so Tate was picked for The South versus The North at Old Trafford. He did not disappoint, taking seven for 51 in the first innings. Tate's debut in the Gentlemen v Players match at Lord's in mid-July was a quiet affair, taking two in a weather-affected draw. Nine in a match against Kent, ten against Hampshire, seven against Somerset: he was still performing. Then Tate inflicted another dose on poor Glamorgan—12 for 118.

He had become the scourge of the counties, but 1923 was not a Test match year, so he was to get no chance to prove himself at that level. The next best thing, though, was the recently instituted Test trial, in which 22 of the best players in the land pitted their wits against one another to prove themselves worthy of the highest honour.

Tate was picked, tellingly, for England rather than 'The Rest'. Pelham Warner, watching at Lord's, was impressed, both with the newcomer and the state of England's possible attack, with an away Ashes series just over a year away: "The bowling was clearly of better class, with Tate now a great bowler, R. Kilner, Arthur Gilligan, Louden, Fender, Stevens and Parkin, while Woolley could get most people out on a sticky wicket."

Tate had previously been a possibility for a Test career. He was now a certainty. In The Rest's first innings he took six for 62 off 33.5 overs. Percy Chapman, the young Cambridge University and Minor Counties dasher who was yet to qualify to play for Kent, was described as being a "foot late" on a ball which glanced off his pads and bowled him. They were fine figures, but one passage of play stood out. In just a quarter of an hour, Tate took five wickets – four bowled and one lbw—for no runs. Four of these fell in five balls. They were Arthur Carr, George Geary, George Macaulay and George Louden. *The Times* reported: "Mr Carr seemed to see the terrific break back which bowled him out, and hurried his stroke in consequence of what he saw. But the muscles of arms and wrists could not respond quickly enough." Geary, Macaulay and Louden were all late to play the ball.

Some very grainy *Pathé* footage of the Test trial remains. It notes some "unsettled weather and remarkable bowling" and shows Tate, a tall figure, standing and smiling, pipe in hand, for the England team's photograph. Percy Fender also looks conspicuously cheerful, smoking a cigarette. There must have been nerves, however. The action starts and Tate can be seen trundling in off eight paces and letting the ball go with a fearsome whip. The caption reads: "Maurice Tate—the young Sussex Professional—whose sensational bowling caused the

collapse of 'The Rest'." Tate was actually 28. It was a common feature of much of his career that he was known as 'young' even when, in cricketing terms, he was not. A close-up of the bowler shows a fresh face, delighting in his achievement, but somewhat shy and unused to such attention. As he flicks a ball from right hand to left, he does not quite engage the camera. But the grin—one of his physical trademarks—is big and toothy.

Remember, this was little more than a year after Tate had changed his action. Already Warner, who had captained Sydney Barnes for England, was describing him as "great". However, the fielding in the game was poor, increasing concerns over this aspect of England's game with just over a year until the next side was due to travel to Australia for the 1924/25 Ashes.

The 1923 season ended with Tate continuing his good form with the ball, but without many large hauls. The exception was six for 51—including Arthur Gilligan, bowled—in the Gentlemen versus Players game at Scarborough. It was an era when the county game, with less competition from international fixtures, had a higher profile. Although Tate had not played Test cricket, a top-class bowler had arrived. The Sussex committee must have felt vindicated in its lenient treatment of him when he had returned early from South Africa the previous winter, when, in its report on the season, it celebrated Tate's 179 wickets at 13.1 for the county. He "was thought by many to be the best bowler in England in 1923", it remarked. In all first-class cricket, he had taken 219 wickets at 13.97.

Tate's grin must have grown wider still when *Wisden*, for its 1924 edition, made him one of its five bowlers of the year. The specific selection of five bowlers, rather than players of all types, shows English cricket's obsession with improving this aspect of the Test side's performance. Tate had proved "brilliantly successful under all sorts of conditions". *Wisden* reported: "In 1922 he found his true *métier*, and last summer he was by general consent the best bowler in England."

Whether he would have found his *métier* if Ernest Tyldesley had not offered his advice, had he not bowled *that* ball to Phil Mead or, at some stage, upended Arthur Gilligan's stumps in the nets, no one can say. If Sir Home Gordon had not persuaded his colleagues otherwise, Tate might even have given up bowling entirely at the start of the 1920s. A series of events conspired to unleash a phenomenal talent. Somehow it happened.

*Wisden* reported that "the story of Sussex cricket in 1923 might be written about [Gilligan's] doings and those of Maurice Tate", adding: "For a player of his undoubted abilities the future may hold even greater deeds in store, but to Maurice Tate the season brought remarkable success. As an all-rounder he made vast strides, and was easily among the first three or four in the country." His quicker bowling was described as the "outstanding feature" of the summer. Unlike many hundreds of startled batsmen over the next 14 years, Tate was never to look back.

# Chapter 10

## The Big Mo.

"*With nothing in the pitch to give him the least assistance,*
*Tate did great work.*"
—Wisden Cricketers' Almanack

TATE WAS MORE or less a complete bowler by the start of 1924. County batsmen, and even the best of the 'Rest' of England had failed to compete with him during the previous season. He had moved easily into representative cricket, but a bigger challenge remained. Luckily there would be a Test series this year.

South Africa were touring. Not nearly as strong as the Australians, the squad still boasted some impressive performers. Fans, starved of a home series since Warwick Armstrong's Australians in 1921, were eager to see how a rejuvenated England would fare. All Tate—whose wages the committee had risen to £16 per month (the equivalent of about £550 today), all-year-round—had to do now was to maintain the form of 1923, or anything like it, and he was guaranteed a place.

Sadly any sense of enjoyment and anticipation at pre-season training ended with some devastating news. George Street, the Sussex wicketkeeper, was killed on 24th April. Riding along the seafront at Southern Cross, just west of Brighton, he swerved his recently purchased motorbike to avoid a lorry and smashed into a wall. Street, Tate's senior by five years, had made his championship debut in the same year, 1912, and had remained an ever-present since. He had been an older brother figure to the bowler, there throughout his transition from spin to pace. The popular Street, like Tate, was entering his best years, gaining a Sussex record of 95 dismissals in 1923. Tate was one of the pall-bearers at the funeral.

Street's death did little to affect Tate's bowling. In fact, the intimation of one's own mortality may have inspired him to more notable deeds. In six bowling innings against Cambridge University, Hampshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, he took 30 wickets. After that came six for 24 against Worcestershire and a match total of 11 for 95 against Essex. The machine was showing no signs of rustiness. More to the point, the brains trust on the county circuit had not worked out a way to deal with it.

Another try-out for England against The Rest gave him respectable match figures of five for 97. Then the destruction continued, with eight wickets in a match against Somerset. At the Oval, Tate took six for 22, including the Surrey legends Jack Hobbs and Andy Sandham.

While at the south London ground, Tate learned to his delight that he had been picked for the first Test, at Edgbaston. With the good news passed on, he crossed London to Lord's where, in a Sussex victory, he did even better than he had against Surrey, taking seven for 39 in the first innings against Middlesex. Of these, six were bowled. The *Sussex Daily News* compared the teams' attacks, saying Middlesex's bowlers had done well but "could hardly compare with Tate. So magnificent was his length, and such spin did he get on the ball that he had almost every Middlesex batsman in difficulties".

In Middlesex's second innings, Arthur Gilligan, who had made his Test debut against South Africa in the 1922/23 series, took eight for 25. Sussex's opening bowlers were in superb form. The *Sussex Daily News* perceptively remarked that

Tate was varying his attack more. In its Lord's match report it said: "Tate completed the discomfiture of Surrey with a ball that broke away from the wicket; the Middlesex batsmen were beaten by a ball that broke back sharply. All six batsmen he dismissed on Saturday were clean bowled." Tate also made a 50 in the match, to demonstrate his all-round credentials.

He had little chance to celebrate his call-up in a rather tame draw against Nottinghamshire at Hove, managing one for 13 in the first innings and none for 18 in the second. He did chip in with scores of 28 and 30, though.

On to Edgbaston for the first Test. Excitement was high in Sussex over Tate's debut, but it was higher still over the decision to make Gilligan the England captain, following his popular stewardship of the county team. Tate would enjoy the most comfortable of introductions to the England set-up, with his greatest admirer in charge and the press unanimous in its admiration of his abilities. How different from 1902, when Fred had to contend with the backlash against the dropping of George Hirst and Sydney Barnes. Tate travelled to Birmingham with Bill Reeves, one of the umpires, who had been officiating in the Notts game at Hove. He recalled telling Reeves about experiencing "stage fright".

It was a wet summer and the South Africans had had scant opportunity to acclimatise. England, who had not played a Test for almost 16 months, included four debutants. Apart from Tate, there was Percy Chapman, one of the best slip fielders in the country, and Roy Kilner, a slow left-armer from Yorkshire. Kilner's county colleague Herbert Sutcliffe, an elegantly turned-out and technically brilliant batsman, was making his bow. This was the beginning of the Jack Hobbs–Herbert Sutcliffe opening partnership, undoubtedly the best England has ever had.

The three-day Test started on a Saturday. South Africa's captain, Herbie Taylor, won the toss and put England in to bat, somewhat to the crowd's surprise, on a warm and sunny day. The pitch was soft. The report of the day's play by Neville Cardus is a joy. The first pair—Hobbs and Sutcliffe—put on 136. Cardus told his readers that "prosperous though the English innings has been, our batsmen have not exactly flown like eagles unabashed to the sun. Rather have they moved on the wings of circumspection".

Frank Woolley, the most beautiful left-hander of his age, played a pleasant cameo. The team ended the first day on 398 for seven. Cardus was highly critical of the South Africans, whose attack had "dwindled to a feebleness one has indeed never before seen in Test cricket". He even reserved a mild rebuke, unusual given the reverence for the man, for Hobbs. And it was a brilliant one: "To-day Hobbs batted two hours and a half for 76—the innings was in the vein of a Poet Laureate's poem for an occasion: it was dexterously put together, and that is about all."

England had, in the modern parlance, 'built a platform'. The Sunday was, as usual, a rest day and Tate, Lancashire slow bowler Cecil Parkin and 12th man Ernest Tyldesley visited Birmingham prison. "After seeing one or two Saturday night cases," Tate wrote, "we came to a condemned cell, and for a joke we shut Mrs Parkin in. She screamed, and we were all very sorry, little thinking she would not enter into the joke." Tate was still nervous, as he confided that evening to his

room-mate, the Middlesex batsman Patsy Hendren, who reassured him that he would be fine.

Day two was far more exciting than day one. Tate, at number eight, hit out for 19, caught at deep square leg. In doing so he became the 216th man to play for England, who ended their innings on 438, at that point the highest score they had made against South Africa.

A satisfied Gilligan was ready to unleash himself and Tate on the opposition batsmen, who reacted as if the forces of hell itself were at work. Gilligan bowled Bob Catterall for nought with his first legitimate delivery—the previous one had been a no-ball.

South Africa's number three, Fred Susskind, a gangling figure on his debut, played a two and a single off Gilligan to be facing at the start of Tate's first over. Almost 22 years after his father's humiliation it was time to bowl.

Tate marked out his eight-step run, stood at his mark and prepared to come in. As he had done so many times for Sussex in the last couple of seasons, he loped a couple of steps, accelerated and leapt into a perfect body action. He whipped his arm over and Susskind moved to play at the ball. At the last moment, it swung in towards the right-handed batsman's body and he got a thick inside edge. The ball carried to fellow debutant Kilner at short leg, who showed no nerves and held the catch.

Tate had taken a wicket with his first ball in Test cricket. The crowd let out a mighty roar at the scarcely credible news. He was only the fifth England bowler in history to achieve such an instant breakthrough. A delighted Gilligan congratulated his county colleague and, more importantly for the teams, South Africa were four for two. Susskind's dismissal may have resulted from the misplaying of a half-volley. Tate admitted as much in his 1934 memoir *My Cricketing Reminiscences*, although he called the delivery "beautiful".

After the over, Tate fielded at square leg and kept gesturing to umpire Reeves that he wanted a word. But there was no time between balls. Eventually Reeves made a move towards Tate to hear whatever wisdom the delighted debutant might wish to impart. He then uttered the words: "Hot, ain't it."

Unlike his father, Tate had been made to feel at ease in international cricket. He belonged. Now it was time to go on and devastate South Africa. With Gilligan, he did so. The skipper got rid of Dave Nourse, who had been playing Tests for more than 20 years, with the final ball of his second over.

With the score at just 14, Tate bowled skipper Taylor – who had had to watch three of his colleagues dismissed from the other end before facing a ball—for four. The Times reported that Taylor's demise had been in character with the marauding trail Tate had led around the counties: "Tate made a collapse probable by finding an exceptional ball to beat the visitors' captain: it pitched on the blind spot and came back like lightning from the line of off stump to make the leg turn cartwheels."

Tate soon bowled all-rounder Jimmy Blanckenberg for four. The team sheet read 20 for five. In what was becoming little more than a bowl-off between county colleagues, Gilligan replied, taking out the evocatively nicknamed Hubert "Nummy" Deane for two and Eiulf "Buster" Nupen for a duck, off successive balls.

Then Tate took his fourth wicket, bowling Sid Pegler for nought. The scoreboard read 24 for eight. Was a new record low score in Test cricket in the offing? The previous worst of just 30, made by South Africa against England in Port Elizabeth in 1896, looked in some danger.

Cecil Parkin, unusually placed at slip, dropped number five batsman Mick Commaille from an easy chance off Tate. This proved to be his last opportunity to take five wickets in the innings. Gilligan, charging in, did for the rest, bowling wicketkeeper Tommy Ward for one and getting the number 11, debutant fast bowler George Parker, out lbw for a duck, again off successive balls.

The away team had collapsed for 30 runs in 50 minutes, matching the lowest score yet in a Test. Edgbaston's pitch had seemingly speeded up a bit, but it was not playing that badly. Taylor's decision to bowl first now looked plain daft. An indication of the speed of events was that Commaille, batting at five, was stranded on one not out.

Cardus wrote: "Gilligan bowled better than I have ever seen him bowl, while Tate was at his very best – which means the finest in the country." Gilligan's figures were six wickets for seven runs off 6.3 overs, four of which were maidens. He could be forgiven for three no-balls. Tate was a superlative support man, taking four for 12 off six overs, including one maiden. It was among the most devastating Test bowling debuts of all time. What a pity his rewards were superseded by those of his county skipper.

Cardus was appreciative of Tate's efforts. Gilligan was described as having a day of "transfiguring glory", but the debutant's greater enduring quality was noted. The *Manchester Guardian* man wrote: "Tate exploited his most dangerous in-swing and out-swing, and the batsmen, being more or less strangers to his arts, could not pick one swing from the other, for Tate's swingers happen very late, and they follow lines of flight that are more or less the same."

*The Times*, meanwhile, informed its readers: "There was something definitely terrific about their bowling. It was not that they made the ball bump. Neither of them hit a single batsman on the fingers, but they did cause it frequently to break back at an extraordinarily sharp angle, and they most certainly did develop pace off the ground to an amazing extent." The *Argus* reported that Gilligan's spoils "far excelled Tate's four for 12", but it was only a matter of luck.

The team returned to the pavilion for a quick cup of tea, as Gilligan, with his bowling resources fresh, decided to enforce the follow-on. As they came back on to the field, Tate, in particular, had a beaming smile—as well he might. It was only lunch time on the second day. England might even do it with a day to spare, they thought. South Africa had other ideas, though. Even if they lost, they would try to restore some honour and go down fighting.

Gilligan again opened with himself and Tate. Taylor rejigged the order and came out to bat with Commaille, rather than first-innings failure Catterall. The pair looked resolute but Tate had chances missed off both players, Woolley and Fender the culprits. Gilligan switched the attack round, bringing on Fender and Parkin, to little effect. So Tate returned, quickly taking a wide, sharp return catch off Taylor with his left hand, dismissing him for 34. The team total was 54 for one, already a much-improved effort.

Tate continued to trouble the batsmen but it was not until the score reached 101 that he got rid of Commaille with a popping ball that carried off his glove to Hendren at third slip. South Africa marched on, Susskind getting a half-century to remove the memory of his first-innings demise but departing to Gilligan soon afterwards. The fight continued as Nourse went to Gilligan for 34. South Africa ended day two on 274 for four.

Early the next day, however, Blanckenberg went to Gilligan. He had already skied one from Tate to just behind mid-off, where Parkin failed to get a finger on the ball. Woolley had also dropped the same batsman off the unlucky bowler. The South African total was now 275 for five. Could an innings defeat be avoided? At the other end Catterall was playing a monumental fighting knock. Deane was run out for five and Nupen fell lbw to Tate for the same score—295 for seven.

Catterall passed his hundred with three boundaries in an over off Tate, but Gilligan dismissed Ward and Pegler, to leave South Africa nine down for 372. With the score on 390, Catterall had a smack at Tate which went straight, but very fast, to Hobbs—a master at cover as well as at the crease—and was caught for 120. It was the away team's highest Test total to date in England, but the home side had still won by an innings and 18 runs. On paper it looked like a trouncing, but this would be to negate the visitors' splendid but belatedly discovered resolve.

Tate's second-innings figures were four for 103. After the excitement of the first innings he had slipped into the dual role of stock and shock bowler, as he sent down 50.4 overs, of which 19 were maidens. Gilligan took five for 83 off 28.

In the match, Tate and Gilligan took 19 wickets between them, an astonishing feat. Not everyone was happy, though. The press was full of dark mutterings about the quality of England's unsuccessful back-up attack. *The Times* demanded some "furious thinking" by the selectors, while Cardus, possibly after a press-room conflab, concurred. The bowling, except for Tate and Gilligan, had to be "drastically improved for the next Test, and must be improved out of recognition before we can even think of sending a side to Australia". The action was of the moment; thoughts were of the impending Ashes winter.

Cardus unleashed a further load of invective against Parkin, accusing him of losing his guile by bowling for Lancashire on too many helpful pitches. He conceded the off-spinner, who also threw in a few leg-breaks, was a "jewel" on sticky surfaces, but pointed out that success in Australia was now about performing on hard wickets.

His words on Tate were generous and highly perceptive: "And, with hard wicket men so terribly scarce, let us be more and more grateful for Tate—on all kinds of pitches the finest bowler since Sydney Barnes played for England. On Monday, throughout a gruelling day, he maintained all but his opening pace, from the wicket. Batsmen at six o'clock needed to watch him as vigilantly as at noon." As Barnes is still recognised by many today as the greatest bowler to have played the game, it was uncommonly high praise, especially for a debutant who had been a paceman for still less than two years.

The selectors' task in changing the supporting bowlers was made far easier when Parkin, no doubt angry at his coverage in the rest of the press, vented his anger in the Sunday newspaper *The Weekly Dispatch*. At least, via the rather sensationalising pen of a ghost-writer, that is.

The article informed readers he was “not going to stand being treated as I was on Tuesday last”. On the last morning’s play, he said, he had felt “humiliated” by Gilligan’s reluctance to call on his services, and wondered “what on earth I had done to be overlooked”. Parkin then made the shocking admission that “I should not be fair to myself if I accepted an invitation to play in any further Test match”.

He got his wish, being dropped for the next game, and was never called up by England again. Until his dying day, Parkin contested that he had been at least partially misquoted, but he was in real life an outspoken man, and the words seemed to ring true. He should have checked his colleague’s copy more carefully.

The press treated the outburst as mere bitterness, while one or two suggested his frustration could have been a matter of the race with Tate to be the first man that year to 100 first-class wickets. In February the following year, Parkin accepted the Lancashire president’s advice to cease ‘writing’ cricket articles. By 1927, he was out of the first-class game.

In the 1930s Gilligan wrote that “far too much” had been made of the article and that “Parkin and I have always been good friends both before and since this little affair”. He even displayed a “very nice letter which he wrote to me from Old Trafford afterwards”. It read:

> My Dear Mr Gilligan,
>
> Just a few lines to express my sincere regret to you for giving you any pain by what I said in the Press about Birmingham during the First Test against South Africa. I spoke in the heat of the moment, never intending to hurt your feelings in any way.
>
> Hoping the matter is now done with, and wishing you continued success.
>
> Yours respectfully
>
> [Cecil Parkin]

Tate agreed that Parkin, as England’s “number one bowler… had reason for his grouch at not being asked to open the bowling with the skipper”, but added that Gilligan had “seen me all the season” for Sussex, and knew his capabilities.

The day after the first Test finished, Tate was down at Horsham, where he took four for 96 against Worcester. In the second innings he excelled his best first-class figures once again, taking eight for 18 in 14.3 overs, to give Sussex a five-wicket victory. For the moment he was unstoppable. The next two games brought a century against Yorkshire and a five-wicket haul against Lancashire. Now it was time for another special experience: his first Test at Lord’s.

The game, while not as dramatic, had some peculiar parallels with the first at Edgbaston. England’s margin of victory was the same: an innings and 18 runs. Catterall, this time in the first innings, made another score of 120. Having tarnished his reputation by fielding when winning the toss in the first Test, South Africa’s Taylor opted to bat. They were all out for 273. Tate took two for 62—Nourse and Blanckenberg—off 34 overs.

The visitors’ efforts paled, though, when England’s Hobbs and Sutcliffe started to demonstrate their true greatness as a pairing. They put on 268 for the first wicket. Sutcliffe went for a crafted 122, his first international century. Hobbs, perhaps stung by the implied criticism of his batting in the previous Test, went on

to make a glorious 211 in just 280 minutes. The team score was by now a totally dominating 410 for two. Gilligan went on, though, allowing Woolley to record an unbeaten 134 and Hendren an unbeaten 50, before declaring on 531 for two.

South Africa, without the talent at England's disposal, once again fought manfully, to 240 all out. Tate managed to take only two tail-end wickets, those of Pegler and Parker. It was not as exciting as at Birmingham, but there was one last parallel. Tate took the final wicket to win the match once again. It was becoming a wonderful summer, where everything was going right for Tate, and even England. Yet his task was about to become a lot harder, and lonelier.

The day after the second Test finished one of the biggest games in the calendar, the Gentlemen v Players at the Oval, began. The amateurs were forced to follow on, making just 113 in reply to the professionals' 288, in which Tate recorded a duck.

In the Gentlemen's first innings something terrible occurred. While facing the non-express bowling of Worcestershire's Fred "Dick" Pearson, Gilligan was hit over the heart by one that lifted, and slumped to the floor unconscious. A worried Tate was among the first to rush towards his friend. Gilligan recovered sufficiently to be led from the pitch. But he came back on later and made 34.

When the Gentlemen followed on, rather than decline to bat, which he should have done, Gilligan opted to do something foolhardy, but magnificent. Coming in at number ten, the England captain attacked the bowling like he had rarely done before. No one was spared, even Tate going for 98 in 26 overs. Gilligan ended up with 112 in 90 minutes. The team posted 381, to force the Players to come in again, no one else even getting a half-century.

In the end the Players made the 210 to win comfortably, Tate unbeaten on 41 at number six. Yet the significance of the match went much further. Gilligan seemed to exacerbate his heart injury through his exertions, causing permanent damage. Apart from on rare occasions, he was not able to bowl anymore with the fire and passion he had shown in the Edgbaston Test. For Sussex, and England, Tate was now the only really top-class pace bowler around. It meant his workload and responsibility, already heavy, would only increase.

For the time being that did not seem to worry him, with seven for 48 against Kent. This was followed by six for 42 in the first innings of the third Test, at Leeds. This was Tate's first haul of five wickets or more at international level. He had Deane caught and bowled, clean bowled Ward and had Catterall and Nupen caught by wicketkeeper George Wood. Pegler was lbw and Blanckenberg bowled. *Wisden* said: "With nothing in the pitch to give him the least assistance, Tate did great work in taking six wickets for 42 runs." In the second innings he took another three for 64, as England went three-nil up with two matches to play.

Five for 87 against Warwickshire got him nicely warmed up for what must have been a nerve-racking encounter. It was time for a second member of the Tate family to play for England at Old Trafford. Unfortunately the weather was the biggest influence on the game, which petered out into a draw. The South Africans batted and Tate took a tidy three for 34, but the game was declared a washout with the visitors on 116 for four.

The South Africans then drew with Sussex in their tour game at Hove, Tate having a quiet game. But he was back in the wickets with six for 66 and four for

33 against Middlesex. Just to remind people that he was, at least at county level, a genuine all-rounder, he took five for 114 and scored 164 in 150 minutes against Hampshire at Hastings. He gave a further reminder in the fifth Test, at the Oval, another weather-affected draw. Tate took three for 64 in South Africa's only innings and then scored his first international fifty, coming in at number seven.

The season ended successfully, with seven for 41 against Lancashire the highlight. In his second full summer as a seamer he had taken 205 wickets at 13.74, the highest number of any bowler in first-class cricket that year. Sussex, after a good start, had finished tenth.

South Africa were a decent side, but now the ultimate challenge awaited. It was time to sail for Australia. Before that, however, it is time to ask just what was Tate doing to achieve such amazing results?

# Chapter 11

## Unlocking the Machine.

"*The bowler who suspended the laws of timing.*"
—John Arlott

CRICKET AND MAGIC have a long association. The late 19th century boom in illusionists and conjurers coincided with the entrance of the game into the English national consciousness. Cricket even took on some of the terminology. The phrase 'hat-trick', meaning three wickets in three balls, derives from the sort of 'hat trick' performed by men in capes pulling rabbits, handkerchiefs and other paraphernalia out of their headgear.

Cecil Parkin, the Lancashire spinner who so resented Tate and Gilligan's monopoly of wickets in the first Test of 1924, was himself an accomplished conjurer. Yet his bowling lost some of its ability to dazzle. When Parkin began his first-class career, he was able to perform all sorts of wonders—leg-breaks, top-spinners, mystery balls. However, he became somewhat ground down by the demands of county cricket, with its need for containment and accuracy, and the damp pitches of Lancashire, which lessened the need for experimentation. At least he had his hobby as an outlet for his more creative impulses.

Spinners, like the early Parkin, have always been credited as the true creatives among bowlers. Think of Muttiah Muralitharan and Shane Warne in recent years and the words "zooter", "flipper", "doosra", "googly", "top-spinner" and others create a bewildering array of possibilities. In fact, the mystique, like the mesmerism of a fairground showman, can begin to take over one's mind.

Even before going out to bat, normally well-organised, rational players can become confused about what to do. The bowler, like the magician, has won the mind games. With more than 1,500 Test wickets between them, Warne and Muralitharan were glorious refreshment after a few decades during which one-day cricket had seemed to turn spinners into unflighting, run-saving automata.

Bowlers of a greater pace do not receive the same accolades for their endeavours of intellect, or at least cunning. When one thinks of traditional English pacemen, the long-ingrained image of the muscular, uncomplicated village blacksmith, arms pumping furiously during a long run in, is never far away. This may have changed in recent years, as slow-motion film shows better the variety of skills in use, but in Tate's time it was thought fast bowling was a less cerebral activity than flighting up 'slows' and, especially, batting. These roles provided inspiration. Pace was all about perspiration. This did, and still does, the noble practitioners of rapid propulsion a huge disservice.

Australia's Dennis Lillee, when he began his career, was ferociously quick. A serious back injury forced him to cut his pace, but he became a better bowler as he learned more about how to out-think batsman and create what might be called an 'aura'. It was controlled, rather than wild, speed which made him such a force. Tate, at his peak, had more aura, and control, than any other bowler of his generation, and most before and afterwards. Using a keen brain and a beautiful action he created a kind of magic.

Whenever contemporaries discussed his bowling, certain phrases came up. What was he like to face? Well, he had 'zip', 'fizz' and 'nip'. In fact, batsmen of the 1920s and 1930s constantly averred that he gained 'more pace off the pitch' than anyone else around, possibly more than anyone who had ever lived. They also complained that getting hit by Tate hurt more than by anyone else. Even Bob Wyatt, a highly rational England captain, was content to state that, in his experience, Maurice Tate "lost less pace off the pitch than any other bowler of his kind".

People believed Tate was somehow defying, or at least coaxing some flexibility from, the immutable laws of physics, like an unwitting Einstein. What a batsman saw, and believed, was not the same as what he knew, with even a little learning, was possible. Expectation and misperception were overwhelming clear-mindedness.

It has been proved over the years that a cricket ball cannot gain pace during its journey from the bowler's hand to the batsman. Figures from the University of Sydney show that, regardless of the speed at which it is bowled, it slows down by about 12% by the time it hits the pitch, due to air friction. Contact with the pitch slows it down by another 30% to 40%, depending on the hardness of the surface and the angle at which the ball is bowled.

During the 1990s, the New Zealand Sports Turf Institute carried out similar research into the speed and behaviour of cricket balls. Its former chief executive, Keith McAuliffe, who now works in Australia, told me: "In regard to pitch pace after contact with the pitch, it is true that there must always be a loss in energy, and presumably pace. I guess there is a potential for a ball that is looped—coming through on a steep angle, and with top spin—to have quicker horizontal velocity." Even this is open to doubt. And such spin was not something Tate, given the pace of his arm through the air, could manage.

So it is fair to say that for Tate, as with every other bowler in the history of the game, the ball was coming down from the bowler's hand at a certain pace and continuing at a reduced pace, proportionate to the effects of air friction and hitting

the pitch. Without in-built jet propulsion or similar gimmickry it could not be any other way.

Players still swore blind that Tate was gaining pace, though. After his change from off-spin to medium pace, word of his devastating acceleration got round the country. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy, a useful myth for the bowler. There was something of a Sussex tradition of apparent acceleration off the pitch. Fred Tate was known to zip his off-spinners along. Long before that, an all-rounder by the name of John Hammond was born in 1769 in Pulborough, in the west of the county. He was described as a "semi-round-arm" bowler. John Marshall, in his 1959 book *Sussex Cricket*, wrote: "Though slow, he was formidable; the scant evidence to us suggests that he had 'fizz' off the pitch which, if less venomous than Maurice Tate's, 130-odd years later, claimed many victims."

Tate believed in his own pioneering, or at least evolutionary, importance. He posited that bowling had once been "more or less of the plain type, coming under the heading of breaks, medium and fast". Then George Hirst had "produced, much as a conjurer produces a rabbit, a new type of ball: the one which swung in the air—the swerver". This had startled players around the start of the 20th century. But Tate added that "dozens" were now emulating Hirst's methods. He also implied that his own style was an improvement on the Yorkshireman's, the next stage in the march of bowling.

Yet he was not especially forthcoming about how he achieved his supposed innovation. "During the last two years, scores of people have asked me, verbally or by letter, to explain how I came to develop my 'nip' from the pitch," he wrote in the mid-1920s. "To be quite candid, it is rather a difficult question to answer, as most of my bowling (at any rate, during the last year or so) has come to me quite naturally." Was he being disingenuous, keeping a 'poker face' on to preserve the mystery, or did he genuinely not know what was going on? It is time to analyse his technique.

The first thing to note is that, during his transformation from an off-spinner to a medium-fast bowler in 1922, Tate did not change his run-up. He kept the same eight-pace amble, then trot, up to the wicket, before leaping in to bowl. This is unusual for a bowler reaching speeds above 80mph, as, judging by footage, he must have done. It had a rural air about it—the sort of approach to the wicket one might see in a village game on a Sunday afternoon. Yet in what could be a lesson for over-prescriptive coaches today, Tate wrote that there should be "no fixed rule as to the best length of run", allowing for differences of "height and build, the pace of your delivery, and particularly your temperament".

At first his quicker ball was used as a 'shock' delivery, mixed in among slow-medium spinners. The dismissal of Hampshire's Phil Mead with a markedly more rapid delivery in 1922, perhaps born of frustration at Mead's stonewalling, seemed to surprise Tate. Such was its success that a faster ball, if not his very fastest, became the stock offering over the next year or so. Effectively, given that he was still coming off the short run, he was now bowling a 'faster ball' off a spinner's approach all the time. Why change the run-up if the existing one had the desired effect? Most spinners, and the vast majority of bowlers who have played the game, did not have Tate's great weapon: his action.

As Tate shifted into his sideways-on position, he raised his long left arm high, with his right in geometrically the opposite place, at just about full stretch. The left led over and, with a rapid swing, the right came over and delivered the ball. There was little loss of energy. As modern coaches say, his 'lines' were all straight, with most of the effort going in to getting the ball to the other end. Often bowlers have struggled with their actions. Andrew Flintoff's feet were in the wrong position, causing a huge strain on his body. Others have wasted energy by contorting themselves into inefficient movements, nullifying the pace they produce. Tate, in contrast, came through easily.

A legacy of his off-spinning days helped him too. Spinners are apt to balance for longer on the big toe of their front foot than fast bowlers with long run-ups, mainly because to steam in off 20 yards and then linger on the ball of one's foot would be incredibly hard on the body. Tate, from his short run-up, still did this noticeably. This helped him.

In a study at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2010, a dozen teenage fast bowlers were filmed at 250 frames per second and their actions scrutinised. Researchers found that "greater ankle height during the delivery stride, and greater shoulder extension strength contribute significantly to higher ball release speeds". With Tate's huge feet, his ankle would have been well off the ground, which would have been a distinct advantage. His shoulder was extended too.

Standing on the tip of one's toe when bowling makes it harder to bend the front leg. So, Tate's left leg was always braced at delivery. As further justification for his method, the Johannesburg study also found that "greater front leg knee extension at ball release" was an important factor in maintaining speed and keeping the action as economical as possible.

Tate himself came to realise these truths, via experience rather than scientific theory. He stated that a bowler, as much as a batsman, had to ensure that his 'stance' was correct. It is not an expression often used of bowlers, but is perhaps one that should be. Batsmen adopt a stance so that they can move easily into the right position to hit, defend or leave the ball. Bowlers, while not having to react in quite the same way, are also moving into position and, if they think about it, should do as much as possible to make this as easy, efficient and repeatable as they can. Tate wrote that "when my left leg comes down on the ground it is firm and stiff; if I bent my knee at all I should soon lose the power and direction of length. So do not bend the knee when in the act of delivering".

An interesting television experiment in 1979 seemed to corroborate this idea. Australia's Channel 9 gathered some of the best pacemen of that rich era in Perth for a competition called *The World's Fastest Bowler*. Australia's Dennis Lillee, West Indians Michael Holding and Andy Roberts, Pakistan's Imran Khan, New Zealand's Richard Hadlee and South African Michael Procter were among those who took part. Film of their actions was slowed down, so as to be seen more accurately than the side-on blur normally witnessed by spectators. Lillee and Hadlee, undoubtedly two of the all-time greats, noticeably bent their front left knee during delivery. They were measured as being among the slowest of those on show.

The quickest, with a top speed of 147.9kmh, or 91.2mph, was Australia's Jeff Thomson. Presenter Richie Benaud said he had "one of the most marvellous

actions I've ever seen". When slowed down, it is obvious that Thomson, more than any of the others, kept his front leg fully braced, and lingered on the toe of his extended foot for longer, allowing him to whip his right arm through his action, wasting less energy than the others. The second quickest, Holding, had the second most braced leg. Imran was third, and his leg was almost straight at the point of delivery too.

The heat that day in Perth was almost unbearable and Thomson had been out of cricket for several months. "I wasn't even playing," he said years later. "It was the year I got banned from cricket. And Channel Nine, the guys from Nine, said: 'Thommo you've got to go in this. You're the fastest bowler. You've got to be in this.' I said: 'Hang on. I'm not even playing.' So I went in the bloody thing and won it. And alls I'd been doing was drinking beer, sitting on my backside for months."

Thomson's run was rather ambling until he gathered his energy at the last moment, like a speeded-up Tate. Thomson was renowned for not practising or overcomplicating his approach to bowling. Surprisingly, given the company he was in, he also took the 'accuracy' prize for hitting the stumps most often. Thomson was, in the true Tate sense, a 'natural' in having such an action. It is a gift given to few.

Such a braced leg at the point of delivery can take a physical toll. "Young" Jim Parks, the Sussex and England wicketkeeper of the 1950s and 1960s, remembers a story his father, "Old" Jim Parks, the all-rounder who played for many years with Tate, told him: "He used to recall that Maurice came in with an almighty thud when he was really going for it. It seemed to make the whole ground shake and the other fielders could hear it." If the slender Michael Holding, a talented runner in his youth, was known as "Whispering Death" for his gliding, near-silent approach to the crease and passage through it, Tate was more of a "Thundering Doom". The Thor's hammer-like sound of his left foot landing was the warning that a poor batsman was about to be sent off to that Valhalla of a pavilion at Hove, Lord's or wherever he was playing. Given the pounding his left foot took, it is no wonder he suffered from time to time from toe injuries.

There was more. Tate's wide hips provided power as he rotated through the action. Fast bowling is about moving the ball as quickly as possible through the horizontal plane to generate velocity. Big hips and a sturdy backside help that.

Another legacy of Tate's off-spinning days was a strong wrist. Turning the ball, year after year, requires both flexibility and power in the joints. Looking at his action, there was still a discernible flick of the wrist as the ball was released, imparting extra whip. The slinginess of the action kept the ball hidden from view until just before delivery too, adding more 'hurry up'.

All these factors conjoined to ensure the ball was coming down at a pretty rapid pace, despite the short run-up. Tate was not gaining pace off the pitch. He was coming more quickly through the air than anyone expected, given the visual clue of his run-up. Very few players truly came to terms with this. To do so required unusual powers of counter-intuition. Tate's magic was in this deception. It came from a bowling style of near-perfection, not an invocation of the supernatural or a defiance of conventional ballistics.

This, in itself, might have been surmountable, but Tate had still more tricks. After the spring of 1923, when Gilligan instructed him with tenderness in the Hove

nets, he was able to bowl outswingers and inswingers. This was accentuated when the mist known as the 'sea fret' crossed the ground during many an afternoon, to the loud accompaniment of the screams of seagulls searching for titbits left over from Sussex members' picnics. Tate's swingers were not only accurate, but moved late, either way, from a very similar initial line of flight, giving the batsman little time to adjust. Late swing, creating confusion and despair in the last few milliseconds of a ball's passage, is the dream of most pace bowlers.

Tate went even further, though, leading knowledgeable commentators to think of him as a true pioneer of modern seam bowling. The previous generation of medium-pace and medium-fast bowlers, led by George Hirst, had learned how to control swing, which had previously been an unpredictable weapon. But their variation balls were what we now call 'cutters', where the seam is dragged down on one side to create movement off the pitch. They were sometimes referred to as 'spin' deliveries, in the confusing terminology of the early 20th century. The choice was generally either movement off the pitch *or* swing. Even top-class Test performers could not frequently manage both effects with the same delivery, hoping instead for the odd fluke. Tate was different.

He is sometimes referred to as the first bowler who really used the seam to its full potential. The key seems to have been, like his action, extreme precision. Contemporaries reported that, after the ball had swung in or out, it often jagged off the turf. So, an 80mph ball might move away in the air at the last moment then hit the seam and move back in—or further away. It might swing in and then seam in either direction. It might do nothing after pitching, if held slightly differently. That variety must be the definition of unplayable. This movement off the pitch was not directly controllable, making it more disconcerting for the batsman. Yet Tate got the seam into such a position as to make a jag either way more likely.

John Arlott recounted Tate once bowling Kentish left-hander Frank Woolley with a ball that dipped in, hit the pitch and then moved the other way to send his off-stump reeling. "Chub, you meant that to go the other way," exclaimed Woolley. "Let me tell you, Stork, I haven't got the vaguest bloody idea where it's going, so I'm damned sure you haven't," the delighted Tate replied.

The poor batsman had to contend with the illusion that Tate was gaining pace off the pitch and his actual wicked movement, both through the air and off the pitch. Some observers were not entirely pleased, though. Monty Noble, who had played against Fred in the 1902 Test and later captained Australia, felt something seen in the likes of the English medium-pacer Sydney Barnes at the turn of the century was missing. Noble wrote after England's tour of Australia in 1924/25: "Tate is one of the finest bowlers England has produced, a worker and a trier. He is a 'seam' bowler, and would be even better if he could cultivate a spin." Did he need to, though? Might purposefully cutting or spinning the ball even have detracted from Tate achieving marvellous varieties from almost exactly the same action, which is the type of deception all bowlers strive for?

Tate could also bowl a slower delivery, another legacy of the subtle changes of pace employed during his earlier career as an off-spinner, although he claimed not to know how he did it, except to say he used "a lot of body work in holding back the ball". He even ventured that he feared losing his natural ability to send down a slower ball if he thought too much about it.

Tate's faster ball entailed running up as normal but bringing "your left foot down more heavily" and putting "plenty of body work in to it", he said. Those poor toes!

Tate liked to keep his bowling as simple as possible. Rather than vary his position on the crease, he always bowled from the same spot quite close in to the stumps. Doing otherwise, he reasoned, would give the batsman an insight into his thinking, and an early indication of what was coming down.

He was fastidious about maintaining a length. It reminds one of the 1990 England versus India Test series. A young Angus Fraser, bowling at a similar pace to Tate, had kept the batsman, Mohammad Azharuddin, tied down for the first five balls of an over on a dusty, unhelpful pitch. Then he let go of a half-volley off the last ball and was driven for four. Commentator Richie Benaud remarked: "Fraser is going to be really cranky with himself about that." He was right. The red-faced Middlesex man kicked the pitch, knowing he had relieved the pressure.

It was something Tate was just as keen to avoid. He did not want batsmen to feel free to drive him. To this end, he always insisted, unlike most modern pace bowlers, that the wicketkeeper should stand up to him. Walter "Tich" Cornford, the tiniest man on the first-class circuit, did this for him at Sussex, after he replaced the late George Street, as did Surrey's Herbert Strudwick, Lancashire's George Duckworth and Kent's Les Ames for England. It was not a role for the faint-hearted. Wicketkeepers in the 1920s and 1930s, like batsmen, did not wear helmets. A slight deviation off the bat at Tate's pace could easily have resulted in a career-threatening eye injury.

Cornford was brilliant at taking the ball and, in one movement, having it ready to administer a stumping. He used to wear pieces of steak under his gloves to help ease the pain of the poundings his hands had to take. The keeper was ready for stumpings—but maintaining the threat, and keeping the batsman tied down, was Tate's primary objective.

Few sportsmen do such a constant, mentally tiring job. But the 90-year-old Rupert Webb performed it for another Sussex fast-medium man, Jim Cornford (only a distant relation of Tich) during the 1940s and 1950s. After Webb retired from the game, he worked in the oil industry before becoming an actor and model, one of his roles being the father of the jilted bride 'Duck Face' in the 1994 hit film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. "It was an attacking situation with a batsman if they dragged their right foot out of the crease because, if they missed a ball, they were a goner," Webb, now Sussex's oldest living capped player, said. "If you stood back, a batsman could go further forward and turn a good-length ball into a half-volley, by just stepping out, not running out or slogging. The right foot out of the crease gave him momentum and we tried to stop that."

Jim Cornford performed like a lesser clone of Tate, always wanting to make the batsman feel trapped. This feeling of claustrophobia, an inability to relax, knowing that the slightest movement could bring an instant demise, is what pressure for batsmen at the highest level means. It also allows the bowler to feel the keeper is an accomplice. If they stand back 15 yards, there is not the same intimacy of purpose. It was an intimacy with which Tate would have grown up as an off-spinner and been reluctant to relinquish.

The modern concern is that having a wicketkeeper standing up will result in more dropped catches and byes. Tate reasoned that, with slip fielders like Wally Hammond and Percy Chapman for England and Duleepsinhji or John Langridge for Sussex, he had plenty of back-up for the thicker edges, and even some of the finer ones.

A first-class career economy rate of 2.01 runs an over—and 1.94 in Tests—shows Tate knew a thing or two about keeping his opponents quiet. Also, if he thought his bowling speed was not high enough to necessitate a wicketkeeper standing back, the batsmen could not have expected him to bowl quickly either. Hence even greater surprise at his 'pace off the pitch', particularly among those facing him for the first time. It was rare for stumpings to be taken off Tate, happening only once in Tests and 66 times during his first-class career, but the threat was a deterrent to movement.

Webb was also a contemporary of Tate's successor Alec Bedser, so strong and skilful for Surrey and England in the years immediately after the Second World War. His career saw a glorious re-flowering of the early 20th century cut, or 'spin' that Tate had not employed.

Webb explained to me: "I was talking to Alec Bedser once. I asked him how he was getting on. When they played at the Oval, they prepared the pitch for their spinners, Tony Lock and Jim Laker. It was a turning wicket. Alec never played on a decent pitch at the Oval. In the whole seven years they won the title, we never played on a decent wicket at the Oval. Not once.

"It was always the case that Alec had two or three overs and [the captain] Stuart Surridge said: 'All right, Alec. Take a break.' Then he shouted: 'Jim.' Alec would shine the ball so you could see your face in it. Jim Laker would come up and rub it all over the ground and it was all brown.

"If Alec did get a chance to bowl it again he couldn't swing it like he did before. It was a brown lump. Then he came on later with the new ball and perhaps the same thing would happen again. When he played away, he would bowl over after over after over, at Hove or somewhere like that.

"I asked him one day how he'd been getting on. He said he'd been practising down at Alf Gover's school bowling cutters. He said: 'I've mastered it and I'm as bloody good as those two at moving it off the wicket. I bowl my cutters slower and I bowl leg-cutters. I can make it go off the wicket just as well as Locky can.

"All you do with a cutter is roll it over, not spin it like a leg-spinner. There's no wrist in it. Maurice Tate didn't bowl a lot of cutters. It was only the situation Alec was in. He didn't bowl a lot of cutters when he played away. He never bowled cutters against us at Hove.

In actual fact he got it into his head that it was the only way he could stay in the Surrey team with Jim Laker and Tony Lock in it. He got very serious. He said: 'Those two buggers'll have me out of the side.'"

Tate did not play in a county team anything like as good as Surrey's in the 1950s and, therefore, did not face the same pressure on his place, real or perceived. He relied on his 'natural method', with its accuracy and subtle, unpredictable variation. He analysed batsmen's weaknesses, but did not employ grand schemes of the mind to get wickets. Sydney Barnes, who lived on to well

after Tate's career, was an admirer, saying on one occasion: "Like me, he tries to get a wicket every ball, and is surprised if he doesn't."

Tate was quite serene, even mesmerising, to watch. From side-on he appeared so smooth, despite the whacking his left foot took. Viewed from behind the arm, he created movement in more than one direction, the ball seeming to dance around the batsman's defences, like a stabbing picador taunting a confused and wounded bull.

It was cruel but unsurpassably beautiful.

# Chapter 12

## Australia Bound.

"*We have every hope that he will emulate the doings in Australia of those great bowlers, Lohmann, Barnes and FR Foster.*"
—Pelham Warner

AS THE 1924 season ended it was time for the cricketing test: an Ashes series in Australia. Everything that cricket had to offer, Tate had dealt with easily in the two and a bit years since his conversion to pace. A trip down under was something else, though. Baking heat, batsman-friendly pitches, barracking crowds, eight-ball overs and Test matches with no time limit made the experience unlike any other for English tourists. The team were to spend six months away from home.

Kathleen gave birth to the couple's first son, Maurice junior, shortly before the trip. With three children under the age of three in the house, her winter was set to be hard work.

It was with a sense of excitement and some foreboding that Arthur Gilligan's MCC tourists met at London's Victoria Station on Thursday 18th September 1924. Large crowds gathered on the concourse to wish the players well. Gilligan's mother handed each of them a sprig of white heather for good luck, something the superstitious Tate would have appreciated. Fred Tate was also there to see his son off, as were Walter Brearley, who had noticed Maurice's talent early on, and Sussex devotee Sir Home Gordon.

Gilligan had a strong squad, with Jack Hobbs, Herbert Sutcliffe, Frank Woolley, Andy Sandham, Percy Chapman and Patsy Hendren among the batsmen. Yorkshire's Roy Kilner and Kent's Alfred "Tich" Freeman were formidable spinners, while Surrey's Herbert Strudwick was a superb wicketkeeper. One thing lacking, though, was pace. Ageing Essex all-rounder Johnny Douglas bowled some nice seam and Gilligan could still turn his arm over, despite his injuries. However, Tate occupied a lonely place as a true Test-class fast-medium man, despite England's attempt to find speedsters to match Jack Gregory and Ted McDonald, who had stampeded through England back in 1921.

England had not won a Test against Australia since the final match of the unique triangular series, also featuring South Africa, back in 1912. Gilligan, while

no tactical genius, was the ideal man to instil some morale among his men, and even some hope. “We are all looking forward to the trip immensely,” he said as the team boarded the train. “We will be a very happy party, whether we win or lose, and we will try to keep up the tradition of cricket.”

Tate was to recall his excitement, adding: “My only regret was leaving the family... for I am a highly domesticated man; but one has to go where one’s work is, and there are always the happy reunions to look forward to.” Despite his domesticity, Tate enjoyed the lighter side of the long journey aboard the Orient liner Ormonde, the boredom lessened by banter with team-mates and sightseeing.

The squad arrived in Ceylon for a match in the sweltering heat of Colombo, which MCC won. In mid-October they got to the Western Australian city of Perth, then even more isolated by distance than it is today. Crowds greeted them, with one wag giving the visitors their first taste of barracking, by shouting: “You’ll never get ’em out.” He had a point. It would certainly not be easy.

The writer of the *Cricket Notes* column in *The Times* feared what would now be called ‘burn-out’, saying: “In this connexion a word of serious warning is imperative. Except in case of dire necessity Tate must not be encouraged to get runs... I think Mr Arthur Gilligan should, in Australia, treat Tate as Mr [Plum] Warner treated [Wilfred] Rhodes in the brilliantly successful tour of 1903-04, putting him in last or last but one in the Test Matches, and so keeping him fresh for his all-important task of getting the other side out. On Tate’s chances rests our best chance of winning the rubber.” It was a marked contrast to four and a half years earlier, when Sussex had seriously considered asking Tate to give up bowling.

The first game of the tour, against Western Australia, was a rather jaded draw, with Tate taking two for nine and one for 21, as the home side followed on. But *The Times* noted that Gilligan and Tate had “already created a profound impression” through their jovial light-heartedness.

Australian leg-spinner Arthur Mailey predicted problems selecting a balanced side. “Gilligan will burn the midnight oil before he selects his first team,” he wrote, “unless he is prepared to enter the field without two of his four match-winning bowlers—Howell, Douglas, Tate and Gilligan—whereas if he includes these bowlers, he must omit outfield [meaning those with good throwing arms] batsmen like Sandham and Sutcliffe.”

Tate himself found the new environment difficult to adjust to, with the soft turf of England a very distant memory. The hard ground “seemed to throw me back instead of forwards, because there was no give”. He consulted Strudwick, a devout Christian dubbed the team’s “Father Confessor”, who said it would be OK after a bit of practice.

MCC thrashed Western Australia in a second game at Perth, with Tate getting three for ten in the second innings. At a civic reception, Gilligan introduced his Sussex colleague as having the “biggest feet in the county”. The local press misquoted him as saying they were the biggest in the “country” and, from then on, the Australians became obsessed with these parts of the Tate anatomy, which ended up having a considerable influence on the series.

By his third game, against South Australia in Adelaide, after a train journey of more than 1,500 miles, Tate was, true to Strudwick’s advice, starting to adjust. He

had decided to bowl a yard shorter than in England to deal with the greater pace of the pitches. He took three for 63 in the match, as MCC won by nine wickets.

He was 12th man against Victoria and then it was off to Sydney to face the mighty New South Wales. It was here that the Australians got a true taste of Tate's ability. In the first innings he took seven for 74, amid some poor weather, which he described as one of his 'mad' moments. Tate remembered Strudwick telling him afterwards: "I am so pleased Maurice. You've got your run-through all right now."

Some pre-series banter must have made this achievement all the sweeter. Speaking before the New South Wales match, former Test captain Warwick Armstrong doubted whether Tate could prosper in Australia, going along with the view that only spinners who gave the ball a real rip and genuinely quick bowlers could succeed on the country's pitches. His quality questioned, Tate had something to prove, saying afterwards: "I laughed. It doesn't do to let that sort of thing get you down."

One of those watching at Sydney was Armstrong's contemporary and fellow ex-Australian captain, Monty Noble, who was producing an encyclopedic memoir of the tour, entitled *Gilligan's Men*. He studied Tate as the new man took three wickets in an over: "I liked his style. He takes six swinging strides [Noble did not include the first two, shorter steps], and his action is beautiful. He lopes easily along, has the advantage of height, and the flexibility of his youthful muscles is evident. A flick of the wrist gives him swing and pace off the pitch…

"That he could get so much out of a fairly slow batsman's wicket was a triumph, and old cricketers placed him high among bowlers, while the crowd, most of whom are content to judge by results, gasped with astonishment… On this first day of play I marvelled at the way Tate handled the wet ball."

Noble went on: "Tate secured the majority of his [seven] wickets with a ball which, pitched shorter than his usual length, made pace off the pitch." Something special had washed up on Australia's shores.

Tate took another three wickets in the second innings, as MCC triumphed by three wickets. A draw against Queensland, in which Tate took five wickets, preceded the first Test, at the Sydney Cricket Ground. After a couple of days' rest in Sydney, an over-keen Gilligan decided a course of physical jerks might help liven spirits and harden bodies for battle, despite the temperature being in the nineties. Tate remembered that most players could "scarcely walk" afterwards.

Almost 34,000 people crammed into the SCG on 19th December. The consensus was that the current Australian lot were not as good as Armstrong's 1921 team and that England had improved. There might be a decent contest. Australia's captain, Herbie "Horseshoe" Collins, so nicknamed because of his legendary luck as skipper and batsman, won the toss. He decided to bat on what looked like a belting pitch. Tate opened the bowling with Gilligan. First change, and on international debut, was leg-spinner Tich Freeman, the one bowler who consistently took more wickets than Tate at county level during the 1920s.

The right-handed Collins had clearly been thinking about how to play Tate and decided to face as much of his bowling as he could. His partner, the left-handed Warren Bardsley, also did his best to blunt him. On a broiling day, the ball was breaking both ways as the seam hit the hard pitch. Both men played and missed but Tate could not get them out. When Bardsley had scored 13, he was missed in

the slips by Hendren off Tate. Perhaps the fears voiced about the frailty of England's fielding a year before during Tate's breakthrough Test trial game were being realised.

Gilligan looked far less effective at the other end and he replaced himself with Freeman. With the score on 46, Freeman dismissed Bardsley for 21. In came debutant Bill Ponsford, the brilliant Victorian right-hander who had hit the world's highest first-class score, 429, the previous year. It was the fiercest introduction imaginable. Ponsford was almost bowled half a dozen times in the first two overs. He turned towards Strudwick to say: "I've never played against such good bowling before." "No, it does not look as if you have," the wicketkeeper replied.

Yet Ponsford, with Collins doing his utmost to shield him from Tate, managed to stay in. The bowler was not a happy man. Each time Tate narrowly missed bowling Ponsford, he put his hand on his head and looked up at the sky. One wag in the crowd shouted out: "It's no good, Tate. HE won't help you!"

Any divine inspiration was with Australia, rather than Tate, that day. Ponsford remembered being nonplussed by the style of bowling he was facing, rather like an English batsmen today being confronted by an effective leg-break/googly bowler. He claimed he had seen the ball well, but it then "fizzed through like a flat pebble off a millpond", beating himself and the wicketkeeper to go for four byes. He was beaten again and again, the harder pitch making Tate's bowling appear to come through even quicker than it did in England. Test batsman Jack Fingleton, who later became a journalist, wrote: "Maurice Tate, that day, almost shed tears of frustration because Collins wouldn't let him *get at* Ponsford."

This was not his only cause for exasperation. When Collins was on 42, he was again dropped by Hendren, this time at mid-on. Gilligan tried all sorts of permutations, but Collins and Ponsford, with no time limit to the game, kept on accumulating. Collins worked his way to a well-earned hundred. Tate, however, was not amused, saying of that morning that he had never "bowled better in my life", but without reward. Several lbw appeals against Collins were turned down and the ball frequently missed the off stump only narrowly. Tate labelled the umpiring "open to question".

On the second day, with the Australians on 236, Tate finally got his first Ashes wicket. Collins, who had made 114 from 311 balls, was caught, Hendren at last managing to hang on to one. Collins and Ponsford had put on 190. Gilligan bowled Ponsford for 110 and there was some sense that England's ordeal might be nearing its completion.

Leg-spinner Jack Hearne bowled South Australia's Arthur Richardson and suddenly Tate's figures began to improve. He had right-hander Johnny Taylor caught by wicketkeeper Strudwick to bring him a second wicket. Freeman bowled Victor Richardson, the grandfather of Greg and Ian Chappell, to bring the Australian score to 387 for seven. Tate then had Charles Kelleway caught at slip by Woolley for 17. Strudwick caught the all-rounder Hunter "Stork" Hendry off Tate for three, and paceman Jack Gregory suffered the same fate for a duck.

Tate had taken five wickets in his first Ashes bowling stint. It had been a painstaking effort, and it was not over yet. Wicketkeeper Bert Oldfield and last man Mailey put on an annoying partnership of 62. Tate eventually bowled Mailey for 21, leaving Oldfield stranded on 39 not out. Australia were dismissed for 450,

fewer than they might have expected with Collins and Ponsford playing so well, but an above-par total even at batsman-friendly Sydney.

Tate's figures are hard to comprehend. In all, he bowled 55.1 eight-ball overs. That amounts to 441 deliveries, or 73.3 six-ball overs. The weather was unremittingly hot and only Freeman completed anything like the same workload. Tate was phenomenal and thoroughly deserved his six wickets. With a bit of luck, and some decent fielding, he could have done half the work for a greater reward.

Tate's frequent jerk back of the head in disbelief at his terrible luck had the Sydney fans in stitches. It was an unusually emotional display for an Englishman. One barracker shouted: "Don't reach those clouds, Maurice; you'll make it rain." Already they had taken to Tate.

On the afternoon of the second day Hobbs and Sutcliffe came in for England. The pair put on 157, Hobbs in particular looking splendid. This was to be the main substance of the innings. After Sutcliffe went for 59, Hearne and Woolley fell cheaply. Hendren atoned somewhat for his dropped catches with an unbeaten 74, but those around him could not do the same. Hobbs went for 115, Chapman for 13, Tate for seven, Gilligan for one, Freeman for a duck and Strudwick for six. England had made 298—a deficit of 152 runs.

Collins juggled Australia's order in the second innings and Tate struck first, bowling out Bardsley for 22. Arthur Richardson, his partner, battled on, as Kelleway, at three, was bowled by Gilligan. The score had moved on to 168 by the time Freeman got rid of Richardson. Collins and Ponsford, at four and five this time, were together again. But Ponsford made only 27, out to Freeman.

Tate, his feet having taken a fearful pounding, was having trouble with his left big toe and not bowling with the same sting as normal. He and Woolley, who had a bad knee, were seen by a doctor during lunch on the fourth day. He recommended that Tate's severely damaged toenail be removed to prevent infection. *The Times* said this was necessary "as Tate told him it was an *affection* [my italics] of some years' standing which reappears annually". Was the "newspaper of record" repeating a spoonerism on purpose or was it just a typographical error? Anyway, that afternoon a dust storm briefly stopped play, spreading wrappers and other rubbish across the ground. It was a long way from Hove.

Tate soldiered on through the pain and took two more wickets—Victor Richardson, for 18, and Collins, for a painstaking 60—but the lower order did not collapse. Gregory went for two and Oldfield for 18. Number eight Taylor was still going strong against a tiring attack. With Mailey, he put on a spirit-sapping 127 for the last wicket. Tate eventually bowled Taylor for 108, leaving Mailey on 46 not out. His previous best in Test matches had been his 21 in the first innings. Australia were out for 452, but Taylor had apparently been caught off Gilligan with the innings total about 100 fewer. Tate still thought the umpiring open to question.

It was now almost the end of day five—Christmas Eve—as the England team trudged back to the pavilion. Tate had again worked hard, bowling 33.7 eight-ball overs to take five for 98. He had managed 11 wickets in the match. Altogether he had bowled 712 balls. This was the equivalent of 118.4 six-ball overs. It was a record for Test matches.

In the run-up to the series it had been noted that Gilligan was "carefully nursing" Tate for the big occasions. Once the real action started, the protection stopped. There was really no one else to put in the overs. Noble questioned this aspect of Gilligan's captaincy. "Tate's luck was shocking; he always looked dangerous—but why bowl a man to death when he only looks like getting wickets?" he asked. "It is only permissible to bowl a man to a standstill when he is getting them, and quickly too." It was a little harsh on Gilligan—a rather 'over-cute' analysis. If a bowler looks like getting wickets, surely the skipper must reason that he is the best one to keep on.

Hobbs and Sutcliffe came out that Christmas Eve afternoon with England requiring the small matter of 605 runs to win. They did not let anyone down, making 110 before Hobbs was out for 57. Hearne went for a duck, made off 22 balls. Chapman, as was his wont, struck an entertaining 44 off 65 balls, and Hendren made nine, before Sutcliffe went for a deftly crafted 115.

Things looked hopeless but Woolley started treating the crowd to a wonderful display of stroke-making. Sandham made two, Tate recorded a duck and Gilligan made only one. Freeman, alongside Kent colleague Woolley, went four runs better than rival leg-spinner Mailey and made an unbeaten 50 at number ten. But Woolley, having made 123 off just 139 balls, was ninth man out. With England on 411, Hendry had Strudwick caught by Oldfield. It was then the highest fourth innings in history, beating England's 370 at Adelaide in 1921.

England had lost by 193 runs, but not without a fight. It might have been different had those catches been taken off Tate. It was now 27th December, the first time a Test had run into a seventh day. Woolley's was one of a record six centuries made. The Sydney public had been royally entertained and Tate must have been exhausted. The 712 balls he bowled in the match still represent the sixth most deliveries by anyone in Test history. Of those who have beaten the effort, only two were pace bowlers—South Africa's Norman Gordon and Chud Langton. Gordon, at the time of writing, is still alive, aged 101, his stamina unquestioned.

After one Test, the England team, true to Gilligan's word at Victoria Station, had made many friends on the tour so far. Yet there is a question over what sort of companions the Sussex and England captain was courting away from the cricketing action.

The 1920s were tumultuous in politics. Fear of communism following the Russian Revolution of 1917 was still high. In October 1924, four days before the UK's general election and just after the MCC party arrived in Australia, the *Daily Mail* published a letter purporting to be written by Grigori Zinoviev, president of the communist organisation Comintern. It called on British sympathisers to support an Anglo-Soviet treaty and a loan to Moscow. It also urged followers to push for agitation among the armed forces.

The so-called "Zinoviev Letter" has since been proven to be a fake, its provenance murky. But its publication helped cause Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government—the first in history—to lose the election by a landslide. It was against this 'reds under the bed' atmosphere that fascism was becoming a popular political creed among some of the upper and middle classes. One of the converts was Arthur Gilligan.

He and MCC tour manager Frederick Toone had joined the British Fascists, not to be confused with Oswald Mosley's larger British Union of Fascists, in the belief that the existing system of parliamentary government might not be enough to repel the threat of communism and social degeneration. The Australian secret service was aware of Gilligan's sympathies and, it emerged decades later, had been keeping tabs on him, in case he used some of the social occasions of the tour to garner support for fascism. The schedule was tight and Gilligan's social and cricketing workload high, so did he really have time to try to convert the Australians, and indeed any of his team-mates?

On his return to England in 1925, Gilligan wrote an article, *The Spirit of Fascism and Cricket Tours*, stating that, when away from home, it was "essential to work solely on the lines of Fascism, ie the team must be good friends and out for one thing, and one thing only, namely the good of the side, and not for any self-glory". It puts his emphasis on teamwork and committed fielding to back up the bowlers in a different light. Little evidence exists, however, to suggest Gilligan—who also regarded the British Empire as a possible bulwark against Bolshevism—persuaded many Australians.

The second Test, at Melbourne, began on New Year's Day 1925. Collins, as usual, won the toss and again chose to bat first. As at Sydney, the bowlers had a rough time of it. The home side compiled 600 runs, the first time such a total had been reached in Tests. Ponsford and Victor Richardson both made centuries.

This time, Tate had an extra pace bowler for company in the shape of his old sparring partner—metaphorically rather than literally, given his pugilistic background—Johnny Douglas. *The Times* expressed the hope that Tate's burden would be "lightened", following his "excessive" work in the first Test. It added: "He can now be restricted to shorter spells of bowling—an important point when cricket is played in Australian conditions." Still, he got through 45 eight-ball overs in taking three for 142.

When they began batting, on the third morning, England again made life hard for the Aussies. Hobbs and Sutcliffe put on 283, both men going to their second centuries of the series. Tate was the next highest scorer, with 34 off just 35 balls, as the visitors ended on 479—121 behind.

Then something exciting happened. Collins and Bardsley opened once more and the skipper did his best to tame the threat of Tate. The other batsmen were not so proficient. Tate had Bardsley lbw for two and then bowled Arthur Richardson for nine and the so-far prolific Ponsford for four. Australia's mini-collapse left them 27 for three. He had taken all three for just five runs.

Yet nobody could continue the destruction whenever Tate had a rest. Collins crawled his way to 30 before Hearne dismissed him. Hearne then got Victor Richardson for eight. Tate got rid of Taylor for a well-made 90. He also had debutant, and one-Test wonder, Albert Hartkopf lbw for a duck and bowled Mailey for three.

Tate took six for 99 off 33.3 overs. It was his third haul of five wickets or more in his first four Ashes bowling innings. He was England's one-man pace attack. Hearne's leg-breaks and googlies did for the other four Australian batsmen.

Noble, yearning for a proper battle, rued the fact that even Tate was human and had physical limitations: "He appeared to get periodic spasms of greatness. He

would bowl as one possessed for a time, meet with great success, and then dwindle away to mediocrity as though the impelling force had been burned up; and then, after a rest, the fire was rekindled and he came again with destruction in his wake, and there was more sorrow in the camp of his opponents. Some day he may develop a double supply of this dynamic quality; then all Australia will lament and yet admire."

Late on day five, Hobbs and Sutcliffe went in, needing 372 to win. Surrey's master batsman went to Mailey for 22, but his peerless Yorkshire apprentice made his third century of the series—and second of the match—ending on 127. Only Woolley's 50 offered much support and England were all out for 290, to lose by 81 runs. Tate, last man in, was bowled by Gregory for a duck. A second Test in a row had gone to the seventh day. Never on the field of cricket had so much been given for so long for so little.

The series was progressing in a friendly way, as Gilligan had predicted, but the press tried to provoke a bit of needle by accusing Tate of bad sportsmanship. It was all based on a misunderstanding. After repeatedly hitting Oldfield's pads, Tate walked down the pitch to talk to the Australian wicketkeeper. The newspapers claimed he had made abusive comments to his rival. Asked what he had said, Tate could not immediately remember. He thought a while then remembered: "Bloody hot, ain't it, Bert? I could do with a cup of tea." The matter rested there.

After two losses, it was hoped that the city of Adelaide, famed for its many churches and 'English' atmosphere, might bring respite for the visitors. The third Test began at the Oval ground on 16th January. Travelling from Melbourne, MCC stopped at Ballarat, where Tate's toe became worse, so bad, in fact, that the nail came off. "All I could do was hope for the best at Adelaide," he said, "but when Arthur Gilligan lost the toss again and I knew I should have to bowl at once, my heart sank, especially as it was a billiard-table wicket."

Tate began well, bowling out Collins—who had thus far left balls outside the off stump so assiduously—for just three with one that broke back. Freeman bowled Jack Gregory for six and Tate had Taylor lbw for a duck. The score was 22 for three. England were on top, but then the bad luck Gilligan's men had experienced in the previous two Tests became even more terrible.

The condition of Tate's toe worsened and Johnny Douglas, who had been dropped after a poor showing at Melbourne, tried to bandage it for him during lunch. But after the break it was unbearable and he had to go off. An Adelaide shoemaker tried to fashion a special boot to help ease the strain, but to no avail. Shortly after Tate's departure, Gilligan tore a back muscle and joined him in the pavilion. Then Freeman took a blow on the wrist while fielding and also came off.

It was left to Kilner, the only recognised frontline bowler still on the field, and Woolley, whose slow left-armers had been declining for several years, to carry the attack. Kilner bowled 56 overs, taking four for 127. Woolley sent down 43, capturing one wicket for 135. Australia recovered from their poor start to reach 489 all out. Jack Ryder in particular capitalised, making an undefeated 201. The Australian music halls made the most of England's misfortune. The songs *Tate's Poor Feet* and *How's Your Poor Old Toe?* satirised the injury crisis.

With just 50 minutes of play left on the second day, Tate—seemingly undeterred by the threat of yorkers hitting his toe—opened the England innings with

Nottinghamshire batsman William “Dodger” Whysall. Tate survived the day, but Whysall and Strudwick, another nightwatchman, did not. Chapman, at number four, stayed in, to leave England 36 for two.

The next morning Tate went for 27 and Chapman for 26. But Hobbs, coming in at five, made a third century in as many games and Hendren 92, taking the England total to 365.

When Australia replied, Tate could manage only ten overs for 17 runs before the pain became too much again. This time, though, it was not a problem, as Kilner and Woolley took four wickets each, and Freeman, recovered from his blow, got two. Australia were all out for 250, leaving England needing an improbable 375 to win. They so nearly made it, too. Sutcliffe hit 59. Whysall top-scored with 75. Chapman knocked up a lively 58, including seven fours and two sixes. The lower-middle order all chipped in, Tate, at eight, getting 21. Early on the seventh morning, with England on 357—just 18 short of victory—Gilligan got out to Gregory.

It was now up to Freeman and last man Strudwick to finish the job. It was like Fred’s match in 1902: England’s last chance to stay in the Ashes. Sadly, just as before, it was not to be. Freeman was caught at the wicket off Mailey and Australia had won an enthralling match by 11 runs. The Ashes were theirs.

England had played gallantly but been desperately unlucky with the toss and injuries. Tate later reasoned that Collins, in his own way, had been just as “relentless” in his captaincy as Douglas Jardine during the famed ‘Bodyline’ series of 1932/33. Collins had not allowed Gilligan and Freeman to bat on at the end of day six, when they had a decent chance of reaching the target. Instead he made them go off and resume on day seven, after a fretful night. Gilligan was not a soft touch, but maybe he lacked Collins’s steeliness. The series gone, Collins sportingly conceded that there was “nothing between the two sides”. Gilligan told the Reuters news agency he did “not want to complain of our luck”, saying: “I am glad we made a decent fight.”

England now had almost a month until the fourth Test, again at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The series was gone, but some pride could be salvaged. Tate played in three matches, two against Tasmania and one against Victoria, MCC winning all of them. In the second game against Tasmania he took a useful six for 26 against mediocre opposition.

During the Tasmania trip, Tate gave an interview to the *Advocate* newspaper. He described the weather as “wonderful”. Asked how he managed to get his “perfect” physique, he attributed it to walking. On to more personal stuff, he was asked: “Do you think marriage leads to a decline in a cricketer’s powers?” Tate, so long away from Kathleen and the twins, jovially responded: “That’s too much. I won’t have that. Why, before I was married I was a thin sort of a weed. To-day I do not think I am altogether a weed.”

On 13th February the fourth Test started. For once, miracle of miracles, Gilligan won the toss and England finally had first use of a pitch. They made the most of it. Of the batsmen only Chapman, with 12, failed, as Sutcliffe made 143, Hobbs 66 and Hearne 44. Woolley got 40, Hendren 65, Whysall 76 and Kilner 74. Tate, at number ten, got just eight, but it did not matter as England ended on an enormous 548—a true team effort.

Australia, their intensity apparently reduced after winning the series, faltered in reply, getting out for 269. Tate had Collins caught by Kilner for 22 and bowled Ryder for nought. That must have been satisfying after Ryder's relatively easy double ton against a depleted attack at Adelaide. Hearne and Kilner got three wickets each and Woolley one.

Gilligan enforced the follow-on. Australia's second innings was no better. Collins went for one, then Tate bowled Bardsley for a sixth-ball duck. On the fifth day, in the cloudy conditions he loved, he bowled beautifully. Tate took five wickets in total. Kelleway was caught at shoulder height by Strudwick, standing up to the wicket. Strudwick also caught Andrews off Tate, before the big man bowled Ponsford. Tate finished the match by bowling Oldfield for eight, as the home side struggled to 250 all out. England had won by an innings and 29 runs—their first victory over the old enemy in more than 12 miserable years. Even the home crowd were delighted as they gave the tourists a rousing cheer.

With his toe mended Tate was on top of the world, in more ways than one. In those days there were no official rankings for players. However, the International Cricket Council has applied them retrospectively. After the fourth Test Tate reached the number one spot for bowlers, a position he was not to relinquish for more than five years—although, of course, he was never to know that.

One Test to go and he could return to his beloved Sussex. But, first, records for achievement, to go with those he had already collected for endurance, were looming large. Sydney Barnes, during the 1911/12 series, had taken 34 wickets. Tate was now on 29. There might even be a chance of beating Arthur Mailey's record total of 36 wickets, set in the 1920/21 Ashes. Immortality beckoned.

The fifth timeless Test, played at Sydney, began on 27th February. Following the massive scores and seven-day matches which had made this series so long and grinding, it was to be a relatively normal contest. Collins, after the aberration at Melbourne, returned to his winning ways at the toss and opted, as ever, to bat. But Gilligan dismissed his opposite number for just one. Gregory was run out for 29 when Tate threw in a high return and the agile Strudwick took the ball and broke the wicket in a single motion. Kilner then bowled Ryder, Collins's fellow opener, for 29, leaving Australia on 64 for three. Andrews also went to Kilner. Four down for 99 and still no wicket for Tate. Mailey's record looked like it might be out of reach.

Normal service was resumed, however, as Tate had Taylor caught by Whysall for 15—103 for five. After that Ponsford and Alan Kippax put on a stand of 105, before Kilner bowled Kippax for 42 and had Ponsford caught by Woolley for 80. But then, despite some resistance, Tate cleared up the tail. He got Kelleway lbw for nine, had Oldfield caught by Strudwick for 29 and bowled out Mailey for 14. Australia were all out for 295. Tate's wickets tally for the series stood at 33.

England made a bit of a dog's dinner in reply, Woolley's 47 the highest score in the total of 167. Tate, with 25 in 25 balls, was second-highest scorer. The damage was done by the debutant leg-spinner Clarrie Grimmett, a bowler who had waited years for his chance and was not about to squander it.

Australia were back in, with Tate needing three wickets to match Mailey and four to beat him. Collins juggled his order again. The first two wickets, those of Ryder and Gregory, went to Gilligan and Hearne. With the score on 110 Tate had

Taylor stumped by Strudwick for 25. Perhaps it was worth the wicketkeeper standing up. This was the only stumping achieved off Tate in Test cricket. It was also the dismissal with which he matched Barnes's Ashes series record for England.

Then Ponsford was run out, leaving the Australians on 130 for four. Hearne got Andrews for a well-made 80. Woolley got Kippax out for eight, the score reading 156 for six. Just four wickets left in the series. Would Tate do it? Collins and Kelleway put on a half-century partnership but soon afterwards Tate had the skipper low for 28. He was now on 35 wickets. He had beaten the great Barnes.

The waiting continued as Kelleway and Oldfield added another 116 to the score. Then, with the Australians on 325, Kelleway was caught by Whysall. Tate had 36 wickets. He had matched Mailey. All the pain and effort had been worth it.

With no addition to the score, Tate performed a most poetic act. He bowled Mailey himself for a duck to break the leg-spinner's record. Tate had taken 37 Test wickets. The crowd roared in approval of a big-hearted man who had carried the England attack for months.

Again, with no addition to the team total, he then did exactly the same to Mailey's leg-spinning partner Grimmett, bowling him for nothing. Australia were all out for 325 and Tate had taken five for 115 off 39.3 overs. He had nine in the match and, most importantly, 38 wickets for the series. His work was now done. No more toiling away on heartless wickets against top-class batsmen, for now. He could rest.

In his record year, Barnes had been partnered by the almost equally brilliant Frank Foster, who had claimed 32 victims. Tate, with Gilligan a faded power, had done it alone. Noble wrote that "only the worst of luck" had stopped him getting past Mailey's record earlier and that "there was not one of that vast multitude who did not realise the greatness of his effort".

England's batsmen, already possibly demob happy, again put up little fight against Grimmett, who took six for 37. Tate was the top scorer, with 33 off just 38 balls. The innings included four fours and a six. He was entertaining the Australian crowds until the last. England were thrashed by 307 runs and the reign of Gilligan, never to play another Test, was over.

Collins presented Tate with an inscribed ball from the New South Wales Cricket Association to mark his achievement. He was touched, remembering: "Whatever others may say, I have always appreciated the sportsmanship of the Australians."

Tate played one more match on the tour, against South Australia in Adelaide, taking four more wickets. An exhausted MCC were thrashed by ten wickets. It was time for the long voyage home.

Noble ranked Tate just a little lower than Barnes, but thought he might reach the same standard with more "versatility". In other words, he wanted him to apply 'spin', or cut, to some deliveries.

He wrote: "In the natural course of evolution methods change, and the desire to achieve is largely influenced by the tendency to follow the line of least resistance. It is far easier to produce a result which seems sufficient for the time being by learning to seam-swerve than it is to develop the same amount of accuracy and at the same time bowl the ball with an off-spin. The result in the latter case is infinitely more dangerous and, therefore, of greater value than the former, but the

road is longer for the bowler, and many weary hours of practice are necessary to complete his education… The loss of this type of bowling is the outstanding weakness of cricket today."

Any criticism of his efforts was like quibbling with Shakespeare for a lack of stage directions or Wagner for making his operas too loud. Tate had been incredible. His view was that his style of bowling was a development on George Hirst's innovations. Noble's was that, despite its brilliance, it was a regression from that of Barnes. It was an understandable, yet misplaced, censure. In the Peter Shaffer play *Amadeus*, some of the work of composer Wolfgang Mozart is torn up by a disapproving director. His response would have been appropriate for Tate: "They say I have to rewrite the opera. But it's perfect as it is! I can't rewrite what's perfect!"

MCC sailed from Adelaide to Perth before embarking for home on the ship MALOYA. On the stop-off in Colombo, Tate ate curried prawns and got a dose of food poisoning, but he still put on weight during the voyage, which he deemed "greatly to my benefit for the next few years".

The team arrived back at Victoria Station on 19th April—seven months after they had left. Considering they had lost 4-1, the reception was remarkable. At least they had finally triumphed in one Test. Hundreds of well-wishers gathered to cheer Gilligan's men. As Sussex's superstar came into view there were shouts of "good old Tate". Some people suffered minor injuries as they jostled with one another to get a glimpse or a handshake.

Gilligan told the press the winter in Australia had been "just perfect". One sceptical onlooker called out: "What about the Ashes?" Taken aback, the England captain replied: "Don't mention them or I might become rude, but I think we will lift them in 1926."

Tate had an almighty struggle to change platforms to catch the train to Brighton, where his family were waiting, but he did so as a national hero. There were further scenes of excitement when he pulled in to his home town. It was announced that a dinner was to be held at the Royal Pavilion, that architectural orgy of Regency excess, to celebrate the feats of Tate and Gilligan.

He would have been entitled to get some relaxation, but the English season was about to start and the life of a professional cricketer—particularly this professional cricketer—did not allow it.

# Chapter 13

## Success by the Sea.

"*Then came massacre.*"
—Sussex Daily News

CRICKETERS OF THE 1920s had far fewer commercial opportunities than their modern counterparts, but there were ways to improve their income. One was to

move to league cricket, which paid more money for a day's work in Lancashire, Yorkshire or the Midlands than a week of toil for a county.

Rumours began to circulate that Tate was considering giving up the first-class game to pursue greater riches. The move must have been tempting. On the other hand, the standard would have been lower and the experience less stretching and fulfilling. Even if he had not seriously contemplated such a plan, Tate sent the Sussex committee a letter early in 1925, while still away in Australia, "with regard to future arrangements". The records provide no further details of its content, but the committee resolved that no decision should be taken until Arthur Gilligan, for whom Tate had the utmost respect, was contacted. At a meeting in May, it was decided that Tate's salary should be increased to £19 per month. He had apparently pay-bargained, with his potential loss a vaguely disguised threat. Sussex could not afford to let go of their biggest draw for the sake of a few pounds.

The dinner held at the Royal Pavilion in Tate and Gilligan's honour proved a great success. In Australia, the *Adelaide Register*, still desperate for news of the recently departed star, reported: "Tate said there had been rumours that he was going into league cricket. He wished to state publicly that he had received a very good opportunity, but so long as Gilligan remained skipper of the Sussex team he would remain in the county."

His ties were too strong to leave, but this did not prevent some flexing of muscle. Some high in the Sussex set-up felt aggrieved at what was perceived to be impertinence. Sir Home Gordon, in his end-of-season report for 1925, might have alluded to this when he wrote that Tate had been "completely and understandably spoilt" by Gilligan. He added that he was "a jolly playboy who always said what he thought would be acceptable and ingratiating".

They were harsh words. The Eton-educated Sir Home, a baronet rather than someone honoured for service to country or another cause, was a constant presence at Sussex games for many years. He had a speech impediment which made 'th' sound like 'f'. Gilligan once described the incomprehension of a barmaid when Sir Home, getting a round in, insisted on being served 'free beers'. In 1924, Gilligan had decided that, for his services to the club, Sir Home should be given an 'honorary' Sussex cap—an unprecedented accolade. He was immensely proud, and his commitment to Sussex could not be doubted, but many must have thought it gauche, and devaluing of the cap itself, when he accepted the offer.

With a few days to fill in before the 1925 cricket season started, Tate agreed to spend a week at Harrods, demonstrating his bowling technique to customers of the famous London department store. He joined Archie MacLaren, the amateur who had captained his father in that ill-fated 1902 Test, in the specially constructed nets. MacLaren, despite his grandeur, was never a wealthy man, so the money came in handy.

Tate was to continue offering the same show at Harrods for several years, his companions over that time including Jack Hobbs and Len Braund, the 'third man' involved in the catastrophic dropped catch incident at Manchester in 1902. It was a small world. The London correspondent of the *Melbourne Age* joked in 1926 that "there is the backbone of a fairly sound Test eleven ready to meet those who desire the distinction of boasting to their friends that they have played, with and against, the giants of the day".

One such customer was Laetitia Stapleton, who became Sussex's most ardent supporter and, in the 1970s, wrote a charming memoir of her life watching and meeting the players. As a teenager, she begged her mother to take her to Harrods. She eventually got her way. "It was Tate, the England cricketer, as much as Tate, the coach, who drew people to that part of the famous London store," Stapleton recalled. Lots of youngsters queued up to have a bowl at Tate. One, a 14-year-old future Brighton College pupil called Maxwell, dismissed him with a googly. "But I never heard of him again," wrote Stapleton. "How transitory is fame."

She was joking. The boy was Cecil Maxwell, who went on to play for Middlesex, Nottinghamshire and Worcestershire as a batsman and wicketkeeper. His greatest moment was scoring 268 in just over three hours for Sir Julien Cahn's XI against Leicestershire in 1935. But he never took a first-class wicket, despite his youthful success in the Harrods nets.

Tate himself, embarrassments against schoolboys aside, enjoyed his time at the shop, writing: "In spite of working in an enclosed space, the exercise was useful as it loosened the muscles in preparation for the coming season."

After his exertions in Australia, the streak of brilliance which had started in 1923 and continued in 1924 showed little sign of ending. In the first game of 1925, against Leicestershire at Hove, he took five for 44 in the first innings, before poor weather necessitated a draw. Sussex lost the next two games, against Cambridge University and Nottinghamshire, Tate taking four wickets in the former and just one in the latter.

By mid-May Tate was on top form again. He took 11 wickets for 103 against Essex at Hove. In the next game he did even better, with 14 wickets against Glamorgan, still struggling to cope with first-class status, let alone a bowling genius. Of Tate's seven victims in the first innings, five were bowled, one was lbw and the other caught and bowled. Even that was spectacular, with Tate bounding forward, and stretching low down to his right to grab the ball.

In the second innings, he bowled six batsmen and the other one was caught by a fielder. Altogether he had taken 13 wickets in the match single-handed. The *Sussex Daily News* said: "Tate joined in the butchery." It added: "He got Mr [Norman] Riches [a dentist by trade] fairly tied up, as he had done earlier in the morning, and then with a leg break just grazed his wicket. So little did Mr Riches realise what had happened that he waited till the umpire signalled him to retire. Then came massacre."

What a delightfully over-the-top, yet appropriate, sentence. Tate never professed fully to understand his own powers and it suggested that success of the highest order just visited him, that he was merely the conduit for greatness. It 'came'. Tate had been massacring batsmen for three years, a sort of bloodless carnage, perhaps in revenge for what had happened to his father in 1902. Pity the victims.

Eighteen Glamorgan wickets fell to Sussex's bowlers in a single day for just 66 runs. The *Sussex Daily News* reported: "Sussex county cricket team yesterday blazed forth into glorious doings, which matched well the delightful May day." Tate took his 14th wicket, and won the match—Sussex's first victory of the season—when he hit hard-drinking slow left-armer Frank Ryan's leg stump.

"The men from Wales found Tate and [fellow right-arm medium-fast bowler Bert] Wensley, backed by magnificent fielding, a well-nigh impossible combination," the

paper said. The 14 wickets Tate took for 58 runs were the best match figures of his career.

It becomes almost tedious to recount them, but his statistics that year were outstanding. Six for 61 against Surrey was followed by eight for 105 against Middlesex. Next game, against Gloucestershire, he took seven for 58 and five for 36. Even a disappointing one for 89 against Worcestershire was followed by six for 56 in the second innings. On and on it went.

Ten wickets came in the match against Hampshire, nine against Somerset, 13 against Gloucestershire, ten against Essex, and 13 more against Glamorgan. Was Tate getting even better? These were once-in-a-lifetime performances for most players, but he was achieving them twice a week.

Bowlers have never been cricket's greatest heroes, their job being to shorten, rather than continue, proceedings. A success by Tate against Surrey in late July confirmed this lowly status. The visitors arrived at Hove with Jack Hobbs needing one more three-figure score to match WG Grace's record of 126 centuries in first-class cricket. Dozens of photographers turned up hoping for a magical celebration shot of this most dignified of men reaching the target. The *Argus* that evening conveyed the scene: "One big question was in the minds of all: whether Hobbs in one match would succeed in equalling or even passing WG Grace's record of 126 centuries. Hobbs had this morning 125 to his account. He had only recorded one of these against the Sussex attack."

The sense of pride at Sussex's ongoing ability to contain "The Master" was to be maintained. An unusually nervous Hobbs square cut a single, but, off the third ball of Tate's second over from the Sea End, he appealed for lbw. Sailor Young, the umpire, raised his finger and said: "You are out, Jack." The photographers, one of whom had clambered on to the pavilion roof, left in disappointment. It was a severe anti-climax. Surrey still beat Sussex by an innings and three runs, though. And Hobbs equalled and broke WG's record later that year.

For once Tate had proved to be a party-pooper but journalist John Marshall recalled the effect Tate's achievements usually had on the children of Sussex in the 1920s. "'Bags be Tate' was an almost automatic cry after the decision to pitch stumps on Aunt Lucy's back lawn or the Worthing sands at low tide," he wrote. "Being Tate had the weighty advantage over being Hobbs, of ensuring opening the bowling as well as the batting."

Much of Tate's appeal was that he was the type of man who would gladly join in the sort of knockabouts described by Marshall. During the winter and spring evenings of the mid-to-late 1920s, he would leave his house in St James's Avenue and, later, his larger home, called Mal-o-Mar, in Surrenden Road, in the developing suburbs of Brighton, for an invigorating stroll. On his way through Hollingbury Park, he would often have a quick bowl or bat with some of the adoring local lads.

Earlier, around the time the twins were born, Tate used to walk from his flat in Lorna Road, Hove, across Cromwell Road to the County Ground, only to be besieged by gaggles of boys. He gladly chatted and signed autographs and sometimes, to the consternation of the gatemen, used to bring some of his young admirers in for free. Tate always felt like 'one of us', even when performing other-worldly feats. Having been starved of success and adulation as a youth, he greatly

enjoyed this kind of reverence. It must have made up for some of the hurt he had felt when unable to make the team at Belvedere School. His confidence was built on continual success rather than an innate sense that he was a great player. Tate needed love. For many years he got it. Youngsters, in particular, were unquestioningly adoring. Tate was no longer the last boy to be picked at games, but the star.

The flip side of this need and liking for admiration was a distinct, ongoing touchiness about criticism. Tate made much of a pretty innocent remark during a game against Worcestershire at Horsham, after his Test debut in 1924. Veteran right-hander Maurice Foster made 157 not out, while Tate took four for 96. As they came off, Foster remarked: "You're not a Test match bowler, Chub!" That was the bowler's abiding memory, anyway.

His sporting prowess was built on solid foundations of fitness and technique: what is called 'professionalism' in its truest and most noble form. His self-esteem, like that of so many sportsmen, was less well established. Not that the world, watching an ever-smiling genius at work, would have known.

The reverence of Sussex fans, and readers of the national newspapers, was not misplaced, as 1925 became his most successful year as a bowler. In all, Tate took 228 wickets at 14.97. There were no Tests to get in the way of the accumulation of batsmen's scalps. Tate, in 35 games, took five wickets or more in an innings 24 times, and ten—yes, ten—lots of ten wickets or more in a game.

In July he took seven for 148 in the Gentlemen v Players fixture at the Oval, followed by three wickets in the second innings. The next match, against Nottinghamshire, was conspicuous for a lack of bowling success but, as compensation, Tate smashed his way to 114 off 95 balls, coming in at number eight. Still the wickets came.

He took ten against Northants, including his 200th of the season. One shy of the achievement, he waited to face fast bowler, and last man in, Nobby Clark. On 199 wickets, Gilligan reminded Tate how close he was to the milestone. He was so eager to get on with things that he started his run-up prematurely. Tate was "itching" to get him out, Gilligan wrote. Finally it was time. "He sent down the fastest ball he ever bowled, and Clark's leg stump went over and over and over!" Gilligan remembered.

It had been another superb year, the last of what can be called his true 'golden era' as a county bowler. From 1922 to 1925, including the Australia tour, Tate took 852 wickets. All that, in just over three calendar years. The transformation in success was as spectacular as the alteration in bowling style. In that time he bowled 38,044 balls.

Tate also scored runs. In 1923, 1924 and 1925 he swung lustily to more than a thousand of them. Three years in a row he had performed not just the 'ordinary' double of 1,000 runs and 100 wickets, but the extraordinary one of 1,000 runs and 200 wickets.

Tate's efforts seemed to have little bearing on Sussex's standing. In 1925 they finished a lowly 13th with only Derbyshire, Somerset, Worcestershire and Glamorgan beneath them. Yorkshire won, with Surrey second. Yet Tate had other matters on his mind. The Australians were due to return in 1926. "I was very keen

on keeping my place in the England side, and had an idea we might be able to turn the tables on the Aussies and get back the Ashes," he wrote.

In the 1920s, preparation for cricket was not as it is today. Tate was unusual in doing anything much at all in the winter. Some players, including Sussex's Tommy Cook, who performed for years for Brighton and Hove Albion FC and even appeared once for England, had football to keep them fit. Some tried to get employment as coaches.

In the 1980s, the syrupy Australian drama series *Bodyline* showed Nottinghamshire and England express bowler Harold Larwood sprinting through the cobbled streets of Nottingham to build up his stamina for the 1932/33 Ashes tour. It was in no way representative of the regimens of the time. More often than not, amateurs and professionals left pre-season nets a mass of aches and pains, their fitness gradually to return through playing in matches, involving hundreds of overs, dozens of innings, or both.

Tate was different. He took his conditioning seriously. Early on he had the benefit of agricultural labouring to boost his bulk. In the early 1920s he took up another country pursuit in the form of beagling. This ancient sport, the hunting of a hare by foot, was one he deemed perfect preparation for bowling. He even advocated it in his guide to bowling, calling it a "magnificent form of exercise". One can see why. Beagling lasted several hours and involved much walking and periodic explosive effort in the form of sprints and jumps.

Laetitia Stapleton described him in action for the Brighton Foot Beagles, "either leaping a five-barred gate, taking a stream in one gigantic stride, disentangling himself from a barbed-wire fence, or, equally characteristically, reclining in the hay, with, of course, his pipe".

His other off-season hobby was walking. Tate advised aspiring England players to follow his example and take to their feet, with "arms swinging freely" to keep the vital muscles nice and loose, but warned them not to "overdo it" and have a warm bath and a good rub-down afterwards. Tate's refuelling sounded fun too. He admitted he was not a "total abstainer, for I drink and enjoy a glass of draught-beer". He advocated moderation, but asked: "What can be better, after a ten-mile tramp over the beautiful Sussex Downs, than a glass of beer and a crust of bread and cheese?"

It beat hours sweating in the gym, followed by a mineral-infused energy drink, certainly for enjoyment. But were Tate and England ready to win back the Ashes? It was time to find out.

# Chapter 14

## Australia Again.

"*Bowl him a yorker.*"
—Maurice Tate

THROUGHOUT THE WINTER of 1925/26 Tate trained hard. His walking and beagling done, another stint on the Harrods shop floor meant he was nicely prepared for the new season. So were the Australians. Their selectors had spent an inordinately long time picking a squad suitable for English conditions and their main focus was clearly on one man. Tate alone of the bowlers had made the 1924/25 series competitive, but how would he fare in his own country?

The Tests were, as usual in England, scheduled to last up to three days each. At least there would be no repeat of the gruelling workload foisted on to Tate down under. However, the Ashes would come in the middle of a long county season, so fatigue would still be something to guard against.

In January Tate wrote to Sussex in an attempt to make his financial situation more certain. His letter was read out at a meeting of the finance committee in February. It asked for a basic "salary of £416 per annum [equivalent to around £19,000 in today's money], for five years, and a benefit match in 1930". There was also, as ever, appearance money for first XI matches, which helped to bring the income to a decent level. Both of Tate's requests were agreed to, subject to consultation with the club's solicitors. The new set-up was confirmed in April.

Meanwhile, one of Sussex's members was launching a one-man crusade to make life easier on bowlers. At a meeting of the general committee on 5th March, AC Somerset from Worthing proposed this motion: "That, with a view to increase the power of the Bowler against the Batsman, Umpires be Instructed to discontinue for the future the use of the maxim that the benefit of the doubt should always be given in favour of the Batsman, but should act on their unfettered judgment as to the best of their ability, holding the balance without favour to Batsman or Bowler."

The committee resolved to send the suggestion to Lord's, where it lingered, as these things tend to do, for some time. In November, the idea was referred to MCC's Advisory County Cricket Committee. By February 1927 it had been rejected.

The ultimate role of the umpire, when deciding on dismissals, is to pass judgement on the batsman's status—whether he is in or out. In the best English legal tradition, MCC clearly wanted to maintain the principle of batsmen, like criminal suspects, being innocent until proven beyond reasonable doubt to be guilty. So, the presumption in the batsman's favour remained.

All the while, the clamour to rebalance the situation a little towards the bowler was growing. It would be more than a decade, though, until the lbw law was permanently altered to allow dismissal by balls pitching outside the off stump. It would be too late for Tate to benefit to any extent. Mr Somerset's suggestion further demonstrates just how brilliant Tate was in a world made for batsmen.

Not that those facing him felt particularly privileged. Australian all-rounder Charles Kelleway, not one of the 1926 Ashes touring party but a player who was to appear again in Tests in 1928/29, wrote a remarkably frank piece for the Daily Express on 12th April. "His different deliveries do not vary according to rules, but according to Tate," he argued. With that in mind, the newspaper arranged for Kelleway to watch some slowed-down Pathé footage. "I am confident, after seeing the wonderful picture, that it is impossible to tell exactly how each particular delivery acts after leaving Tate's hand," he concluded.

It was an unusually defeatist thing for an Australian to write. But the 1926 team, led again by Herbie Collins, were definitely up for the fight. With Arthur Gilligan no longer equal to the physical demands of Tests, England appointed a new captain: the garrulous and hard-living batsman Arthur Carr. The 1926 county season began with five wickets for Tate against Carr's Nottinghamshire, then six against Somerset and 11 against Surrey.

Then, in late May, came his greatest-ever single-innings performance in first-class cricket, at Lord's in the traditional Whitsun fixture against Middlesex. A capacity crowd, 24,871 of whom paid to get in at the turnstiles, meant the gates had to be closed by 3pm. They were not to be disappointed, as Tate took his first championship hat-trick.

He bowled five maiden overs in succession. The last ball of the fifth saw Tate knock Clarence Bruce's leg stump several yards out of the ground. In the next over, bowled by leg-spinner Ted Bowley, Middlesex's Frank Mann hit an enormous six, the ball striking the red tiles on the new stand.

When Tate started his next over, he straightaway removed future England fast bowler Gubby Allen lbw. The next ball saw him rip out Nigel Haig's off stump. Tate had taken the hat-trick. But the newspaper reported: "So sensational had been the happenings hereabouts, including Mann's mighty hit, that possibly few in the great ring realised that the coveted distinction had fallen to England's bowler. From the Press box a special messenger had to be sent to the scorers to verify the fact." Tate ended with figures of nine for 71 off 39.1 overs. With the first Test three weeks away, it was a timely reminder of his powers. Then there were six wickets in the game against Essex, four against Hampshire and nine against Gloucester. In the Test trial at Lord's Tate managed eight victims.

After a few days' rest, he was off to Trent Bridge to face Australia once again. It was an awful summer and the Test turned into a damp and dreary draw. Carr won the toss and chose to bat. The established pairing of Jack Hobbs and Herbert Sutcliffe put on an unbeaten 32 in 17.2 overs before the game was abandoned amid non-stop rain.

After a couple of unremarkable Sussex games against Kent and Cambridge University, Tate and his England colleagues arrived at Lord's for the second Test, the social highlight of the cricket calendar. Gilligan had gone, but Tate was granted a high-quality new-ball partner in debutant express man Harold Larwood of Nottinghamshire.

Australia won the toss and batted, compiling 383. Tate kept things tight, but a slow pitch meant he was not at his penetrative best. He ended up with the figures of 50 overs, 12 maidens, two wickets for 111. The elegant Warren Bardsley was the main Aussie success, scoring an unbeaten 193. Tate wrote: "Careful at first, he was never at a loss for a shot and must put this down as his greatest innings."

The Australians' innings stretched into day two, when the players arrived to find the middle of the pitch flooded by a faulty sprinkler, which delayed play by just ten minutes, after ground staff spent hours mopping up the mess with sponges and blotting paper.

When they batted, England's top five were in superb form. Hobbs and Patsy Hendren both made hundreds, Hendren's an unbeaten one. Meanwhile Frank Woolley managed 87, Sutcliffe 82 and Percy Chapman 50 not out. Carr declared

with the score on 475 for three, leaving little time for a result. Tate took one for 38 in the Aussies' second innings, the match ending with the total on 194 for five. He remembered the team leaving Lord's "full of confidence" after a strong showing.

Tate took six more wickets against Essex and three against Lancashire, before the Test match circus pulled up at Leeds. Tate later called the game the "most sensational in which I have played". Carr decided not to include Gloucestershire left-arm spinner Charlie Parker in the starting XI, although many felt he would have run through any side on a pitch likely to crumble later on.

The England captain won the toss and put Australia in, with the sky overcast. Bardsley, captaining Australia in the absence of Collins, who was ill, opened the innings with the plodding Bill Woodfull. Tate marked his run and, with the first ball of the match, induced a snick from Bardsley, who was caught at first slip by Sutcliffe.

Then, with the score on two, Carr committed the second error—after not including Parker—for which his captaincy is most remembered. Tate, with his fourth ball, forced Charles Macartney to thick edge the ball to Carr at second slip. But he missed the chance, after which 40-year-old Macartney went on to make a brilliant 151.

Arthur Gilligan, watching, remarked that the ball had travelled waist-high to Carr's left. He had attempted to take it two-handed, "following one of the soundest catching rules", but, in swinging his right arm across, knocked it to the ground.

It was especially galling for Carr, who claimed he had been attempting a grand strategy to remove Australia's danger man. He was still ruminating over the incident almost a decade later. Carr claimed he had "laid a trap" by "moving quietly" from gully to slip in anticipation of an early chance off Tate. "Macartney slipped me a catch I should have caught 99 times out of 100, and I put it on the floor," Carr rued. "The whole memory of that missed catch is almost more than I can bear."

Arthur Richardson made a hundred too, with Tate, unhappy at his fate, blaming umpire Harry Butt—an old Sussex colleague of father Fred's—for failing to give him out twice when wicketkeeper Strudwick took stunning catches off his bowling. "Even third man appealed," Tate seethed.

So reprieved, Australia's batsmen knocked up 494 all out. Tate's figures were reminiscent of his feats of endurance in Australia in 1924/5, bowling 51 overs and taking four for 99—Bardsley, Woodfull, Jack Ryder and Bert Oldfield. He admitted that bowling to Macartney that day was "one of my worst moments", the batsman moving around to hit him to leg or off depending on his whim. Loss of control was not something Tate was used to. These things are relative, however. He still went for under two runs an over.

England were bowled out for 294, allowing Bardsley to enforce the follow-on, which he gladly did. England reached safety, as Hobbs and Sutcliffe put on 156, with Tate not having to bat again. They were 254 for three when time ran out. Three games played, three draws.

Tate took two wickets in the Gentlemen v Players fixture and 11 against Hampshire. Then it was on to a very significant venue. The fourth Test was taking place at Old Trafford, the scene of Fred's personal devastation 24 years earlier. Not

a day would have passed, perhaps scarcely an hour, without those events racing through the itinerant man's head.

Naturally, just as in 1902, the Manchester game was scheduled to start on Fred Tate's birthday, 24th July. Despite Maurice's great success over the past couple of years, Fred was nervous. A letter he wrote to the secretary of Lancashire County Cricket Club found its way into the press. "My wife and I love to see the Tests, as Maurice is playing," it said. "The 24th is my natal day, and 24 years ago I was proud to represent my country in this very match, where I missed a difficult catch, which has been a daily talk ever since. I sincerely hope my son and Mr Carr will redeem it this week."

Most spectators at the ground in 1902 had not noticed the catch being especially hard, but a man who had been grieving inwardly over the error for so long was entitled to some self-justification, even self-delusion.

Fred need not have worried, as the rain washed out most of the first day's play, once more meaning a result was unlikely and making a mockery of English Tests having so little time allotted. Bardsley, still deputising for Collins, won the toss and decided to bat and, by the close on the second day, Australia were only 322 for eight, with Woodfull still in. Tate managed two for 88, bringing his series wickets total so far to nine. The returns were not as spectacular as he would have liked, but the chances to achieve more had been severely limited.

Australia were all out for 335 and England ended the game on 305 for five. Honours were very much even. Carr fell ill with tonsillitis on the first day and professional Jack Hobbs took over the captaincy for the rest of the match.

Tate maintained his good county form, taking nine wickets against Nottinghamshire and 11 against Kent. After that Australia and England arrived at the Oval for the deciding encounter. Could England finally take back the Ashes? Even in that stygian summer, a result was guaranteed, as the English authorities, following Australian precedent, had decided to make the fifth game of the series 'timeless'. They would play on even if it meant months of waiting around—spectators were quite used to that by the late summer of 1926, anyway.

The biggest controversy ahead of the game was the replacement of Carr as captain by Chapman, with some thinking he had been unfairly scapegoated, and others furious at his perceived errors. It was felt that Chapman, a tall, fair-haired figure of good nature, would fit the captaincy role better, even though he was still only 25 years old and had only started playing county cricket in 1925, after having to qualify for Kent, being a native of Berkshire.

Tate got on well with Chapman. In fact, he asked him to write the foreword in *Reminiscences*. In it Chapman described the Sussex man as a "trier from start to finish", adding: "He has done yeoman service for England time and again, and personally what he has done in his efforts for me I can never thank him enough for." There was a warmth not always felt between Tate and other captains, Gilligan and a few others excepted. Carr was bitter about his sacking, but Chapman inspired affection from his colleagues, who understood the size of the task facing him on his captaincy debut.

In the *Manchester Guardian*, Neville Cardus fretted about Chapman's "unproven leadership" and the consensus that Tate, Larwood, Leicestershire pace bowler George Geary and Middlesex leg-spinner Greville Stevens were "all essentially

hard-wicket bowlers", with the Oval pitch sure to have been dampened by conditions.

There was one addition to the team who was likely to prosper in such conditions, though. Yorkshire's slow left-armer Wilfred Rhodes, who had been but a tyro when Fred had played, was recalled at the age of 48. The selectors would never say so, but part of the thinking was to give Chapman a 'senior pro' to take charge of the situation if the skipper became overwhelmed. It was a good choice. No one knew cricket better than this veteran's veteran.

Describing the saga of Carr's sacking and replacement as a "sad muddle", Cardus was at best wary of what was to come, suggesting: "An English victory at the Oval, if and when it does come, will be, like most English victories, a triumph of the bulldog breed over our dear, delightful incapacity for abstract thinking in the councils of war." Such a description would have applied equally well to the administration of the international team until recent times. The nation was behind Chapman, however. Pathé footage gave a flavour of the atmosphere, showing the captains going out to toss in front of the Oval pavilion. A smiling Chapman raised his arms to indicate he had won, to the delight of the Surrey members.

Many would have expected some dire, attritional fare, as England, having decided to bat, started their work. In fact, spectators of a delicate disposition would have preferred it to what actually happened on day one. Fourteen wickets fell. England were all out for 280, with Sutcliffe's 76 the best effort, as leg-spinners Clarrie Grimmett and Arthur Mailey took eight wickets between them. Tate, at nine, hit 23 in just 15 minutes, including a pulled six from a ball outside off-stump off Mailey. Cardus called this stroke "the broad smile of cricket".

The England fans' spirits would have been heartened by the even more rapid fall of four Australian wickets—Bardsley, Macartney, Bill Ponsford and Tommy Andrews—as the visitors ended day one on 60 for four.

The next day's play was more sedate, with Collins and Jack Gregory putting on a century partnership. Gregory attacked for his 73 off 100 balls, before being caught by Stevens to give Tate his first wicket. Collins was happy to play the foil, trudging to 61 off 230 deliveries, when he was caught off Larwood. Tate took the final two wickets—Grimmett and Mailey—to record astonishingly economical figures. He bowled 37.1 overs for just 40 runs, including 17 maidens. He took three wickets in total, as did Larwood, but Australia had made 302—a lead of 22.

Cardus was critical of Tate's inability to dismiss, rather than merely contain, Collins, contending that the great Sydney Barnes would have managed it. He added: "Tate, indeed, has lost much of his pace from the turf, and seems ready to develop into one of those uninteresting bowlers who keep the runs down." And he continued: "Tate's analysis flatters his skill, though not his endeavour." It was a trifle unfair. Tate was doing an important job for the team, keeping England in the game by making runs hard to come by.

With the scores so close this rain-addled Ashes series looked set to go right to the end. It was up to England's batsmen to prove their mettle—and how they did. Hobbs and Sutcliffe further confirmed their brilliance with an opening partnership of 172. Hobbs went for 100 in 221 minutes. Sutcliffe continued to play the supporting role, as Woolley, Hendren, Chapman and Stevens all went for cameos. By the time the great Yorkshire opener departed, for 161, the total was 375—a big

lead of 353. Geary went cheaply and Tate came in to smash 33 not out in 50 minutes. Larwood and Strudwick went, leaving England on 436 all out.

Australia required 415 for victory. No one had ever reached such a total to win a Test. England's fans could almost taste victory. Tate's mean bowling and productive hitting in both innings meant he had done more than his share in setting up a chance of taking the Ashes. He was not to have a starring role in Australia's second innings. But, for once, there was little need of any Tate heroics.

Heavy rain delayed the start of the innings, after which there was strong sunshine. Larwood had Woodfull for a duck, the score one for one. He then dismissed Macartney with the score on 31. The score unchanged, Larwood caught Ponsford off Rhodes—31 for three. Rhodes, getting some balls to rise alarmingly, dismissed Collins. Larwood had Andrews caught by Tate. At 63 for five Australia were moving rapidly towards defeat. Rhodes got Bardsley out and Tate had Gregory caught by Sutcliffe at slip, his only wicket of the innings. Stevens bowled Oldfield for a doughty 23, leaving Australia on 114 for nine, with just Grimmett and Mailey left.

Geary was about to bowl to Mailey, on six, when Tate whispered to him, as he had whispered so many inconsequential things to so many people over the years. This time, however, the words from behind the cupped hand were those of wisdom: "Bowl him a yorker." Geary did exactly that. A superb delivery hit Mailey's leg stump. England had won the timeless Test by 289 runs in four days to recapture the Ashes. Tate took one for 12 in the innings, but the plaudits went to Rhodes, who took four for 44 on a sticky pitch ideally suited to his wiles.

Tate wrote: "What a scene there was in the dressing-room afterwards!" Champagne was liberally dispensed, while the crowd demanded a speech from Chapman. He obliged in what Tate called his "usual charming" way. Cries of "give us Rhodes", even "give us Collins", filled the air. They duly obliged, as the swarms of supporters, 40-deep, strained for a glimpse and cheered each man.

They almost had a shock. Tate gleefully recalled that one member of the victorious team had been shunted on to the balcony in a state of undress but not quite, thankfully, into the gaze of the public. The fans might have forgiven even that eventuality, such was their ecstasy. This was revenge at last.

England had not beaten Australia by the same margin—4-1—as they had lost in 1924/25, but that earlier series had not really given a true indication of the closeness of the sides in terms of talent. One-nil in 1926 was about right. Fred Tate was proud of his boy. He had indeed played his part in helping England win, with 13 wickets at just under 30 runs each.

A few days later Tate was in very different surroundings, as Sussex drew with Warwickshire at Coventry. They then lost to Yorkshire at Hove to end the season tenth in the championship. Tate played the Australians again, in their drawn game with Sussex at Hove, and once more for CI Thornton's XI at Scarborough. The result was a draw.

But Tate ended a dramatic, if strangely curtailed, season well by taking seven wickets in the match as 'The Rest' beat champions Lancashire by a whopping 374 runs at the Oval. For good measure, he managed the second hat-trick of his career, and of that season. In Lancashire's first innings he bowled number ten Albert Woolley for ten, and had last man, his England colleague George

Duckworth, lbw for a duck. When Lancashire began their second innings, he dismissed Ernest Tyldesley, who had offered such good advice in 1922, lbw for one with the first ball he bowled. Perhaps Tyldesley was now beginning to regret his comments.

Tate's season figures were 147 wickets at 17.51. This was a considerably higher average than in the previous three English seasons, but Australia were the best team in the world, which brought the overall number up. He bowled almost 2,000 fewer balls than in 1925, but that was mainly down to the weather.

Journalists, including Cardus, were beginning to notice that he had lost a bit of 'nip', understandable for a 31-year-old man who had had to bear such a burden over the past four seasons. The rain of 1926 had dampened pitches too, rendering pace less dangerous. Tate's performances, in that context, were impressive. Leading international batsmen had perhaps got more used to his style. None had mastered him. The Sussex committee, unusually bothering with an England matter, noted at its meeting in February 1927 that Tate had endured "persistent bad luck" during the Ashes. Still, England had won. Tate was becoming more famous – and more marketable.

# Chapter 15

## Sell, Sell, Sell.

"*Even for colours inclined to run, a quick washing in lukewarm Lux suds, no soaking and quick drying, keeps the colours fresh and clear.*"
—Kathleen Tate

ENDORSEMENTS BY SPORTS stars can do wonders for brands. When such promotions are really successful, the performer becomes synonymous with the product. To this day, any mention of Denis Compton soon brings the sobriquet "Brylcreem Boy" to people's lips. His tie-in with the hair care product evokes memories of his great batting summer of 1947, of carefree hours spent watching and reading about cricket as the country muddled through post-war austerity. Likewise, mention Brylcreem itself and Compton comes to mind immediately. It was brilliant marketing, at once masculinising, glamorising and legitimising the product. Compton was not paid a great deal by today's standards for his troubles, but Brylcreem made a fortune. Tate, in the 1920s, was as well known as Compton later became. He was not as handsome, or dashing, given his role as a stock/shock medium-pace bowler. Yet he was just as popular. "Good old Tate" had provided headlines and consistent success. He was keen to cash in on his image.

For many years Tate endorsed an energy supplement called Phosferine, claiming it "helps to keep an athlete fit" and that it could enable people to bowl "40 or even 50 strenuous overs a day".

Another product, Caley's Marching Tost Chocolate, he described as a "real source of energy". Caley's, a Norwich firm, is still in business today, after more

than 125 years. In a sign of how celebrity has changed, it supplied traditional confectionary including dolly mixtures, rhubarb and custard drops and mint humbugs for the TV show *Big Brother* in 2012, when the contestants' diary room was converted into an all-you-can-eat sweetshop for an episode.

Tate was being used to reach a 'wholesome' market. And not just in the United Kingdom. In what today would be an unthinkable endorsement for one involved in sport, an advertisement appeared in New Zealand's *Truth* newspaper in 1926 for Sarony's cigarettes of Bond Street, London. It bore Tate's image. Well, a very badly drawn image of a generic sportsman purporting to be him, anyway. The accompanying blurb is a reminder that much of the cigarette card collecting that went on among young people at the time was part of a hardened marketing ploy, responsible for causing an addiction resulting in countless bronchial conditions, heart attacks and cancers. The advert said: "Sarony cards feature interesting links with England's historic past. In addition to satisfying the desire of children for collections, they are of important educational value."

A 'letter' from Tate to the boss of the company was displayed:

> "Dear Bob, Sarony's—like cricket—have a large and enthusiastic following. But Sarony's have this big advantage—Sarony's are always 'in season'. It is bad enough to put away one's cricket gear for the winter months, but just imagine having to pack up Sarony's as well. I shudder at the terrible thought."

The links between smoking and ill health were not established, but one thing the advert does show is that Tate, who had never visited New Zealand at the time, was a huge name abroad. The Tates were not averse to using their children for commercial purposes. An advertorial feature called "Our Sporting Younger Set" appeared in the *Daily Mirror* on 17th July 1931. Its purpose was to demonstrate the effectiveness of Lux washing powder. The twins and Maurice junior were shown in the garden of the family's Brighton home. The girls wore bright flapper-style dresses and their brother, who was holding a cricket bat, a spotless white shirt. The journalist, household advice guru Lady Muriel Beckwith, wrote: "Mrs Tate likes them to wear light-coloured cottons for their summer play clothes. She tells me: 'Even for colours inclined to run, a quick washing in lukewarm Lux suds, no soaking and quick drying, keeps the colours fresh and clear'."

The Tates, Kathleen in particular, became very adept at using the press to their own advantage. In more difficult times the skill was to come in handy.

Liberal helpings of wholesome anecdotes helped to maintain Tate's image as a hapless, but lovable, family man. In September 1932, Middlesex and England bowler Ian Peebles told one involving a cattle auction in Brighton one winter. Tate wandered over to watch proceedings while he was out for a walk. He waved a hand to greet a friend and, mistaken for a bidder, became the owner of a cow, costing £34. It "remained in his keeping until the end of the sale, when it was resold at a slight profit", according to Peebles.

Inadvertent the purchase may have been, but—a few pounds here and there for adverts aside—it stands out as a rare instance of Tate making a successful commercial decision.

# Chapter 16

## Arthur's Eastern Promise.

"*Ranji had a private zoo in which was an animal very few people have seen, with a lion's head and a tiger's body. There were two others in existence but I believe both are dead.*"

—Maurice Tate

TATE, DESPITE HIS avowedly 'domesticated' nature, agreed to coach in New Zealand during the Test-free winter of 1926/27. It would mean several months away from Kathleen and his three young children. Still, money was money, although memories of the homesickness and loneliness he felt on his ill-fated trip to South Africa four years earlier were still no doubt fresh in his mind.

Fortunately, Arthur Gilligan came up with a more exciting, and sociable, offer, which Tate gladly accepted. Gilligan was to lead an MCC tour to India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and there was a place on offer. Sightseeing, hunting and adventure beckoned, and Tate was to be paid. It ought not to have been too taxing, with the local sides not up to English or Australian standards, and promised to be relatively low on overs, giving his feet, back and hips a rest.

Tate and Gilligan journeyed overland to Marseilles, where they met the rest of the team on the P&O ship NARKUNDA. Most of the squad were not household names, but a smattering of larger figures, including George Geary, Bob Wyatt and Andy Sandham, made up a decent core. Yorkshire's Raleigh Chichester-Constable was not as well known.

En route to Ceylon, at Port Said, Gilligan received a letter informing him the side was to play 36 games on tour—more, even, than during an English season. Tate, who devoted far more of his *Reminiscences* to this trip than any other subject or series, including the Ashes, wrote: "That was too much of a good thing in a climate like that, and with all the travelling involved, so the number was reduced slightly, but all the same it meant we were not exactly on a picnic."

He seemed, though, to have had the time of his life, musing: "I don't suppose I shall ever again have such a wonderful trip as I did through India." Fêted everywhere they went, MCC played in front of more than 20,000 people at the Bombay Gymkhana ground. Tate made 100 before lunch against the Parsees and Europeans in early December. All the while he enjoyed the hospitality, excepting an incident at Christmas in Calcutta.

Tate, always conscious of his status as a cricketer, was aggrieved at an 'amateurs-only' invitation handed to a couple of the team, criticising, rather understatedly, the "hint of snobbishness". It was not the done thing to rail against the injustices of the amateur/professional divide, but nor was it acceptable to display them in such a naked way as some of the team's hosts, no doubt influenced by the rigid stratifications of India's caste system.

Playing against Rajputana and Central India in late November, Tate took four for 21. They were unremarkable figures in the context of his career but he kept an interesting souvenir. In his collection was a billboard used by sellers of *The Times of India*, proclaiming at the top: "Tate in deadly form". Underneath was a second headline: "German plot revealed". It demonstrated the news priorities in that cricket-obsessed country—and Tate's celebrity. It is nice to think that, in his later days, he was able to look at such memorabilia and remind himself of his true importance as a cricketer.

In the serious business of the tour, against All India at Calcutta in a game which started on New Year's Eve, Tate took six for 42 in the first innings and four for 64 in the second. He also hit 58 in the first innings, in a game which MCC won by four wickets. Tate recalled batting with the Maharajah of Patiala, who lost an earring worth £10,000. Luckily it was found in the net he wore to cover his beard during his innings.

In Madras, Tate reached 1,000 runs on the tour, a significant achievement, but lost two teeth when he was hit by the ball. On to Ceylon, and Tate gained his 100th wicket, making him the only man to do the double of 100 wickets and 1,000 runs on tour anywhere other than in England. It is a record which stands today.

Despite the workload and busy itinerary, it was definitely a 'social' tour, with a fair bit of boozing going on at receptions organised by rich English, or Anglophile, businessmen, diplomats and others. MCC outclassed most teams with ease.

Sometimes Tate—regarded as too lively to handle even on the slow sub-continental pitches—did not come on until third or fourth change, presumably to prolong the contest. Whether teams like Aligarh University Past and Present deserved first-class status is debatable. It throws in to question MCC's need to take professionals along in the first place. Although, when expenses are taken into account, they were often cheaper than the amateurs.

Overall, despite the odd rebuff, the paid players were treated better than was often the case in England. The team were driven in a fleet of Rolls-Royces for a big game hunt while staying at Patiala. They were also served a banquet on gold plates. Tate slept under canvas outside the vice-regal lodge in Delhi, with Sandham in the neighbouring tent. They were impressed when the sentry saluted them.

Tate, a poor shot, was particularly proud of managing to bag some animals during hunting expeditions. *The Times of India* mis-recorded him as having killed a buck from 9,000 yards (almost six miles) away, while the team were staying with Ranji at his palace in Nawanagar.

Tate managed 1,249 runs on the tour, at 34.69, and 128 wickets at 13.45. The team were unbeaten in 34 games. It was like playing Glamorgan all the time, albeit in hotter, drier weather. Tate reserved special praise for Gilligan, who had been unwell much of the time, reporting that, at a meal given for the visitors at the Byculla Club in Bombay, he had "made a few pointed remarks about the people who wished to break up a team like ours and differentiate between amateurs and professionals".

Tate had been an excellent tourist, willing to try new things and keen to see the countries he visited. Today's England teams could learn a thing or two from him. Tate returned to Sussex in March to get down to some serious walking and

beagling. It was time to crack open the Phosferine and munch on some Marching Tost Chocolate as the season of 1927 got under way.

# Chapter 17

## Business as Usual?

"*I was always on my toes, thinking that there must be plenty of competition.*"
—Maurice Tate

TATE CAME BACK to England tanned, toned and happy. His tour of India and Ceylon had been highly successful in establishing further fame as an all-rounder. The return in March gave a much-appreciated chance to spend time with Kathleen, his daughters, who were now five, and his two-year-old son.

There had been many games over the winter, in hot conditions, but the efforts he made could not be compared to those of an English season. Most of the sides were poor and his bowling was often held back by the sporting Gilligan, who cherished his ambassadorial role.

Back in the milder climes of Sussex, Tate could restart his winter regime of walking, beagling and watching Brighton and Hove Albion. In April it was time to return to his pals at Hove for some pre-season training. Young Laetitia Stapleton was among those who turned up at the nets. "Tate let me bowl [to him] most of the morning," she noted in her diary. The next day she recorded: "Tate let me bowl then bat… How kind these men were!"

The practice, against anyone prepared to send down some deliveries at him, was worthwhile. Tate had always been keen on batting, but it had definitely become secondary to his bowling since his conversion to pace. After the Australia tour of 1924/25, Monty Noble had offered a slight criticism in saying that he did not take this aspect of his game "seriously enough". In 1927, another summer heavily disrupted by the weather, this was to change. At the beginning of the season he was promoted to open the batting, a role he had not performed consistently since the early 1920s. Remember, the committee had even questioned whether he should focus entirely on this skill at the expense of his bowling.

In the second match of 1927, against Cambridge University, he hit 113. In the next, against Worcestershire, it was slightly better: 122. Another ton followed against Hampshire, his 101 helping Sussex win by an innings and 38 runs. In the same game, Tate took ten wickets for 95 runs.

Sir Home Gordon had complained that Arthur Gilligan "spoilt" Tate by pandering to his needs. But who was spoiling whom? No captain in the world could fail to be delighted that he had undoubtedly the world's number one bowler in his team. If that same bowler was capable of hitting three centuries in as many games, then even better.

Still it continued, with almost every fixture bringing success with either bat or ball, or both. Against Leicestershire, there were two fifties and seven wickets. He

passed 50 at least once for five games in a row, while still taking wickets at a steady rate. Tate reached 1,000 runs for the season before the end of June, as he made 26 in a rain-ruined Test trial match. Then, in July, he hit two more hundreds in a week, against Kent and Northamptonshire.

While his bowling went for only about two runs an over, Tate's batting was explosive. His method was simple: to strike hard from early on and take the attack to the bowlers. If it came off, it was spectacular and allowed the team to score quickly, giving more time to win games. If it failed, then he could usually wrest back any lost initiative with the ball.

The batting quietened after the early-season blitz, but Tate still enjoyed the most successful season of his career. He made 1,713 runs, including five hundreds and nine fifties, at the average of 36.44. The Sussex fans were delighted and thoroughly entertained.

The high point was a win by an innings and 196 runs over Lancashire at the end of August. The north-western county, always a mighty force, were chasing the title. The *Manchester Guardian* said: "Tate, who in all took nine wickets for 49 runs, gave an emphatic answer to those critics who have suggested that his bowling has lost some of its fire and sting." It failed to mention that those critics had included the newspaper's own Neville Cardus who, the previous year, had doubted whether Tate was among the 11 best cricketers available for England.

It was only relative to the great years Tate had just experienced, but his bowling figures declined a little in 1927. He sent down 9,416 balls, almost as many as in 1925, but took 'only' 147 wickets at 20.53, the first time he had averaged more than 20 since his conversion from spin to pace. Sussex finished a disappointing tenth, the same as in 1926. It was a 'nothing' sort of year for English cricket overall, with no Tests played either.

Excitement was already building for the Ashes series of 1928/29 and Tate was keen to impress the selectors in 1928. "I was anxious to do well," he wrote. "I can never remember a time when I sat back in my chair and thought: 'I am Maurice Tate, I can rest on my oars.'"

Tate always focused on getting the best out of his cricket. Despite his good-naturedness, he was rather a tunnel-visioned man. Nothing much else seemed to bother him, except his family. Money was a recurring concern, not because of extravagant spending, but the poor wages paid to professionals of the day.

As he settled down for a winter of rest at the end of 1927, he had an idea. It was not a good one. At an Armistice Day golf match in November he was matched against an H Osborn. The two of them got chatting as they walked around the course. One can imagine the type of dialogue which occurred between the businessman and the sportsman. It was probably along the lines of: "With my business acumen and your sporting fame, we're going to be rich beyond our wildest dreams." Their clubs downed, along with, one imagines, a few pints of beer, the golfing opponents decided to set up a joint venture.

So it was that, in the March of 1928, Maurice Tate Ltd, a sporting goods shop, opened its doors for the first time. Based at 25 East Street, Brighton, its main attraction was to be that Tate himself would be on hand, chatting to would-be customers. Maybe he had seen the crowds swarming to see him and other England players at Harrods and thought he would like to be the one enjoying the

takings. In a rare admission of his own sporting mortality, he told the press: “One cannot go on being a bowler for ever.”

Yet it does not appear to have been properly thought through. The premises were only a few hundred yards away from Brighton’s established equipment supplier, Wisden’s. They were also quite cramped. The building survives largely intact, with its original fittings in place. It is now an optician’s. It is far more suited to storing and displaying pairs of glasses than it would have been for housing bulky sports gear, such as footballs, bats and pads.

Tate tried to pop in as often as he could, but his playing commitments were enormous, usually lasting from Monday to Saturday. This surely impeded sales. Laetitia Stapleton, loyal as ever, was a customer, recording in her diary of 2nd April: “Went to Tate’s shop about a racket.” Ten days later she wrote: “Went to Tate’s shop to get a bat.” She was one of few.

Business was poor and, on 19th September 1928, just six months after opening and shortly after MCC had left for Australia, the *London Gazette* notified the public that Maurice Tate Ltd was going into voluntary liquidation. Osborn remained hopeful, saying: “But we still have hopes of pulling the company through, and the *Gazette* notice is purely formal.” A meeting of the firm’s creditors was held in October but nothing could be worked out to save it. On 30th November, the sporting business was formally wound up.

Tate had cricketing nous in abundance but no head for business. He was a total novice. These days, he would have had an agent to promote his interests and look after the day-to-day issues of accounting and the like. In the 1920s, no such help existed.

The year 1928 saw another change. His standing in the game guaranteed, he moved more freely among the inner circles of Sussex society, despite the failure of his shop. Tate was initiated as a member of the South Downs Lodge of the Freemasons, in Brighton, on 21st March, the same month as the shop opened. It was the same year as Wally Hammond entered the Bradford Lodge, encouraged and helped by his wealthy father-in-law, the textile merchant Joseph Lister. They were by no means the only members of the cricketing fraternity to join. Herbert Sutcliffe, Hedley Verity, Len Hutton, Godfrey Evans and Colin Cowdrey did so in later years. Ranji was a long-standing member. Middlesex’s Gubby Allen and Surrey’s Douglas Jardine, figures to loom large in the Bodyline tour four years later, were also Masons.

South Downs Lodge offered camaraderie. Tate loved to socialise but he did not appear to engage fully with the ideas behind the organisation. He never progressed beyond the level of an ordinary member, leaving on 31st January 1933, while he was on tour in Australia.

His financial stresses and strains were to be most easily forgotten, or avoided, where he felt most comfortable: on the cricket field.

# Chapter 18

## Caribbean Cruise.

"*The West Indians make the game young again.*"
—Neville Cardus

THE YEAR 1928 was important in the history of international cricket. The West Indies made their Test match debut. The early-season press was full of excitement about their arrival in England: a mostly black team in a largely white country. Racial stereotypes abounded, contrasting the natural talent of the visiting "negroes" with their lack of "technique" and "thoughtfulness" on the field.

Tate's season began productively, with five wickets against Leicestershire and ten against Nottinghamshire, as Sussex started with consecutive wins. The dismissals continued to come, but the runs were not as plentiful as in 1927, Tate usually batting in the middle order once again. By late May at least the bowling was approaching his heightened standard of normality. Tate reached 1,500 first-class wickets in the Whitsun game against Middlesex at Lord's and took a handy nine wickets in the match against Warwickshire in early June, then seven against Kent and nine against Surrey.

The Test trial at Lord's was a disappointment, Tate getting two for 105 in a dank draw. The *Manchester Guardian* reported: "There were times when the game seemed designed as a trial for spectators no less than as a test for players. Larwood's bowling alone had real distinction. The other bowlers, not excluding Tate, were rather unimpressive."

The West Indies arrived at Lord's for the first Test with a reputation for entertaining the public. They were nothing like the great teams of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, but sadly very much like the side of today. There was obvious talent but a lack of application and concentration. The stand-out player was all-rounder Learie Constantine, later to become an eminent barrister and Britain's first black peer. His bowling was decidedly rapid and his batting unremittingly attacking.

England, led by Percy Chapman, won the toss and batted. They reached a solid 401 off 125.4 overs, Ernest Tyldesley top-scoring with 122. It was the debut match for future England captain Douglas Jardine, who made 22, the same as Tate, who came in at eight.

Bowling the West Indies out was no great task, as they fell for 177, Tate taking two for 54 off 27 overs. Chapman enforced the follow-on and this time they were out for 166, Tate again taking two wickets for 28, off 22 parsimonious overs. England were victorious by an innings and 58 runs.

Cardus, modishly, said the visitors had provided "a vivid sense of that far from constant or formal energy which is the essence of jazz". "The West Indians may or may not lose all the Test matches," he wrote, "but they certainly will win the affections of crowds throughout the country. Cricket has grown terribly old here in recent years, and the West Indians make the game young again—free it from the heavy professional chains." Even Tate was "nowadays merely a good bowler", Cardus told his readers, ennui fairly dripping from his pen.

The second Test followed a similar pattern to that of the first. West Indian captain Karl Nunes chose to bat on a flat wicket, but his side were out for 206,

only opener Clifford Roach making 50. Tate's one wicket for 68 was disappointing, but Tich Freeman did most of the damage, with five for 54. Cardus was still on Tate's case. By the afternoon, the Sussex man's bowling lacked 'nip', but, in mitigation, the Old Trafford pitch was described as "docile".

When England batted, Jack Hobbs and Herbert Sutcliffe did the usual and put on a century stand, but Jardine's 83 was the top score as the team reached 351, Tate helping himself to a lusty 28. While Tate and Jardine were batting together, there was a mix-up and Jardine was run out. Down the years, it has been suggested that this embittered the Surrey man towards Tate. It was certainly a poor start to their relationship.

Tate hardly bowled in the West Indies' second innings, his figures one for ten off nine overs. The slow bowlers went through the away team, Freeman getting another five wickets and Somerset left-arm spinner Jack White three. This time England won by an innings and 30 runs.

MCC announced the 16-man squad for Australia a week after the second Test ended. Tate was unsurprisingly among the group to be led by Chapman, which conspicuously lacked fast-bowling support for himself, Harold Larwood and George Geary. A lot of effort awaited beyond the southern horizon once more.

At the Oval, for the last of the three Tests, Tate—perhaps enlivened by his inclusion for the Ashes trip—regained his wicket-taking vim. West Indies won the toss and batted. The opening pair of Roach and George Challenor made 91, before Larwood bowled Roach. Yorkshire's Maurice Leyland had Challenor caught at slip by the brilliant, soon-to-be legendary, Wally Hammond.

Tate then bowled skipper Nunes for nought. He had to wait a while for his next success, but then got out number six Tommy Scott, caught by wicketkeeper George Duckworth for 35. Chapman, like Hammond one of the best slip fielders ever to play for England, caught Vibart Wight and George Francis off Tate's bowling to give him figures of four for 59. The West Indies were out for 238—disappointing after a good early showing.

In reply, Hobbs made 159, Sutcliffe 63 and Tyldesley 73 as England reached a dominant 438. Tate, at number eight, enjoyed himself as he made 54, beating his previous best Test score by four runs.

The West Indies batted for the final time in their maiden Test series and were all out for 129, England winning by an innings for the third time in succession. Tate took three for 27, including the prized wicket of Constantine, during an exciting passage of play. *The Times* described the West Indian all-rounder as "half a side in himself", which was especially true when the outfit was so weak.

Yet Constantine was prone to excitability. The newspaper reported: "Yesterday his innings was a monument of indiscretion. When he went in it was eminently desirable that the English bowlers should be knocked off their length. But that was not to be done in five minutes, nor yet in 50." Constantine came out to attack, narrowly being missed in the slips without scoring. The Trinidadian then hit a slightly over-pitched ball off Tate, which went flying into the pavilion for six "at terrific pace". Tate pitched the next delivery a little shorter and Constantine attempted to repeat the stroke, but miscued it to be caught in Larwood's safe hands at long-on. All it took to get him out was a bit of nous. The West Indies had to go home and think more about how to compete with the best.

Tate wrote that he did not "remember the full details of this match, which is not a matter of surprise in view of the thoughts of the coming trip to Australia". His description of the visitors as "darkies" was very much in the style of the casual racism of the time. The West Indies were inexperienced, but the public took to them and they been a decent warm-up act for the task ahead.

For Sussex, Tate gained some batting form in the second half of the season, with 117 against Worcestershire and 102 against Middlesex. The bowling highlight was 12 for 118 against Somerset. Tate took 165 first-class wickets at 19.29. Sussex had a decent year, finishing seventh. Almost as soon as the season finished it was time for Tate to pack his bags once more.

# Chapter 19

## Victorious Down Under.

"*Oy, Whitey, that's my rabbit.*"
—Maurice Tate

THE ASHES WIN of 1926 had been a cause of national celebration, but the margin of victory—1-0—was small and had been earned in a specially scheduled timeless Test. Percy Chapman's men were keen to do better in Australia in 1928/29 and secure a convincing win to erase the memories of the 4-1 drubbing suffered four years earlier.

At the 1928 season's end, MCC held a dinner for the team at Lord's. Honorary treasurer Lord Harris told the guests that Percy Chapman's side was as well-equipped as any sent to Australia. Yorkshireman Frederick Toone was again the tour manager. As he left Leeds Station for London, he told the press he was almost certain England would win. *The Times* reported: "His reply to complaints regarding the lack of bowling strength was that, assuming Larwood stands the strain of the hard Australian wickets, our bowling will be as strong as it possibly could be with the talent at our disposal." Tate's capacity to handle the trip was taken for granted.

MCC travelled to Australia on the Orient liner OTRANTO. Some left via a special train from London St Pancras. Others, including Tate, travelled overland to meet the ship at the southern French port of Toulon, because the OTRANTO's departure had happened while they were still engaged in The Rest v The Champion County game at the Oval.

Tate recalled a "frightfully hot voyage", his cabin-mate being Yorkshire batsman Maurice Leyland. After arriving in Australia, Tate, who had hurt his shoulder, missed the first two games. He was able to watch the first match of the tour, where George Geary was felled by a ball which hit him on the nose.

As the injured player was being taken into the pavilion, a man in the crowd shouted: "Pity it wasn't Tate!" He could take it as a compliment.

Anticipating the same sort of reception for Sussex's star as in 1924/25, businessmen were ready to cash in on the most famous part of his anatomy. The press started carrying advertisements for 'Maurice Tate' cricket boots. Made of buckskin, they were appropriately promoted as being able to "withstand severe strain".

MCC received a huge welcome when they arrived at Melbourne, with thousands of people waiting at the station. Tate's first game was against Victoria, where he took one for 45 and none for 30 as Chapman nursed him through.

They travelled to play New South Wales at Sydney, where Warren Bardsley told Tate of a newly discovered batting talent called Don Bradman. It was a name to bring a chill to every Englishman's heart for the next 20 years. Tate made 21 not out in MCC's first innings and then got a chance to bowl to the wunderkind. He took three for 98 but did not dismiss Bradman, who made 87. In the second innings the 20-year-old scored an unbeaten 132. Some players fail to live up to their hype; Bradman did not. Yet Tate, with all his experience, noticed that all was not perfect with his opponent's technique, writing: "In the early stages of Don's career, he was apt to play across the ball a lot." Even so, he was "mightily impressed". The two men were eyeing each other with a view to the bigger contests ahead.

The New South Wales game meandered to a draw, as MCC ended their Ashes preparations with a match against an Australian XI, again at the Sydney Cricket Ground. MCC won by eight wickets but, as ever in such games, the personal contests were the most interesting. In the home side's first innings, Tate took three for 38, but Bradman impressed by scoring 58 not out. Tate was proud that, when he batted, he made one more than "The Don", getting out for 59. It was in the Australians' second innings that two highly significant events took place. Tate, in getting three for 65, had Bradman lbw for just 18. The other was that, incredibly rarely, possibly uniquely, Tate bowled a wide.

"The present tour in Australia should prove exceedingly interesting," he told the Australian press in the build-up to the proper action, "and I am sure we shall see some very even games before the Ashes are lost or retained. In batting we are certainly as good as, if not slightly better than, our rivals." Tate voiced concern over Australia's pitches, though. They had been altered so that they were far slower than four years previously, when he had prospered. Tate said that "if England is not very careful, the artificial wicket will ruin her bowlers irretrievably, and the four bowlers who are so necessary to any good Test team will be hard to find"

Perhaps still stung by Monty Noble's criticism of his lack of "versatility" during the last tour, and demonstrating his elephantine memory for negative commentary, Tate advised bowlers to "concentrate upon the body work, and leave that much-talked-of finger spin to take care of itself until they have mastered it". Spin came "naturally to the medium fast-bowler when the body work" was put in. Hefty effort and a well-positioned seam would suffice.

On 30th November 1928, the very day Tate's sports shop in Brighton was wound up, the series began. For the first time, a Test match was to be played in the Queensland city of Brisbane, at the Exhibition Ground. An exhibition is exactly what England delivered.

Chapman won the toss and batted. Jack Hobbs and Herbert Sutcliffe put on 85, when Sutcliffe went, followed ten runs later by his opening partner. Phil Mead made eight before Douglas Jardine and Wally Hammond got the total to 161. After that Patsy Hendren came in and stroked 169, taking the middle order and tail along with him. Chapman got 50 and Tate 26 off 31, before being well caught by Jack Ryder off a skier at mid-off. The crowd enjoyed his blazing style. Larwood hit a well-made 70 and Jack White, at number ten, made 14, before Hendren was the last man out. England had made 521, a big score even in a timeless game.

It was Australia's turn to bat and Larwood and Tate, enjoying Australia's return to six-ball overs, no doubt, had a ball. The Nottinghamshire paceman got Woodfull for a duck and Ponsford for two. Tate caught Alan Kippax off his own bowling. Larwood then did for Charles Kelleway—the player who had professed in 1926 not to be able to read Tate even on a slow-motion film of his bowling—and Hunter "Stork" Hendry.

It was then that Bradman, who had made huge scores at club and state level, came on to bat in a Test for the first time. He moved his way carefully to 18 off 40 balls. Then Tate pitched up a tempting slower delivery, which Bradman tried to turn to the leg side. He missed, beaten by the lack of speed on the ball. Tate appealed loudly, as he was wont to do. Bradman was out lbw, his first dismissal in Tests. It was a disappointing start for an unparalleled career. Tate, if he had achieved little else, would have gone down in history as the first man to get rid of Bradman. He could even claim to have out-thought him.

The score read 101 for six. Tate had Oldfield lbw with the score on 105, while Larwood dismissed skipper Ryder and left-arm spinner Bert Ironmonger. Fast bowler Jack Gregory was unable to bat, as he had damaged his knee, so Australia subsided for 122 all out off 50.4 overs. It was a deficit of 399 runs. Tate had taken three for 50 and Larwood six for 32. How nice it was to have an effective bowling partner.

Despite his attack still being fresh, Chapman declined to enforce the follow-on. For once, Hobbs and Sutcliffe went quite cheaply. Hammond, who was to break run-scoring records in the series, fell for 28. Hendren made 45, Chapman 27, Larwood 37. There was no hurry, but Tate's 20 off just 17 balls showed he was itching to bowl at the Aussies again. Chapman declared with the team on 342 and Jardine on a solid, if a trifle dull, 65 not out, made off 194 balls. England led by 741 runs – just 742 to win. Even with eternity at Australia's disposal, as they had, that would take some getting.

In the end it was all over in just 25.3 overs. Larwood dismissed Ponsford and Kippax. On a rain-affected pitch, White got Hendry and then Tate had Ryder caught for one by man-of-the-moment Larwood. Australia were on 47 for four. With just two more runs added, White had Bradman caught for one by Chapman in the slips. It was at this point that Tate allegedly let forth one of the most ill-judged pieces of mockery ever heard on a cricket field.

"Oy, Whitey, that's my rabbit," he exclaimed to his team-mate. Bradmanologists to this day are debating whether this was merely an ironic, humorous quip delivered at a moment of genuine delight for the England team, or a show of cruelty that hardened The Don up as a player, making him even more determined

never to give his wicket away. The former seems more likely, as Tate was not a nasty man. Bradman was hardly a laid-back type beforehand, either.

Australia now looked doomed. Tate had Oldfield caught by Larwood for five and White quickly got rid of Clarrie Grimmett and Ironmonger. Gregory and Kelleway, who had ptomaine poisoning, were unable to bat. Australia were dismissed for 66, opener Bill Woodfull carrying his bat for a valiant 30 not out. The scale of victory was enormous: 675 runs. Tate had played his part in a wonderful team effort. Chapman's second Ashes Test as skipper had seemingly cemented England's dominance. Bradman was dropped by Australia for the only time in his career.

After the game, Chapman copped some flak for not enforcing the follow-on, with many in the crowd expressing their displeasure when the decision was taken. But Tate defended him against the "unjustified" criticism. The bowlers had been too tired and could have conceded a large total in Australia's second innings, he reasoned. The scale of the win was due to Chapman "striking while the iron was hot". Even in sultry Brisbane, where humidity saps the bowler's spirit, Tate was overstressing the captain's brilliance. Teams which concede huge first-innings leads do not tend to prosper, whoever is in charge.

There was time for some levity after the Test, and Tate was masterly at levity. MCC beat a Combined Country XI in a non-first-class match at Warwick, a town 80 or so miles south-west of Brisbane. To keep the paying spectators happy, the team went in again to provide an "exhibition of hitting". Tate proved why he had become such a favourite with Australian crowds.

Before going in, he bet the Australian journalists a bottle of beer that he could bit the ball into the press box. He told the bowlers, who colluded by tossing up easy deliveries to belt, but Tate failed to hit his target. "The spectators had been let into the joke," according to the *Melbourne Argus*, "and they crowded round the target, cheering every stroke. When Maurice returned to the pavilion one of the spectators insisted upon paying the bet on condition that Tate autographed the bottle. This he did, with the utmost gravity."

Tate and MCC had their serious faces back on when the teams moved down to Sydney for the second Test. In front of a crowd of 25,000 Ryder won the toss and the Australians batted. They reached 253 all out with George Geary, now recovered from the smashed nose he had suffered earlier in the tour, taking five for 35. Tate was his usual super-economical self, conceding just 29 runs off 21 overs. Larwood got three wickets.

Tate was furious to read extracts of a London newspaper, in which the former chairman of selectors Plum Warner had written: "Tate is too old to open the attack for England." Tate indignantly remarked: "I was 33 then!" Again, he was brooding too much on criticism, but it was not pleasant to read, especially coming from Warner, a man whose MCC administration days were far from over.

England further asserted their dominance when they came to bat. Sutcliffe and Hobbs put on just 37, but Hammond strode out to begin one of the most remarkable sequences of scores in history. He hit an impeccable 251 as the away team went to 636, then the biggest total in Test history. A paucity of pace among the Australians saw Grimmett open the bowling with one-Test wonder, and former international rugby union full-back, Otto Nothling.

Warner's words were seen as little more than hokum when the Australians batted again. It was far more of a contest as Woodfull and Hendry both made centuries, Ryder weighing in with 79. Tate's efforts were superb as he took four for 99 off 46 overs. His first victim was Vic Richardson, caught by Hendren at short leg for a duck, with the team score also on nought. Tate got next man out, Hendry, lbw for 112 when he played across the line, the team total now 215. Tate then had Kippax lbw for ten with 246 on the board. Tate asserted his usual dominance over Bert Oldfield when he dismissed him, also lbw, for nothing. The Australians made 397, leaving England just 15 to win.

As reward for their efforts Geary and Tate opened the batting. Sadly, Hendry, opening the bowling for Australia, got them both out. Geary was bowled and Tate caught by substitute fielder Bradman. Still, England won by eight wickets. They were 2-0 up with three to go. Just one more win and they would retain the Ashes.

The next Test, at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, was to prove a proper contest after two such one-sided affairs. Bradman was back in the Australian ranks and Ryder, upon winning the toss, decided to bat. Richardson again went cheaply to Larwood and Tate had Woodfull caught by Jardine for seven.

The team score was just 15 for two and this went to 57 for three when Larwood dismissed Hendry. But Kippax and Ryder both got hundreds, taking the total on to 218 for four. Larwood got Kippax and Tate had Ryder caught smartly by Hendren at forward short leg for 112. Bradman was bowled by Hammond for 79. The tail fell to a combination of Geary and White, to give Australia 397, the same as they had mustered in the second innings of the last game. Tate's figures were two for 87 off 46 overs.

England managed a slight advantage as they reached 417 all out, Hammond's 200 the most notable feature. Tate made 21 off 33 balls, coming in at number nine. Australia were again in fighting mood when they returned to the crease in intense heat.

In a sign that Hammond's dominance of the Test scene might not last, Bradman made his first international century, 112. Tate could not work him out, recalling: "We fully realised his importance in world cricket then." However, he had Woodfull caught by Duckworth for 107 and bowled Kippax for 41. Australia made 351, leaving England 332 to win. The wicket, after much rain, had turned into a 'sticky dog' and pundits were sure the visitors would struggle to get near three figures.

But Hobbs and Sutcliffe, two of the best players in history in such conditions, had other ideas. Hobbs made 49 and Sutcliffe 135, while Jardine got 33, Hammond 32 and Hendren 45. With the score on 328, only four left to win, and four wickets in hand, Tate came in. He only had to stick around for a bit and he could be there when the Ashes were retained. Alas, it was not to be, as he was run out for a duck. A big hit travelled towards the boundary and would have reached it "99 times out of 100", Tate felt, but the lithe Bradman, fielding at deep mid-off, brought off a quick stop and powerful throw to run him out.

Geary—who had taken the wicket to regain the Ashes in 1926—prevented any Old Trafford 1902-style wobbles when he hit the next ball for four to bring England home by three wickets. They had done it. England had won an Ashes series on Australian soil for the first time since 1911/12.

Tate managed further to niggle Bradman after the match. The Fleet Street press had wondered whether the new boy's slightly cross-batted style would allow him to prosper on English wickets, where there was more movement. Tate also questioned his portability. In 1931 Bradman recalled the bowler taking him aside after the Melbourne game and saying: "Don, learn to play a straighter bat before you come to England, or you will never get any runs." Bradman admitted he was no stylist, but had felt his technique would suffice overseas and that it could be altered if found wanting. It was advice Tate would come to regret.

After the celebrations, MCC took a trip to Tasmania for a couple of easily won games, in which Tate took ten wickets in total, before travelling on to Adelaide for the fourth Test. In a 1950 book by Denzil Batchelor, called *The Match I Remember*, Tate was to single out the Adelaide Test as the favourite of his whole career. In his mind it was even better than dismissing the South Africans for 30 on debut or breaking the Ashes wickets record in 1925. It was, indeed, quite a game.

Chapman, who usually called heads at the toss, opted for tails instead. He won and chose to bat in conditions that Tate said "reminded us of a bakehouse". England made 334, with another Hammond century—119 not out—the highlight, and Tate getting just two. When the home team came in, Tate was immediately successful, having the stubborn Woodfull caught by Duckworth for one in his first over.

Larwood had Hendry for two and White got Kippax for three. The score was 19 for three. But teenage debutant Archie Jackson made a sublime 164, one of the best innings in Ashes cricket. With the score on 227, Tate had the pleasure of getting rid of Bradman again, for 40, caught by Larwood. He bowled Grimmett for four. Tate's fourth wicket was Oldfield, also bowled, for 32. This was the Sussex man's 100th wicket in Test matches, a feat achieved in little more than four years at a time when there was far less international play than today. He thoroughly deserved all the plaudits he received.

Australia were all out for 369, a lead of 35. Geary was injured for much of the innings, leaving more work to Tate and White. The latter bowled 60 overs, taking five for 130. Tate, no slouch in the stamina department himself, was impressed, later saying: "For sheer grit under that sizzling sun, White was king of us all… What a man!"

England, in their second innings, made it to 383 all out, thanks mainly to yet another big score by Hammond. He made 177 off 603 balls, backed up by Jardine, with 98 from 378. It was hardly riveting stuff, but England were trying to grind Australia out of the game. Tate, commenting after his later disagreements with Jardine, was half-scathing, half-admiring: "The hours yawned away as Jardine came near to out-Scottoning Scotton, the world's slowest scorer bar none."

William Scotton was a left-handed Nottinghamshire batsman who played 15 Tests for England but committed suicide aged 37 in 1893. Wisden's obituary was unsentimental: "Few left-handed men have ever played with such a straight bat or possessed such a strong defence, but he carried caution to such extremes that it was often impossible to take any pleasure in seeing him play." Jardine was barracked after his dismissal, further angering him after his disappointment at missing out on a century. It did little for his appreciation of Australians.

Tate came in at nine and gave the impatient crowd some long-awaited entertainment, hitting 47 from just 50 balls. He described it as a "different sort of innings" to Jardine's, adding: "But, there, I never could do anything but take a swipe at bowling." Australia needed an unlikely 349 to win, but England's brilliant chase at Melbourne had shown what could be done by a side, given time. Would this new man Bradman enable the home side to do it?

Larwood and Tate failed to get a wicket early on and it was not until 65 runs had been made that Geary dismissed Jackson. It was thanks to a brilliant display by Jack White that England got back among the Australians. Woodfull went for 30, Hendry for five, Kippax for 51, Ryder for 87 and Ted a'Beckett for 21. The score read 258 for six. With Bradman still in, the game was poised for an exciting finish. But White was going well, dismissing Ron Oxenham for 12. The score was 308 for seven, just 41 needed. The team total moved up to 320 when, to England's relief, Bradman was run out for 58 by Hobbs in the covers.

England were right back in the game. White had six wickets to his name, but Oldfield and Grimmett took the total to 336, 13 runs to get. Tate's job, decided upon by Hobbs and Chapman at the tea interval, was to keep Oldfield away from White, deemed easier to hit. Tate remembered that Chapman had called on him to make "one of my greatest efforts", keeping Oldfield "pegged down at your end, while White shoots out the rabbits". This Tate did magnificently for four overs. One barracker shouted: "Hey, Oldfield—hit Maurice Tate for a sixer, and I guarantee you a place in heaven."

Then, at the other end, White, who had bowled an impeccable length thus far, dropped one short. Grimmett smashed the ball as hard as he could to the leg side. Tate, at short leg, stuck out his large right hand in reaction, rather than hope—there was not time to hope. It whacked against the open palm and lobbed back up in the air. This time it stuck. It was a fantastic catch, a thrilling moment in the tightest game imaginable. Batchelor waxed lyrical: "Surely, oh army of ghosts who watch the well-loved game from the balcony of Elysium, this is the catch to remember till the end of time—not the one Joe Darling sent up to poor old Fred so many years ago?" Australia were nine wickets down. England were favourites.

Number 11 Don Blackie, a slightly built 46-year-old off-spinner appearing in only his third Test, came in. Patsy Hendren helpfully told him: "Don, I wouldn't be in your shoes for a thousand pounds." Blackie needed little encouragement towards nerves. So dazed was he by the magnitude of events that he dropped his bat on the way to the crease. Before Black faced, Tate again bowled to Oldfield—another maiden.

The next over started. Blackie, a left-handed batsman, played carefully at four balls from White. The fourth was dropped a shorter. Blackie, discombobulated by pressure, took a swing to leg and the ball carried through the air to Larwood, stationed half way out on the leg side. The paceman held the catch.

England had won a fluctuating Test match, lasting seven days, by just 12 runs. White had taken eight wickets and England were cock-a-hoop. They were 4-0 up in the Ashes with one to play. Tate had bowled beautifully and taken a "miracle catch". He had not gained wickets but he was judging his performance by his greatest yardstick: professionalism under pressure. He had excelled. The players enjoyed a few drinks, the satisfaction of men who had done their job. It was sweet

revenge for being robbed of a chance to win in Adelaide four years earlier by the injuries which had afflicted Tate, Arthur Gilligan and Tich Freeman.

The last Test was not due to start for another month, so Tate got some rest, turning out only in draws against New South Wales and Victoria. The team remained in Melbourne after the Victoria game for the fifth and final Test, which was to last eight days and create an extraordinary result.

England were captained by White in the absence of Chapman, who was suffering from influenza. He won the toss and chose to bat first. The decision was justified as the team made 519. Hobbs top-scored with 142 and Leyland made 137 and Hendren 95. Tate got 15 off an unusually sedate 35 balls. Australia replied with 491. Bradman got his second Test hundred, with Woodfull also reaching three figures. Tate went wicketless in conceding 108 runs, while Geary got five for 105.

Proceedings became more lively when England batted again. They were all out for 257, with Hobbs top-scoring on 65. Tate made the second-highest score, his 54 matching his best in Tests.

Australia needed 286. This time events were not to go the visitors' way. Larwood and Tate both went wicketless, as makeshift openers/nightwatchmen Oldfield and Percy Hornibrook saw off the new ball at the end of the sixth day. They kept going for a bit on the seventh day, by the end of which the team, thanks also to 46 from Jackson, 35 from Woodfull and 28 from Kippax, were still in the hunt. Ryder and Bradman stayed together, making 57 not out and 37 not out respectively, to see Australia home. England's dream of an Ashes whitewash was not to be, but it had been a memorable series.

However, it was one that almost ended on a very sore note for Tate, and not just because he had conceded 184 for no wickets during the match. "Maurice Tate, the English bowler, is still looking for the person who placed three long tacks in his left shoe some time on Thursday night or Friday morning," the *Perth Mirror* reported. Tate wondered whether it was a mere practical joke or a "chance to cripple him". The bowler luckily noticed the tacks before donning the shoe. This unfortunate incident notwithstanding, Tate, Chapman et al had made as good an impression on the Australian public as Gilligan's men four years earlier—and won.

One of the series umpires, George Hele, became a lifelong admirer of Tate. He told the *Adelaide Mail* in 1936: "Maurice loved the crowd, just as the crowd loved Maurice. He dearly loved to get the barrackers in!" On one occasion in Melbourne, Tate misfielded the ball, asking Hele what he had done to earn hoots of derision. Soon afterwards, he stopped a "very hot one", put the ball in his pocket and applauded himself. Someone shouted "good old Maurice" and the famous grin returned. It was a perfect way to handle a troublesome crowd.

"Perhaps thoughts of his father were sometimes in Tate's mind when he was uprooting the stumps of our champions," Hele wrote. "Maybe he was faring a kind of genial revenge for a family disaster way back at gloomy Manchester in 1902." "Genial revenge" is a good sobriquet for Tate's entire, magnificent career, especially the 1928/29 series. But it is telling that he chose the Adelaide game, a superb team, rather than individual, effort as the peak of it.

Chapman's men had excelled by the dictum of togetherness, everyone contributing, although none surpassing the genius of Hammond, who made 905

runs in the series at an average of 113.12. Though the advent of Bradman was ominous, Hammond was still considered the best batsman in the world, while Tate, although not quite the force of old, was still among the best bowlers. His series figures were 17 wickets at 40.76, but this disguised the effort he had made and the importance of his economy to England's success, particularly at Adelaide.

Because the last Test match had gone on so long, England had to rush to catch the train from Melbourne to Perth. A match there against an Australian XI was drawn. The team then sailed for England, arriving back at Victoria Station on 27th April, the day of the FA Cup Final, in which Bolton Wanderers beat Portsmouth 2-0. The team made their way to Wembley to watch the game before returning to their families and moving straight into yet another English cricket season.

# Chapter 20

## Ton Up.

"*Tate is like an Epstein statue, not constructed according to the generally accepted standards of physical beauty.*"

—The Times

TATE BEGAN 1929 in great form with the ball. The visitors that year were to be South Africa, against whom he had known such success before. Just like after the Ashes tour of 1924/25, he had returned to the UK seemingly full of energy. In his first five games, against Nottinghamshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Surrey and Middlesex, Tate took 35 wickets. *The Times* reported of the Notts game: "Throughout the day Tate kept a perfect length, and it would seem that the bigger wicket and the new leg-before rule will suit him. Three of his victims were bowled and two leg-before."

The size of the stumps had experimentally been increased for the 1929 championship season from 27 to 28 inches in height and from eight to nine inches in width. This was with a view to MCC altering the law governing all cricket, including Tests. The lbw rule in county cricket was also changed so that batsmen could be out if they hit the ball on to their pads. Again, this was being looked at to see whether it might work on a wider scale, with a full revision of Law 36 of the game. The administrators were trying to give bowlers more of a sporting chance and to cut down on boring draws. The change to stumps became permanent; the lbw experiment was abandoned.

After three relatively quiet games for Tate against Lancashire, Northamptonshire and Cambridge University, it was time for the Test trial. Playing for England against The Rest, he made a nice 79, flogging the bowling all over the place, his drives interspersed with deft glides. He took only one for 77 in the opposition's first innings, but by general consent bowled dangerously but unluckily, Herbert Sutcliffe missing a difficult chance at slip.

On 15th June the first Test began against the South Africans at Edgbaston. Jack White filled in as captain for Percy Chapman, who was still away in New Zealand. He won the toss and batted. England were soon in trouble. With the score on 66 for two, Tate's county colleague and Test debutant Kumar Shri Duleepsinhji, or "Duleep", the supremely talented nephew of Ranji, came in to bat. He made 12. When the score reached 128 for six, Tate came in and put on a partnership of 87 with Patsy Hendren, which at least took England to somewhere near respectability. They were all out for 245 in 81.1 overs—not a performance expected from men who had thrashed Australia over the winter.

South Africa's openers came in and gave England a lesson in application. Bob Catterall, so magnificent in 1924, made 67, while debutant Bruce Mitchell got to 88, at which point he was bowled off his pads by Tate. Harold Larwood managed five wickets in the innings, while Tate also picked up those of Denijs Morkel, bowled for five, and Tuppy Owen-Smith, who suffered the same fate for 25 runs, when he tried to force a straight ball wide of mid-off. Through disciplined bowling, England had restricted the South Africans to 250, a lead of just five. Tate's three wickets cost him 65 runs off 44 overs. Altogether the visitors batted for 172.4 overs for their score—a very slow rate.

England's top order fared much better the second time around. Herbert Sutcliffe and Wally Hammond both made centuries, as White declared on 308 for four. There was not enough time to force a result, as South Africa again showed fight. Catterall made 98 and Mitchell 61 not out as the game drifted to a draw. Tate complained of the difficulties of adjusting from timeless Tests in Australia to three-day matches, especially as the wicket was "far too good" for the match to be completed in time.

The Lord's Test proved more memorable. White won the toss and batted. Sutcliffe starred with a score of 100, as England went to 302 all out, Tate making 15. The South Africans were in grinding mood again, as they went to 322 all out off 131 overs. Tate was the leading wicket-taker with three for 108. They were all 'solo' efforts, getting Morkel lbw and bowling both Nummy Deane, with an extra-quick break-back ball, and all-rounder Eric Dalton. Tate had beaten the bat and stumps at least twice an over, with little luck. It was slow going for the South Africans, understandable when under such bombardment, but the visitors once again had a slight lead.

England came in again and got the wobbles. Openers Sutcliffe and Edgar Killick were out cheaply, as were Hendren, Hammond and Essex's Jack O'Connor. When Tate came in, the score was a precarious 117 for five. His friend and namesake Maurice Leyland, at number four, was well set, though. Tate and Leyland quickly began to dominate, hitting shots all around. Leyland made his century, before being caught for 102. The pair had put on 129 an Tate was not finished yet. *The Times* reported: "Tate is like an Epstein statue, not constructed according to the generally accepted standards of physical beauty." Jacob Epstein's statues were not to everyone's taste, but they were strikingly dramatic. Likewise, Tate's strokes were effective and powerful.

Walter Robins got a duck and Larwood nine, but White stayed in to hit an unbeaten 18. With 82.2 overs gone, Tate finally reached one of his goals. He scored his first, and only, hundred in Test cricket. The backbone of England's

bowling for so long, he had proven himself, at the age of 34, as a batsman, with his friend White delaying the declaration to allow the popular achievement.

During the innings, White had had to urge Tate to hurry up—an unusual admonishment for him. Tate also took a bit of a battering during his effort, being hit in the small of the back and bruising the tricep of his bowling arm when struck by a fast ball from express right-armer Arthur Ochse. Tate was never a fan of facing the really quick stuff, but his bravery had stood up, and he had got the team into a position where they could not lose, and might even win. He was modestly terse in his comments: "I had the pleasure of making my only century in Test cricket, and Maurice [Leyland] also got a hundred."

With hindsight White, who left the declaration to 3.15pm on the last day, should have closed the innings earlier, for, in three-day games, time was of the essence when trying to dismiss high-quality batting sides. South Africa stumbled to 90 for five off 51 overs.

Tate took one for 27 off 11 overs. He was not generally at his best, with his arm sore from the blow he had suffered. At least one ball fizzed off the pitch, forcing Catterall to play on to his stumps. Larwood, getting even quicker than he had been when new to the Test side, hit the away team's wicketkeeper and number six batsman, Jock Cameron, on the head off a good-length ball. Tate helped carry him off the field, thinking "he was dead", but Cameron recovered.

Two weeks later the teams met again, this time at Leeds. South Africa skipper Deane won the toss but his team made just 236 after choosing to bat. Tate took two for 40 off 26 overs, bowling Mitchell and having Deane caught by wicketkeeper George Duckworth. England easily surpassed the visitors, making 328.

Tate managed only one for 50 as South Africa compiled 275 in their second innings. But he had the satisfaction of hitting 24 not out as he and Frank Woolley, on 95 not out, saw the team—total score 186—to victory by five wickets. Tate came in for some criticism for playing a few shots towards the end, denying Woolley a well-earned hundred, but England's win was the main thing.

Tate pulled a calf muscle soon afterwards and missed the final two Tests of the dull series, which England took 1-0. The injury cannot have been that bad, though, as he continued to turn out for Sussex, steadily taking wickets. The highlight was 13 wickets against Kent at Hastings. This was in a match where Duleepsinhji—angry that Kent had trounced Sussex a few weeks earlier at Maidstone, with Tich Freeman taking 13 wickets on an over-watered pitch—had his revenge. He made a century and a double century. In his description of this game, Tate said he had himself "gone mad" and taken wickets, like a frenzied shark who has smelt blood. Sussex won. It was recompense, even massacre.

Tate added in his *Reminiscences* that he had "gone lame, and played no more that season" after the second Kent game. This was a bizarre statement, as he managed to play a further ten times that year. Was this a lapse of memory or a failure to correct the work of a ghost writer?

Sussex put together a string of decent results in August, culminating in a 78-run win against Yorkshire at Hove. Despite Tate's amnesia, he helped them to a highly creditable fifth in the championship. Tate's overall first-class figures were 156 wickets at 18.60, his best in England since 1926. It was noticeable, however, that in Tests he was not performing at quite his previous level, taking ten wickets

at 33.30. However, he had hit more than 1,000 first-class runs for the 11th season in succession.

As ever, the issue on everyone's mind was the Ashes, with Australia due to tour in 1930. Could Bradman perform on English wickets or would Tate's comments about his technique come true, consigning him to the legions of hard-wicket batsmen who have failed on England's green and unpleasant pitches? Would the attack of Tate and Larwood find him out?

Tate got in a winter of what he liked to call "studied rest", his tramps across the South Downs followed by meals of bread, cheese and beer. While doing so he was given an extra incentive to do well the following year. The Sussex committee's 1929 report noted that it had "very generously agreed" to award Tate a benefit in 1930. It was not that generous, or spontaneous, as the club had decided this course of action as long ago as 1926. The game chosen for the benefit, as was the case for the most senior professionals, was the August bank holiday fixture against Middlesex at Hove, one of the best-attended of the season. The committee wrote that it hoped "the Members will see that he has a benefit worthy of one of the best all-round Cricketers in the World to-day".

Tate, mindful of the recent losses he had incurred from his failed sports shop, wrote a letter to the committee, which was read out on 10th January 1930. It asked for the "usual privilege" of a benefit collection on one day during each match at the Horsham, Hastings and Eastbourne cricket weeks and on one day during the game against the touring Australians. This was granted. 1930 was set to be a big year for Tate and England.

# Chapter 21

## Here's Donnie.

"*I thought you could get him out in England off that cross-bat shot, Maurice.*"
—George Duckworth

TATE WAS READY. In his three Ashes series he had experienced a massive loss, a narrow win and a huge win. He knew which he preferred. The 1930 series was shaping up to be a contest unlike any other, at least in terms of hype. As Don Bradman and his colleagues set sail, the press was full of excitement.

Tate was one of the most watchable characters on either side. His old wicket-taking rival, Arthur Mailey, a multi-talented man, had retired from cricket and become a cartoonist. "Maurice Tate did not mind caricatures," he wrote in the *Adelaide Advertiser*, "although he was somewhat disappointed that the artist always exaggerated the size of his feet." Tate told Mailey "confidentially", probably through a cupped hand, that he could wear size nine shoes "with comfort". He blamed the apparent misperception on his tendency to walk splay-footed. Having looked at pictures of Tate's boots, methinks the medium-fast bowler was protesting too much.

If Test matches were reaching new levels of coverage, things had also changed at Sussex. The lion-hearted but physically frail Arthur Gilligan had given way as captain to his brother Harold, a less talented cricketer but still a sociable character. With Duleep and slow-left-arm all-rounder James Langridge playing regularly, along with the likes of Ted Bowley and another all-rounder, "Old" Jim Parks, in the ranks, the team's prospects were improving.

Tate began the season in his usual wicket-taking style. Five against Nottinghamshire, nine against Northamptonshire (along with a century), five against Derbyshire, nine against Somerset, 11 against Cambridge University and eight against Middlesex showed he was nicely in form. The Test trial was of little significance, Tate taking one for 18.

Aware of the dull draws against South Africa in 1929, the authorities decreed that Tests in England would now last up to four days. Percy Chapman was back to lead a strong England side in the first Test at Trent Bridge. The order began: Jack Hobbs, Herbert Sutcliffe, Wally Hammond. This was surely the best England top three of all time. Then came Frank Woolley, Patsy Hendren and Chapman. The bowlers were Harold Larwood, Middlesex leg-spinner Walter Robins, Tate and Lancashire leg-spinner Richard Tyldesley. George Duckworth, at number 11, was the wicketkeeper.

Despite their quality, England made an under-par 270 all out, early-series nerves affecting them. Hobbs' 78, Chapman's 52 and Robins' 50 not out were the only sizeable contributions. Tate was bowled for 13, becoming one of Clarrie Grimmett's five victims.

Australia's batting line-up was packed with talent, but it struggled too. Tate began the damage, bowling Bill Ponsford for three and then having captain Bill Woodfull caught at gully by Chapman off an absolute screamer. Tate later wrote that cricket's authorities had not realised how much of England's success during Chapman's reign had resulted from "his miraculous catches in the early stages of an innings". It was rather different from Arthur Carr's drop to reprieve Charlie Macartney back in 1926.

With the Australian score at 16 for two, Tate enjoyed one of his greatest triumphs, bowling Bradman for just eight runs. Perhaps he would be found out in English conditions, after all, at least when Test-class bowlers were in operation. That was to be Tate's final wicket of the innings, as Larwood took one, Tyldesley two and Robins four. The Aussies were all out for 144. It was a fantastic start. Tate's value was expressed in his figures: 19 overs, eight maidens, three wickets for 20 runs. The home side had a lead of 126.

England were determined to make the most of the situation, Hobbs and Sutcliffe putting on 125, with Hendren also weighing in with a score of 72. Tate hit a characteristic 24 off 23 balls to demoralise an Australian attack lacking high-class Test bowlers, with the exception of Grimmett, who took five for 94 to give him ten for the match. England finished on 302. Australia needed a highly improbable 429 to win, but they gave it a good go.

Larwood had Woodfull out for four, but Ponsford made a plodding 39 before he was bowled by Tate. Bradman was the danger man. He enjoyed partnerships with Ponsford and Kippax, before being bowled by Robins for 131 off 287 balls. The score was now 229 for four. Stan McCabe struck a rapid 49 off 76 balls and vice-

captain Vic Richardson made 29, but the tail did not score heavily and the Australians were all out for 335, to lose by 93 runs.

Tate had bowled well, his second innings figures being 50 overs, 20 maidens, three wickets for 69 runs. However, Bradman, more machine than man in terms of shot selection and concentration span, was beginning to function.

The second Test, at Lord's, was less of a joy for bowlers. England chose to bat and made a seemingly commanding 425. Duleepsinhji, on his Ashes debut, scored 173, still regarded today as one of the best innings at Lord's, or in the history of the Ashes. Uncle Ranji had promised his nephew a pound for every run, making it a lucrative success too. Tate noticed the prince, a fellow Sussex great, sitting and watching in all his regalia, and made a memorable—but incomprehensible—comment. Various versions abound, but a rough amalgam is: "See that there Ranji? He looks a veritable Hindu, don't he?"

To cap off the fun for Sussex supporters, Tate was the second-highest scorer for England, making 54 off 61 balls, which included eight fours. Giving the spectators excellent entertainment, he and Duleep put on 98 for the seventh wicket. Seemingly on unstoppable verbal form, while walking through the Long Room on his way to the crease, Tate spotted Neville Cardus, moved towards him as if to share a confidence and said: "Batsmanship, eh?" He was suitably perplexed.

England's scoring was soon put into perspective when Australia batted, however. Woodfull made 155, Ponsford 81. The biggest wound came from Bradman who, now on his way to smashing even the records set by Hammond in Australia in 1928/29, played his way to 254 off 376 balls. After he was out, Kippax went for 83, McCabe for 44. Tate had Richardson caught by Hobbs, his first and only wicket, with the team on 643 for five. Woodfull's captaincy proved as relentless as his batting, until even he lost patience and declared on 729 for six. It was easily the highest total in Ashes history, beating the 636 reached by England at Sydney in 1928/29.

Tate's figures were the worst of his career so far: one for 148. However, he could claim to have been the most economical by far of the England attack, his 64 overs going for just over two runs apiece. Robins conceded 172 off 42 and debutant fast bowler Gubby Allen none for 115 off 34.

Still, England were not done. They posted a solid 375 off 116.4 overs. The star this time was Chapman, his 121 off 166 balls his only century in Tests. Tate was out to Grimmett for ten. Australia came back in needing just 72 to win, but they lost three wickets in doing so. Tate had the consolation of having Bradman caught by Chapman for just one run. Australia may have won by seven wickets, but Tate had got rid of the little genius yet again.

Tate had two uneventful games against Gloucestershire and Kent before it was time for England and Australia to meet once again, this time at Headingley. If they thought Duleep and Bradman's efforts at Lord's could not be surpassed, commentators, and the Yorkshire public, were in for a surprise.

Woodfull won the toss and Australia batted on what appeared to be a very good pitch. It looked like it might get exciting again, as Tate had Archie Jackson caught by Larwood for one, the team score on just two. Bradman, having made a hundred and a double hundred in his first two Tests in England, came in. It was almost over within seconds. Tate wrote: "The first ball I bowled him pitched on his middle

stump and only missed the off peg by a coat of varnish. Everyone round the crease gasped."

The increase in the size of stumps introduced to county cricket the previous year, to give the bowlers more support, had not been agreed to for Test matches by the Australian authorities. Having lost two series in a row, they did not want to offer the home side any advantage by making conditions more conducive. The ball tended to stay lower and seam more in England, making the lbw or being bowled more likely anyway. The near-miss might have been a turning point in the Ashes, had the stumps been just a tad wider. As it was, under the unreformed size stipulation, Bradman was still in.

With Woodfull he put on a partnership of 192. To illustrate Bradman's dominance during this passage of play, Woodfull was eventually out—for 50. Bradman was in the mood to go on and on. He and Kippax put on another 229 before the latter fell to Tate, caught by Chapman, for 77. Larwood bowled McCabe for 30 and Tate had Richardson caught by Larwood for one. Yet Bradman, utilising his early good fortune, was supreme. He became the first man to score a triple century in Tests, achieving the feat in a single day.

On the second morning, with the team score on 508 for five, even Bradman made a mistake, being caught by Duckworth off Tate for 334. Tate had got his man—finally. He was in chuntering mood in his column in *Reynold's Illustrated News*. After bemoaning the lack of care taken to fill in bowlers' footholes, and therefore reduce injuries, he turned his attention to the stumps question. Tate felt sure the Australians would be "converted" once they had tried bigger wickets, as it had had the "desired effect" on the county game, that the "bowler gets a little of the help which, according to figures, he stands in need of".

After dismissing Bradman, Tate had Oldfield caught by Hobbs for two—his fifth wicket of the innings. The tail performed and Australia were all out for 566. Bradman, of course, was extraordinary, scoring more than half of Australia's runs. What is forgotten, though, is Tate's equally dominant performance amid such carnage. He bowled 39 overs for his five wickets for 124 runs. The rest of the England attack conceded 428 runs off 129 overs in getting the other five. Had Tate not bowled, goodness knows how many runs the Australians might have accrued.

In his *Life Story*, published eight years later, Bradman said a "number fiend" had told him Chapman had made 25 bowling changes during the day of his triple century. The England team managed some gallows humour, based on Tate's misplaced technical advice to the Australian genius back in 1928/29. Bradman recalled wicketkeeper George Duckworth chirping his team-mate: "I thought you could get him out in England off that cross-bat shot, Maurice. When are you going to start?" Bradman, always scrupulously polite in his public discourse, added: "Tate's reply reflected very great credit on the groundsman who prepared the wicket, ie from a batting point of view."

England reached 391 in their reply, Grimmett getting another five wickets and Hammond, seething at the way Bradman was trying to usurp his dominance, hitting 113. Woodfull enforced the follow-on, but only three wickets fell in the 51.5 overs bowled.

It had undeniably been Bradman's game but it was still a draw. In the grander scheme, grander even than Bradman's achievements, the Ashes series of 1930 was

still 1-1 with two to play. A single win or two draws for England would see them retain the Ashes.

In the meantime, Tate once again had money on his mind. On the last day of the Leeds Test, the London press reported that he had received yet another "generous offer" to play for a club in the Lancashire League and forego the first-class game. It must have been tempting, having bowled at Bradman. The story caused consternation among Sussex fans. So two telegrams were sent from Headingley to Hove to inform county secretary Lance Knowles that it was incorrect. One, from Arthur Gilligan, said: "Please deny rumours circulated that Tate is leaving Sussex going Lancashire league. Maurice says no foundation whatever." The other, from Tate himself, stated: "Utterly no truth in statement. Remaining with Sussex—TATE."

There may have been nothing other than rumour-mongering behind the report, but Tate had mentioned league cricket before when trying to remind Sussex's committee and supporters of his value. The story was suspiciously timely, as his benefit match was due to take place a fortnight later.

Any news regarding those taking part in such an absorbing Ashes series was eagerly conveyed by the media. But the fourth Test, at Old Trafford, proved a far less spectacular affair than that at Leeds. Australia won the toss, batted and made 345. Ponsford top scored with 83, Bradman for once going cheaply, for 14. Tate took the first wicket, getting Woodfull caught by Duckworth for 54. He had no more success in his 30 overs, which went for just 39 runs. England's reply ended on 251 for eight, when rain finally ended the game. Tate made 15 before being dismissed by part-time bowler Stan McCabe.

The rain-ruined match is most memorable for another Tate comment. Sitting in the England dressing room on the fourth day, he reportedly removed his pipe from his mouth, pointed at the sky and said to Chapman: "See that cloud, skipper?" Unable to miss it, Chapman asked: "Well?" With a great sense of seriousness, Tate replied: "It flatters but to deceive." No one then, or since, has quite made sense of it.

Chapman was not to know that dark clouds were settling above his captaincy too, the selectors not happy with his batting performances or his growing reputation as a heavy drinker. Just like 1926, when Carr was jettisoned in a do-or-die final effort, the Ashes were set for a thrilling denouement. The Oval encounter was again made 'timeless' to engineer a result.

England changed captain for the final game. Warwickshire batsman Bob Wyatt was brought in for Chapman, whose form had declined. Tate was indignant in his memoirs, praising Chapman's "superb fielding, his personality and his winning record". He said the team had been "solid for him, and disgusted when we discovered the rumour all too true that he was to be dropped". He even said the players "loved" Chapman. However, for the selectors, a change of leader had worked at the Oval four years earlier, so why not try it again?

Tate, in his column, mulled over the idea of picking Wilfred Rhodes, now aged 52, to bring in the same match-winning nous that had been so useful four years earlier. The selectors decided against this course of action. Tate also warned colleagues and fans alike to keep a "sense of proportion" over Bradman. He was only one member of the team, after all.

Could England take a third Ashes series in a row? Fans queued around the Oval on the morning of 16th August, hoping that Bradman would finally have a bad game, restoring England's task to something more manageable. Wyatt won the toss and decided to bat. Hobbs was out for 47, but Sutcliffe carried on to make 161. Wyatt himself was next top scorer with 64 and Duleep made a handy 50. Tate was again out to the wily Grimmett, for ten, as England made 405 on a good pitch. It was an OK total, but nothing special in such conditions.

Torture ensued. Woodfull made 54, Ponsford 110 and Bradman yet another huge score: 232. The middle order also did well, Jackson making 73, McCabe 54 and Alan Fairfax 53 not out. The Australians were all out for 695, a whopping total.

Tate had last man Hornibrook caught by Duckworth. This left him with figures of one for 153, the most expensive analysis of his Test career, just surpassing the showing at Lord's earlier in the summer. Yet Tate was not a beaten man. He had managed to concede an average of just over two runs off each of his 65.1 overs. It was a huge effort, but England would need something mighty special from the batsmen to put themselves in a winning position.

It was not to be. Hornibrook took seven for 92 with his slow left-armers as England reached just 251, losing by an innings and 39 runs. Tate, batting at number eight, was run out for a duck, Kippax sending in an excellent return from cover-point to hit the one stump he could see. Tate had no idea at the time, but it was to be his last act in Ashes cricket. It was a sad way to go after the record-breaking of 1924/25 and the profile he had built, but he had by no means disgraced himself. He took 15 wickets at 38.26 during the series. Such figures are rather noble when achieved in the face of Bradman's onslaught, the like of which cricket had never known before—and has not seen since.

The two men faced each other when Bradman was at his peak and Tate was past his. The batsman acknowledged this in 1938, saying Tate had been adjudged "the finest bowler that England has sent to Australia since the war" but he had "lost a bit of his zip" by 1928/29, although remaining a fine bowler.

Tate was responsible for five of Bradman's first 13 dismissals in Tests. Only Hedley Verity, with eight dismissals, and Alec Bedser, with six, did better over the course of their careers. Like Tate, Larwood and Bill Bowes both managed five. What entertainment there would have been had Bradman and Tate met while both were at their best.

# Chapter 22

## Benefit Blues.

"*I do not know how we can repay our debt to Mr Tate.*"
—Tom Webster

THE YEAR 1930 was not all about the Ashes. Tate's benefit match, which took place shortly before the Oval decider, was another pressing concern. The latest scare over a possible departure to league cricket over, he hoped his laudable efforts during the summer's Tests would stand him in good stead when Sussex faced up to Middlesex at Hove.

Yet he was well aware that a benefit was no guarantee of a life of riches, or even comfort. With match expenses taken from the proceeds, in extreme cases it could actually increase the penury suffered by a professional. The weekend before the match Tate told readers of *Reynold's Illustrated News* that Nottinghamshire batsman Wilfred Payton "seemed like netting nothing extra as the reward of his 25 years of valuable service" after his benefit, as the weather had been "most unkind".

He recounted a story about the misfortune encountered by Len Braund, the leg-spin bowler who had also had the bad luck to have that catch dropped off him by Fred Tate in the Old Trafford Test on 1902. Things had gone "all wrong" with the benefit and Somerset had offered him another. Tate wrote: "Len's reply was characteristic. 'No, thanks,' he said. 'I can't afford it.'"

With one eye on the weather forecast, Tate recommended that the county authorities change the system so that not so much was dependent on a single game.

If goodwill could be converted, Midas-like, into wealth, Tate would have been fine. To commemorate the benefit, *Daily Mail* cartoonist Tom Webster, who had made much out of his living from Tate's feet over the years, drew a special piece, entitled *The Old Reliable*. It ended by stating: "Without getting exactly lyrical, I do not know how we can repay our debt to Mr Tate, except with the hope that he will have lots of sunshine and a record crowd, because not even a cricketer can exist on three rousing cheers."

The first day of the benefit match, Saturday 2nd August, saw fair but breezy weather, with a few sprinkles of rain in the afternoon. The gate receipts, from which Tate was to profit, amounted to £221 for the day. His friends Ted Bowley and Tommy Cook, and a few others, walked around the ground collecting coins. This raised another £122.

The money was coming in at a decent pace, and so was the praise. Percy Chapman sent a telegram saying: "Dear Maurice. With best wishes for a great benefit and a great tour [the following winter] in South Africa. Also with many thanks for all you've done. Good luck. Yours, Skipper and wife."

Tate was keen to put on a show for the benefit match crowd, but it never really happened. He walked out to bat to the sound of applause and camera shutters going off furiously. Sadly it was to be an anti-climax. Tate was caught for a duck off the medium-pace bowling of Joe Hulme, who was also a famous footballer with Arsenal. The catcher was wicketkeeper Fred Price, who, in 1938, was to play a single Test match before being discarded forever by England—just like another Fred 36 years earlier. The *Sussex Daily News* sympathised: "Seldom does a batsman make a big score in his benefit match, and Tate had only stayed a couple of minutes when he was caught at the wicket off Hulme." Sussex were all out for 243.

Middlesex made it to 73 for two by the end of the first day. Play was extended to 6.45pm so that Middlesex could get away early on the third day in time for the next fixture at Liverpool, due to start the following morning. Of the two wickets to fall before stumps on the first day, Tate took one. It was opener Harry Lee, caught by wicketkeeper Tich Cornford. Again, like Fred Tate—and Fred Price—Lee was to share the distinction of playing just one Test match, in his case in South Africa the following winter.

The first day had been one of mixed fortunes on the field and considerable fortunes in terms of Tate's benefit. The second, the Bank Holiday Monday, can quite safely be described as a disaster for both. Rain over Sunday night meant play could not get under way until 11.35am. An expectant 7,563 people paid at the gate, the *Sussex Daily News* reporting: "The spectacle was very fine, spectators encircling the ground in ranks many deep." Some sat on the bonnets of cars to get a view. Receipts were £348 and another collection raised £111. The total was now more than £800, with all profits, minus deductions for the hated 'entertainment tax', brought in shortly after the First World War, going to Tate.

The boss of the firm Percy Chapman worked for chipped in £100 and Arthur Gilligan paid £25 into the fund for his old friend. The weather was fresh but bearable, with a couple of showers in the afternoon.

It was on the pitch where Tate's benefit went wrong. Middlesex were all out for 214, giving Sussex a 29-run lead. Tate took his wickets tally to three, bowling Harry Enthoven and having captain Nigel Haig caught by James Langridge.

But Sussex batted again and lost wickets rapidly. Tate's team-mates may have been overwhelmed by their desire to see him right financially, as Bowley went for one, Jim Parks for three, and Duleepsinhji for eight. Cook clung on valiantly for 19, but James Langridge made a duck, Harold Gilligan one, and Harry Parks six. Tate himself scored five, Bert Wensley nothing, Jim Hammond one and Tich Cornford one not out. The team had been dismissed for just 72. The top scorer was extras, with 27.

It had taken an hour and 20 minutes for two England bowlers—paceman Gubby Allen and leg-spinner Ian Peebles—to destroy Sussex, with five wickets each. The pitch was described as "playable" too. The Sussex XI would have felt unable to look Tate in the eye after such an expensive debacle. There was plenty of time for Middlesex to take the game in two days and deny the fans' idol his extra gate money.

Middlesex came in again, requiring 102 runs to win. Tate must have been straining every sinew as he opened from the Sea End. Yet Langridge took the first and only wicket, that of Lee, as another England pair, Jack Hearne and Patsy Hendren, made light work of their task. Sussex's ineptitude had cost Tate dear. In her diary, Laetitia Stapleton wrote: "Tate had a great gate. He let us take photos of him early in the day. It's a pity there will be no gate tomorrow."

Yet his benefit year overall was successful. Tate made a record amount for a Sussex player, just over £1,900, or more than four years' basic wages. It equated to almost £100,000 today. The summer of 1930 was not a time of plenty, coming less than a year after the Wall Street Crash of October 1929. As Len Braund and Wilfred Payton would have testified, it could have been worse.

# Chapter 23

## Goodbye Dodger, Douglas and Percy.

"*England ought to win in South Africa.*"
—Maurice Tate

ENGLAND WERE SIMPLY not good enough to beat a good Australian team boosted to the heights of brilliance by Bradman. A winter outfoxing the second-oldest enemy, South Africa, was an appealing idea. Percy Chapman was again in charge, having been appointed as captain for the trip before his sacking for the final Test of the 1930 Ashes. Tate happily accepted the invitation to join him.

MCC set sail on the 13,000-ton Union-Castle Line ship EDINBURGH CASTLE and Tate enjoyed sharing a 'Maurice-only' cabin with his Yorkshire namesake Maurice Leyland once again. They arrived in South Africa and the first serious games of the tour, against Western Province at Cape Town and Natal at Durban, saw hauls of five for 18 and five for 64 for Tate.

One player not on the tour was Nottinghamshire's popular batsman William "Dodger" Whysall. He had appeared in England's loss at the Oval which ceded the Ashes to Australia, scoring just 13 and ten. It was his first Test in almost six years, and his last.

One evening in early November, Whysall went to a dance in Mansfield with his wife. While changing partners during a mixer routine called the Paul Jones, he fell heavily and hurt his elbow. It did not seem a major incident and he kept on dancing. A few days later Whysall started feeling pain. A small cut he had suffered became infected. This spread until he was suffering from full-blown septicaemia. Whysall died on 6th November, two days before the Western Province game. Tate and his colleagues were told of the "sad news" but play went on. He remembered Whysall as "our comrade on many a trip".

Tate continued to pick up wickets until the first Test, scheduled for four days, started, unfestively, on Christmas Eve. It was a game to forget for MCC, played at the Old Wanderers ground in Johannesburg, on matting, that most un-English of wickets. Such pitches, the coir stretched across the earth, offered extravagant spin and bounce, handing the home team a considerable advantage.

England won the toss and decided to field. Chapman's decision was vindicated when the home side was dismissed for 126. Tate took two wickets—getting opener Syd Curnow lbw for 13 and bowling number 11 Bob Newson—for 20. But Nottinghamshire paceman Bill Voce and Middlesex leg-spinner Ian Peebles shared the honours with four each. England made 193—a lead of 67—Tate getting eight.

In their second innings, South Africa did far better, making 306, Tate managing just one for 47 off 18 overs. This gave them a lead of 239, more than handy on matting.

Bob Wyatt was first out for five and only Wally Hammond and Glamorgan's Maurice Turnbull—the third Maurice playing in the game, after Tate and

Leyland—posted fifties. Tate came in with the team on 154 for six, but Jack White and then Hammond soon went. Tate and Duckworth put on 26 before the Sussex man was caught off Buster Nupen, an off-cutting medium-pacer regarded by Tate as the best bowler in the world on matting. England were all out for 211 to lose by 28 runs. There were complaints of barracking of the England players, George Duckworth in particular coming in for some stick. It was a bit of an ambush in conditions favouring the home side, but news of a far more serious event overshadowed the game.

On 19th December Johnny Douglas, the England and Essex all-rounder who had complained to MCC about Tate's absconding from his coaching assignment in South Africa in 1922/23, died. Typically for one of such derring-do, he drowned trying to save his father after he fell overboard when the ship they were on, the SS OBEROON, collided with another vessel as it travelled through fog off the coast of Denmark. The England team wore black armbands to commemorate the man who had led them as long ago as 1911 and as recently as 1924.

"He was a great cricketer, and for all his funny ways, he was both a splendid man and a lovable captain," Tate wrote in a warm tribute to an adversary who was never less than forthright. "He needed understanding, and I flatter myself that I did understand him."

The next Test, at Cape Town, was played on turf, rather than matting, and ended in a draw. Tate's three for 79 off 43 overs was a typically Herculean effort as South Africa amassed 513 for eight declared. He described the conditions as "perfect" for batting. However, England faltered, making 350, meaning they had to follow on.

At least Tate, who scored 15, had the satisfaction of reaching his 1,000th Test run when he got to two. It put him in a very exclusive club of players who had done the 'double' of 100 wickets and 1,000 runs in international cricket. Only Wilfred Rhodes had achieved this for England, along with Australia's Monty Noble and George Giffen. When England went in a second time, they were all out for 252. Tate made three. There was no time for South Africa to bat again and the game ended in a draw.

On to Durban and another draw, this time forced by rain. Tate took two wickets for 33 as he strangled South Africa with 27 miserly overs. The hosts made 177 and then England declared on 223 for one, to try to make a game of it. They nearly did, too, as South Africa ended on 145 for eight. Tate got one for 12.

Tate was angry about events nearer home, with Pelham Warner, who was to be chairman of selectors for the 1931 season, again blurring his roles as journalist and administrator. Tate fumed that "without waiting the result, Warner had written in his paper—duly cabled to a happy band of England cricketers—'Tate and White are finished'." They were inappropriate words, but at Test level, at least, they were to prove more or less true.

The fourth game of the series, at Johannesburg, started well. England made 442, Tate contributing 26, then dismissed South Africa for 295—a lead of 147. Tate got two for 46, having Mitchell lbw and Catterall caught by Hammond.

The visitors had to go for it with the bat. Tate was especially aggressive as he hit 38 off 23 balls. In the innings he made two fours and four sixes. It must have been

quite a spectacle for a crowd bored by South Africa's attritional batting. He recalled that Chapman's orders had been "to get on or get out".

England, who declared on 169 for nine, had to dismiss the home team for fewer than 316 to win. They made quite a match of it, South Africa eventually ending on 280 for seven, as time once more ran out. One down with one to play, the best England could now do was draw the series. It was not to be.

The sides returned to Durban for the next Test, the weather just as rainy as before. England, looking to get on with things, won the toss and fielded. Once more the Springboks were hard to remove. Tate took one for 35 off 22 overs as they crept to 252 all out off 130.4 overs.

England were little more adventurous, getting to 230 off 101.2 overs. Tate was top scorer, saving his team's blushes with 50 off an unusually pedestrian 97 balls.

South Africa made 219 for seven and declared, Tate going wicketless. Patsy Hendren, who had done plenty to cut short Tate's benefit the previous summer, missed Jack Siedle off his bowling, when he dropped a sharp chance at short leg. Siedle made 30 off 88 balls, setting the tone for the rest of the team.

England needed 242 to win, with hardly any play left. Chapman was in a desperate situation when the team subsided to 40 for three. With little hope of a win, he sent Tate in at number five. Quite the all-rounder on this trip, he blasted an unbeaten 24 from 19 balls. But when Turnbull went with the team score on 72, that was it. Time had run out and England had lost 1-0.

It was Tate's last complete Test series and a pretty disheartening one at that. Yet he had taken 14 wickets at 24.35 and made 192 runs at 27.42. It was to be the final time Chapman played for England and Tate was keen to defend the man whom, along with Arthur Gilligan, he rated as his favourite skipper. "England ought to win in South Africa," he wrote, "but there were reasonable excuses for our side that season, and our defeat was a fine stimulant to their cricket."

It had by no means been a boring series, with weather the overwhelming reason for the predominance of draws. A crowd assembled outside the pavilion, but none of the England players—seemingly unhappy at the variable pitches provided and some abuse from the home fans over the past few weeks—emerged to give a speech and it soon dispersed.

Chapman had been a popular captain, winning the Ashes home and away, but his era, the end of which was hastened by the advent of Don Bradman, was now truly over. The skipper was not to enjoy a happy later life, drifting into alcoholism. However, he could be proud of his work in galvanising a richly talented England team. Like Tate, he did it with a smile.

Tate maintained his batting form into a final match of the tour, against Western Province, at Cape Town. He scored 115 not out in a draw, time being the enemy right until the end of the tour.

# Chapter 24

## In and Out.

"*If there is no player in the England team older than yours truly, then this England side is going to be more experimental than I think is either necessary or justifiable.*"

—Maurice Tate

MAURICE TATE WAS not a man to look to the future. He had little time for planning. His role was to bat and bowl for Sussex and England. Yet after the South Africa tour of 1930/31, he was forced to question himself. The Test match appearances became less frequent and some in authority even began to question his commitment. Unpleasant memories of early rejection at the hands of unthinking cricket masters at little Belvedere School must have returned. The happiness he derived from almost unmitigated success and acclaim was to start wearing away. Combined with the everyday pressures of financial and family life, the next two years were to be less than happy.

Tate started the 1931 season in a magnanimous mood. He had suffered in the past from dubious umpiring, particularly on his first tour of Australia. So it was surprising that, in his *Reynold's Illustrated News* column of 3rd May, he called for appealing to be banned: "The umpires know whether the batsman is out or not. Leave it to them." He then made a comparison of sporting ethical codes which would not really wash today, given the different types of behaviour prevalent in football and cricket: "I watched the English cup final last Saturday, and incidentally enjoyed it. The referee of a football match gives decisions without any appeal."

It was ironic that Tate, one of the most impassioned appealers of his day, a man sometimes accused of behaviour approaching petulance, should think this commendable. It was even stranger that that year's FA Cup finalists, West Bromwich Albion and Birmingham City, had played out a local grudge match on the grandest stage with such civility.

Tate's 1931 season started successfully, his new-found respect for the sagacity of umpires not neutering him. Seven wickets in a drawn friendly against Nottinghamshire were followed by a match against Cambridge University at Fenner's. In the first innings, Tate took three for 14, an unremarkable performance by his standards.

However, the third man to fall, right-hander Alan Ratcliffe, was his 2,000th first-class wicket. It was a superb achievement, shared by only 33 players in the history of the game. Tate was the 17th man to do it, beating his old pal Jack "Farmer" White by just a few days. The problem was that nobody seemed to notice. The *Sussex Daily News* made no comment on the achievement its match report. As Alec Bedser was later to remark, ironically, given his later honour: "The last bowler to be knighted was Sir Francis Drake." Career statistics were not so readily available in Tate's time as today. Perhaps the newspaper reporter was distracted by the names of some of the Cambridge team, including Roger Human and Rodney Rought-Rought?

After this unnoticed milestone, Tate's performances began in earnest again. He took ten wickets against Lancashire, seven against Surrey, and another nine in

the return match. The batting tailed off a bit, Tate usually going in at eight or nine.

The New Zealanders were in England for a Test tour for the first time. They were unable to match England in any department, given a tiny, rugby-mad population to choose from. For the first time, Surrey's Douglas Jardine captained England. Tate welcomed the appointment. He thought it "premature" to think he would keep the role for the 1932/33 Ashes, but there was "a straw in the wind, especially as the present selectors are acting for two years". Tate described Jardine as a "good fellow" possessing the important qualification for captaincy of getting the best out of a team. "He won't be fussy, but effective," he added.

But the England selectors, led by Pelham Warner, who, during the winter had been openly sceptical of Tate's enduring value, were keen to use the New Zealand Tests as a glorified trial for greater challenges ahead. With that in mind, the unthinkable happened: England dropped Tate.

They were obviously looking to try out younger players ahead of the Ashes series. Before the news was announced, some newspapers had suggested such a course. Tate demurred, saying: "All that I would say concerning such a suggestion is that if there is no player in the England team older than yours truly, then this England side is going to be more experimental than I think is either necessary or justifiable."

Tate praised the 1930 Australians for having a mixture of youth and experience. The messages were clear. He wanted to be picked and he wanted to remind the selectors that young players of the quality of Don Bradman could not be found on every recreation ground, school field or back street.

The selectors ignored his coded pleas. But if the youth policy was so strong, why was the 44-year-old Frank Woolley picked? Instead of going up to Lord's, Tate played against Hampshire at Portsmouth. With an attack of pacemen Gubby Allen and Bill Voce, accompanied by leg-spinners Walter Robins and Ian Peebles, England beat New Zealand by an innings.

Tate's response to disappointment was to take wickets: eight against Kent, six against Derbyshire, seven against Essex, 12 against Northamptonshire, seven against Leicestershire, six against Somerset.

He was not chosen for the second Test, at the Oval, but had to be drafted in a couple of days before it commenced, when Harold Larwood dropped out through injury. Just before his unexpected recall, he wrote a column accusing the selectors of having trial matches "on the brain", even though it was around 17 months until the next Ashes series was due to begin. He claimed that young players were more likely to perform if they felt they had been picked solely on merit, rather than promise.

Tate returned and England once again destroyed the Kiwis. They declared on 416 for four with Herbert Sutcliffe, Duleepsinhji and Wally Hammond all making hundreds. Then Tate took one for 15 off 18 overs, as the visiting batsmen failed to make any impression. One of the youngsters, Allen, got five for 14. New Zealand followed on and were all out for 197—another innings loss. Tate took three for 22 off 21 overs. Four for 37 in the match, at a rate of about a run an over, was a good performance in what was a total mis-match between the sides. Most notably, the

second of Tate's wickets in the second innings—when he bowled Jack Kerr for 28—was his 150th in Test cricket.

Tate was again missing for the third Test, at Old Trafford, dropped for the returning Larwood. Prior to the announcement, Tate further castigated the selectors, doubting the "significance" of Tests being treated as trial matches and saying this was "tantamount to insulting" New Zealand. Would any batsmen who did well replace the likes of Sutcliffe or Duleepsinhji on the Australian tour, he wondered, adding: "I need not answer that question." It is likely that Tate's sentiments extended to bowlers. They were not words to endear him to those in power at Lord's, or Jardine. Instead of going to Old Trafford, Tate was to perform amid the more bucolic surroundings of Taunton.

He kept on bowling, helping Sussex, under Duleep's captaincy, to a healthy fourth place in 1931. There may have been extra feeling when he played the New Zealanders at Hove. As if to remind the selectors of his all-round credentials, he opened the batting, hitting 142.

Over the summer, England had won and Sussex had improved but, for the first time, Tate had felt some dying of the light, at least in the eyes of significant others. Still, 141 wickets at 15.45 represented good work.

As 1932 came into view, English cricket was once more focusing on the Ashes. MCC's trip to Australia in the winter of 1932/33 was to become the most famous, certainly the most controversial, in history. Tate may have been overlooked for two of the previous summer's Tests, but he felt certain that, when the real battles began, he would be playing and spent the winter "getting into particularly good trim".

There was also the matter of Sussex's recent improvement. Could 1932 be the year when the longest-established first-class county finally won something?

# Chapter 25

## Should I Stay or Should I Go?

"*He couldn't go over the ocean tide; There was something wrong with his poor inside.*"

—Anonymous poet

SUSSEX MADE A good start to 1932, with Tate steadily taking wickets. However, he was not chosen for the North v South Test trial at Old Trafford in mid-June, writing: "I was disappointed when the teams came out to find my name missing. I could not understand it at all."

But, as Sussex played Surrey in a rather superfluous friendly match, Douglas Jardine told Tate he was, after all, to take part, after the Surrey medium-pacer Maurice Allom dropped out. Tate recalled that he had considered this his "big chance" and he had been determined to "bowl myself to a standstill. I say it that

way, but I can never remember a time when I have not been thoroughly on the job".

The talk was that Tate was on the decline and, more damagingly, that he was losing the will to compete and had taken it easy on some occasions. For someone bowling so many overs, it would not have been an unreasonable attitude, allowing some conservation of energy. Yet the suggestions hurt Tate. Anyway, he took seven wickets in the match. *The Times* reported that he was "still the best opening bowler in the country, revelation that is to those who have come to believe that he has lost some of his former grandeur".

Jardine, though, informed Tate he had not been picked for the sole Test of the summer, against India. It was not the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Jardine was "quite nice to me", Tate recalled, "but I felt it was damning with faint praise". He felt he should be given a chance, following his successes on the 1926/27 tour to India, and suspected "some prejudice against me".

On 15th July, with Jardine already named as captain and Plum Warner as manager, the first tranche of players for the Australia tour was announced. The names were: Duleepsinhji, Wally Hammond, Herbert Sutcliffe, Leslie Ames and George Duckworth.

Tate was ignored for a second Test trial, England v The Rest at Cardiff, and *The Times* remained supportive of him. It was "strange that Tate, who came magnificently out" of the previous trial match at Old Trafford, had been passed over.

Tate was also not included in the second tranche of players for the Ashes tour, announced at the beginning of August. They were the amateurs Gubby Allen, Freddie Brown, the Nawab of Pataudi, Walter Robins and Bob Wyatt, and the Nottinghamshire professionals Harold Larwood and Bill Voce.

The business at hand was pressing, though, as Sussex were flying in the championship, not having lost all season, and had a genuine chance of seeing off the all-powerful Yorkshire. It was all happening. At home, Kathleen was pregnant with the couple's fourth child, who was due around the end of the season. Rejection, expectation and an awful lot of bowling were conspiring to increase the pressure on Tate.

He responded magnificently. Sussex just kept on winning, and drawing. Tate was by far the leading wicket-taker, his best performance coming in the match against Middlesex at Hove. The *Sussex Daily News* was full of excitement as the crowd's hero took 13 wickets. Under the headline "Tate's Wonderful Bowling", it recounted the first day: "By lunch time Tate had two wickets to his credit. Subsequently he dominated the game to such an extent that he captured the remaining five wickets, and during the spell he, in 43 balls, had only 15 runs scored from him. It was he who sent [Joe] Hulme back after he had made 25. The total was then 111, and a run later Hulme received his quietus." It is not the sort of phrase one encounters in a local newspaper today. Tate would have hoped for a similar settling of the selectors' minds in his favour.

With 3,800 people streaming through the turnstiles at Hove, he seemed full of vim, maintaining a good length and varying his pace with great skill. He was backed up by sound catching.

Sussex won by an innings. *The Times* described the second day as “ideal holiday cricket, with plenty of thrills and hardly any dull moments”, adding: “Once gain Tate’s bowling had been so deadly that only 30 runs were scored off him in 25 overs, and he captured six wickets.” Victory achieved, the Sussex fans raced across the Hove turf to congratulate the team. Tate, who also scored a fifty in the match, remembered having the “time of my life”. He proclaimed himself amused to read a Sunday newspaper the following weekend, stating: “In case the Selection Committee don’t know who Tate is, he plays for Sussex.”

The England set-up had other ideas. Two years earlier, during the 1930 Ashes decider at the Oval, Surrey captain Percy Fender had watched Bradman batting. Although he made 232, Fender thought he had shown signs of unease when facing the short stuff from Larwood, who eventually dismissed him. He passed this nugget on to Surrey colleague Jardine who, shortly afterwards, organised a meal with Larwood, Voce and their county captain, Arthur Carr, at the Piccadilly Hotel in London. Jardine asked Larwood if he was able and willing to make the ball rise frequently into the body while bowling a leg-stump line. The fast bowler replied that he was. If the future Test captain’s ploys for Australia were not already set, this meeting seemingly solidified them. Sheer pace was to be Jardine’s weapon, along with physical intimidation. Perhaps this helps to explain Tate’s absence from the Test side as soon as Jardine took over as captain in 1931.

Tate, still ignorant of this development in 1932, kept bowling on in hope of making the tour. He was not called on to do much as Sussex thrashed Glamorgan, Somerset and Gloucestershire on their Wales and West Country tour. At Taunton, in mid-August, he discovered the joyous news, via the press, that he was among the last three names to be added to MCC’s 17-man squad for Australia, alongside Yorkshire’s Maurice Leyland and Hedley Verity. Sadly, Duleepsinhji, who had collapsed during Sussex’s Somerset match, had to pull out of the tour, his career now over. He was replaced by Lancashire’s Eddie Paynter.

More than 10,000 miles away, the reaction to Tate’s inclusion was enthusiastic. The *Sydney Morning Herald* told its readers: “Fears expressed by English critics early this season that the stout-hearted Tate on a third tour would have changed from a shock bowler to a mere stock bowler have been followed by admiration for his sustained effort since the first batch of players was chosen, and recently much has been written of Tate’s recovery of the nip from the pitch that formerly marked his bowling. In any case, Tate’s ability to keep a length and to maintain an attack under the most trying conditions should make him invaluable to Jardine.”

But, while at Cheltenham for the Gloucestershire game, Tate was summoned to Lord’s for a most peculiar meeting. Tate wrote a year later that, arriving at the ground, he had encountered an atmosphere “as cold as the Old Bailey”. He then reportedly received an unexpected rebuke. An unnamed official told Tate he had been “lucky” to be selected, and questioned his level of effort during that county season to justify the remark, urging him to try harder. Tate recalled the “Judge” had “put on the Black Cap, without, however, passing any sentence”. He left the meeting “in a daze” and “seething with righteous indignation”.

He had cause for this. By the end of the Gloucestershire match, Tate had taken 101 wickets in the championship at an average of 15.23 and 31 more at just 12.26

in other first-class games. Perhaps the MCC's attitude had a connection with Jardine's earlier dinner with Larwood, Voce and Carr.

Like his father on the way back from Old Trafford 30 years earlier, Tate had an uncomfortable train journey home from London to Brighton, during which he said he had considered ruling himself out of the tour he had worked so hard to join. He had, he reasoned, "without any suggestion of boastfulness… bowled myself into the team". He decided against declining MCC's churlishly handled invitation, as the tour was an opportunity to "uphold my honour".

Tate still had work to do that season, with the superb Sussex trailing first-placed Yorkshire by 19 points, although the northern county had a game in hand. The day after the MCC meeting, Tate took four wickets against Warwickshire at Eastbourne. This game petered out to a draw, as did the next against Essex, in a rainy week on the south coast. This meant an end to Sussex's valiant charge, meaning Yorkshire, as usual, took the title.

But the next game, the penultimate of the championship season, still had a special significance. Sussex were hosting Yorkshire at Hove, in what might have been a decider, but was now a struggle for this virtue Tate was seeking: honour.

By chance, Pathé News footage of some of the game, played in gloriously sunny conditions, survives. Called *Football… Again!* it contrasted the end of the cricket season with the return of the Football League. The film is little more than a juxtaposition of footage of the two sports, but it has a whimsical tone because of Sussex's near-miss. Pathé reports that a "thrilling championship duel between Sussex and Yorkshire wound up one of 'King Cricket's' finest seasons".

The selected scenes were apparently picked at random, but there is footage of Tate bowling to Maurice Leyland. He returned to his mark, turned immediately and ran back in. There was not quite the 'snap' of some of the earlier footage of his action, such as the Test trial of 1923 or his performance on international debut, but he was still giving it a good effort. Good enough to take six Yorkshire wickets for 79 runs.

The commentator stated: "Well, today we bid farewell to cricket, and a great crowd is here to say au revoir to the county champions, Yorkshire, and the plucky runners-up, Sussex, who have gone through the season unbeaten."

The battle between Tate and one of his best friends also features. He is seen coming in from the Sea End: "Maurice Tate is plugging away at Leyland, but he can't get his wicket. Leyland is just seven runs short of his century now. [Voice raised] But he hasn't got it. He didn't know quite what to do with that ball from Tate and played it on to his wicket."

The crowd, which reached 12,000 at its peak, applauded. The fluidity in Tate was still noticeable, despite his workload. All seemingly in one movement, he glided into his action, raised his right arm to appeal and then scratched his head, as the umpire awarded the wicket. It still all looked so natural, so serene.

That was from a side-on view. Things must have seemed different on the pitch. Tate had already dismissed Leyland's opening partner, Herbert Sutcliffe, with a ball that swung to leg and broke back towards off. No wonder left-hander Leyland was beaten, as he faced a ball which moved the opposite way – swinging into his body and jagging away. He edged it on to his stumps. This was the type of bowling which had devastated Australia's batsmen in 1924/25. Yorkshire's captain, Brian

Sellers, was described as being "completely at sea against Tate". Yet the visitors were still the stronger side and won comfortably, by 167 runs. Yorkshire deserved the championship, and Tate could not be blamed, with any fairness, for that. A draw against Somerset and a few festival games and it was time to get ready for his third Ashes trip.

The pressure of trying to win the championship and MCC's coldness was beginning to tell. Impending fatherhood, coming after Kathleen had suffered a miscarriage previously, was also on his mind.

This 'domesticated man' was not due to see his next child until it was several months old. Tate was run down and had developed a cold. With his wife ill, he started packing his bags for a trip scheduled to last almost eight months. While doing so, Tate suffered what he described, unusually candidly at a time when any show of mental illness was a taboo, as a "nervous breakdown". He had reached his limit.

The Sussex fan, and friend of the Tates, Laetitia Stapleton, gave a taste of the pressures of a cricketer's life when she later wrote that Kathleen had, in 1938, "confided that he cried every time he packed to go abroad". Tate, in his book, described himself, contrary to his public image, as "highly strung". Top sportsmen usually are. Pipe-smoking geniality and big smiles could act as a mask for vulnerability in what was a precarious existence.

Tate was in no fit state to make decisions. But he became so concerned about his condition that he phoned MCC—without telling Kathleen—and withdrew from the tour, feeling he "might not do myself justice". MCC, seemingly not certain in the first place that Tate was needed in Australia, agreed. The ship sailed without him.

That was not the end of the matter. Surely England could not do without him. Over the next few weeks an extraordinary saga was played out to millions of newspaper readers. "Will he go? Won't he go?" reporters, gathering outside the family's Brighton home, asked. It must have been hellish for the family, as pressmen scrambled up ladders to get a view of goings-on. Police were called in to keep order.

Initially Kathleen told reporters: "Maurice is utterly dispirited and depressed. The decision was entirely his own. He saw the doctors this afternoon, but the specialist did not advise him one way or the other. He told him to do as he thought best. Maurice thought the matter over for a while alone, and then made up his mind. 'I could not do justice both to England and to Sussex if I went,' he told me. His nerves are in a pitiable state, and are even worse since he decided not to go."

The couple discussed the situation further. The loss of the £400 tour fee was not a pleasant prospect. A day later it was reported that Tate was on the mend. "Maurice seems a little better this evening," Kathleen revealed. "If he continues to improve at the present rate of progress I am confident that he will be well enough to travel in a week's time."

Kathleen was beginning a campaign to have her husband reinstated on the tour. The *Daily Express* scented a cause célèbre and stated: "The definite feeling of the country… is that Tate should go. On sentimental grounds alone, he has claims on those he has served so well."

Tate's health continued to improve and a few days later Kathleen, increasingly furious at her husband for his unilateral action, wrote a letter to MCC secretary William Findlay on 25th September. According to Tate, it pleaded "for them to disregard my telephone message and let me go after all". In the letter she admitted her husband had acted "rather drastically", adding that only rest was needed to get him fit to travel.

Findlay, in reply, offered his sympathies, but said he could see no reason why Tate did not still need to rest, with an Australian tour a "great tax on a man's strength and nerves". However, he promised to put the matter before the MCC committee.

Kathleen, dogged in her determination to come to Tate's aid, wrote back a couple of days later. She informed MCC that he had seen a doctor in Brighton, who had pronounced him fit to travel. Kathleen then suggested MCC put its own physician on the case, proposing that the two medical reports be placed before the committee at its meeting of 10th October. Findlay replied that he would let her know.

The waiting was arduous and a photograph of Tate, resting in the garden with Kathleen and their Alsatian dog, showed him looking more gaunt than usual.

The message to the watching world was unequivocal, however, as he was reclining in a deckchair, wearing his England blazer. Another picture, seemingly taken on the same day, as Kathleen was wearing the same outfit, showed her talking to her three children, Maurice junior, Betty and Joan, outside their home as they awaited news from MCC.

Tate managed to make it to Brighton and Hove Albion's home match against Norwich on Saturday 25th September, the same day as Kathleen sent her letter. Accompanied by Maurice junior, he told reporters he was feeling fit and ready to go.

Two days later, he received the message of hope he had been desperate for. MCC told him its committee would not send him to a doctor before the meeting on Monday 10th October, but would instead wait until that date to decide on a course of action. It showed a lack of urgency, and it meant another agonising wait.

The meeting went ahead and Tate was delighted to receive a telegram telling him that he was to report to Lord's the next day. The press showed a photograph of Kathleen reading the document in the porch of the family home, with a figure looking like Fred standing behind her. Two press men stood outside. It was media management in action.

Tate made his way to Lord's, where he stayed for an hour. To avoid the inquisitive crowds accumulating outside the gates, he was ushered out of a side entrance and into a taxi. This took him to MCC's doctor in Victoria Street. A canny *Daily Mirror* photographer, seemingly tipped off, captured a picture of Tate on the way there, carefully avoiding walking under a ladder—a typically superstitious act.

Tate was passed fit and, after all the fuss, and the earlier questioning of his commitment, it was decided that he would, after all, go to Australia. Findlay telephoned the Tates to pass on the good news. The papers once again got excited. The *Mirror* exclaimed: "Thousands of cricket lovers both here and in Australia will rejoice at this 'happy ending' to a regrettable story of muddle and indecision." Mindful of the cut-throat world of circulation battles, it did its Fleet Street rivals a

disservice, announcing: “Ever since Tate was first declared fit for the trip by his own medical advisers the *Daily Mirror*—almost alone among the great national daily newspapers—vigorously pressed his claim to be included.”

The *Express* reserved some unusual praise for the mandarins at Lord’s: “Let us to-day beat the drum in honour of the MCC. It is not often that this august body hearkens to the voice of the multitude – but in deciding to send Maurice Tate off to Australia they have for once fallen in line with public opinion.”

MCC had not been entirely responsible for the trouble but, if Tate’s account of his visit to Lord’s during the season is accurate, it had at least set the mood for a traumatic period. Kathleen had been incredibly supportive, playing the public relations game perfectly. She was by now heavily pregnant and could look forward to an early motherhood with her husband overseas. Tate was touched by her efforts, writing: “A wife’s love is a wonderful thing.” Kathleen’s conduct during the fuss had been “nothing short of heroic”, he ventured.

Tate declined a full interview, but told reporters the past three weeks had been a terrible ordeal. “It has been rather harassing being kept in suspense, but I feel ready for the Australians now,” he said. Putting his arm around his wife, he added: “This little woman has done it all for me.”

“I’m awfully bucked that Maurice is going,” Kathleen said. “His bats have remained packed since the afternoon he was taken ill. There only remains the labelling of them. Maurice is fit as a fiddle and hopes to put up some records in Australia.”

Some amusing doggerel, written by an unknown wit, summed up the whole affair quite well, although misrepresenting Kathleen’s role. It was published in the Verse and Worse column of the *Perth Sunday Times*:

*First he would and then he wouldn’t;*
*Then he said he really couldn’t.*
*He was sick, but he was sorry;*
*Couldn’t be dragged by a motor lorry.*
*He couldn’t go over the ocean tide;*
*There was something wrong with his poor inside.*
*Then, after thinking it over, he*
*Decided he’d cross the deep blue sea.*
*But would they mind if he asked his wife?*
*She’d known him most of his married life.*
*Then a doctor stood by the wobbler’s cot.*
*Saying, ‘He cannot go. No; certainly not.’*
*Then telegrams went and telegrams came,*
*With the net result of ‘Just the same.*
*‘My poor, dear husband would like to go,*
*But I’m his wife, and I’d rather say “No.”*
*‘His trunks are packed and in the hall.*
*And the taximan soon is going to call.*
*‘But my pet is feeble and in a faint.’*
*Then a voice came out of a room, ‘I ain’t!*

*'Pack my cricketing gear or I may be late.*
*I remain, Yours Truly, Maurice Tate.'*

# Chapter 26

## Watching the War.

"*It only wanted one man to put a foot over the pickets for murder to have been done.*"

—Maurice Tate

TATE WAS TO travel by land across France to catch the P&O liner STRATHNAVER at Marseilles, and eventually join the team in Melbourne. A crowd of well-wishers gathered at Victoria Station as the big man, wearing his customary pre-tour bunch of white heather, proclaimed: "I feel absolutely fit, and will do my best to justify the Marylebone Club's decision." He added that he would have ample time to practise before the first Test. MCC were by now well on the way to Australia. The manager, Plum Warner, expressed his surprise and delight, possibly genuine, at Tate's belated inclusion.

As the STRATHNAVER approached Naples on 18th October, Tate found out, via the ship's radio, that Kathleen had given birth to a healthy second son, to be christened Michael. The press, naturally, were fascinated, and Kathleen continued to play the publicity game, posing for photographs. In one, she holds little Michael as the other children gaze proudly at their baby brother, who weighed in at seven pounds and ten ounces.

Tate, unaware of the conversations Douglas Jardine had had before leaving for Australia, was convinced he could regain his Test place. After the ship dropped off most of its passengers at Bombay, there was more space on deck to practise, which he did for an hour every afternoon with the officers he had befriended.

The STRATHNAVER arrived at Fremantle, Western Australia, in November, and Tate revealed he still hoped to play in the first Test. The press coverage was still focused on his domestic matters, however. He told reporters young Michael had small feet, a detail which was duly published with the usual antipodean fascination with Tate's body. "We decided before I left that if the baby was a boy we would call him Michael," he said, as he passed through Adelaide. "And if a girl she would be called Sheila, but if there were twins I said we would leave the naming of them to my wife."

Tate finally met up with MCC at Melbourne, where the visitors were half-way through a game against Victoria. He wrote: "The skipper said he was very pleased to see me, and I told him I was very fit and had lost weight on the voyage as a result of the amount of deck cricket I had played."

Tate's first game was against New South Wales at the Sydney Cricket Ground, starting on 25th November. He managed four for 53 in the first innings, coming on, unusually, as first change. He took none for 21 in the second. It was a decent

start. But it was not enough to win selection for the first Test, at the same ground, which began on 2nd December. Tate wrote that he was "a bit disappointed, considering I had bowled well enough to warrant inclusion". *The Daily Express* continued to feed ideas of a conspiracy against Tate, asserting that, back in September, "when he declined the invitation to go to Australia he caused several sighs of satisfaction to ascend. His services, to put it plainly, were not particularly desired by some in high places". It was right.

Sitting in the pavilion is often boring, particularly during a timeless match, but Tate was to get a good view of cricket's greatest controversy: fast leg-theory bowling, otherwise known as "Bodyline". Harold Larwood, Jardine's uncomplaining enforcer, took five for 96 as he scared a few Aussies. Herbert Sutcliffe scored 194, with centuries for Wally Hammond and the Nawab of Pataudi. Larwood took another five wickets, for just 28, as England won by ten wickets. Tate was impressed by Larwood's speed, but he did not like the intimidation involved, claiming that orthodox fields—rather than packing the leg-side with close catchers—would have avoided the bad relations which grew between England and Australia.

Tate was not picked for a match in Tasmania, even though he thought the wicket perfectly suited to him. It was the game before the second Test, in Melbourne. "I began to wonder things," he wrote. "Surely I needed all the practice I could get if I were to play in the Test."

Jardine's abrasive manner did little to improve Tate's mood. He had never been one to accept the amateur–professional divide in its starkest forms, preferring gentlemen to act like gentlemen, smoothing things over. Hence his admiration for Arthur Gilligan and Percy Chapman. Two nights before the Test match, a well-wisher put on a dance to raise money for baby Michael, but Jardine refused to let any of the team attend, thinking it was too close to the game starting. Tate wrote that "as he had evidently decided to leave me out, it was not quite fair I should have been kept away". The dance still went ahead, raising £100, but it was not quite the event it could have been.

Jardine picked four fast bowlers—Larwood, Bill Bowes, Bill Voce and Gubby Allen—for the second Test, making Tate feel even more left out. The former Australian batsman Charlie Macartney, writing in the *Barrier Miner* newspaper, was bewildered, calling the exclusion a "singular piece of bad judgement. The preference for an attack of practically all pace is a bad error". He argued that a contrast of speeds made an attack more potent.

The disgruntled Tate sat and watched as Australia won by 111 runs. Was there still a chance Tate could play in the remainder of the Tests? The next tour match, at Bendigo, saw what he called "another rebuff" by Jardine, who took him off during the home side's second innings after he had taken two wickets in his first two overs.

Then came the infamous third Test at Adelaide. Tate found out on the morning of the match that he was not playing and "came to the conclusion that, unless something unforeseen happened, I should not get a game in a Test match at all". The Australian papers were full of letters expressing amazement at Tate's absence.

On a lighter note, the enterprising Max Afford of the *Adelaide Mail* did some research prior to the game. In an article headlined "Test Bagman for a Day", he

shadowed England's kit man, Bill Ferguson. Afford watched while baggage was distributed to each room and unpacked. "The only disappointment that awaited me concerned those famous shoes of Maurice Tate's," he wrote. "Cartoonists and writers have so dwelt upon the famous footwear that I expected them to resemble seven-league boots of the giant in the fairy tale. But, alas, it was not so."

Afford divulged that Tate's shoes were no longer the largest in the team, having been superseded by those of the lanky Yorkshireman Bill Bowes. "And compared with the shoes of Warwick Armstrong and Nourse, the South African batsman of 1911, Tate's shoes resemble Cinderella's slippers!"

That was the only fairy story Tate was to be associated with on tour. Watching in Adelaide was particularly uncomfortable, and not just because of the sweltering heat. Larwood, at his absolute fastest, hit Australian captain Bill Woodfull over the heart, to prompt some severe barracking. Later he struck wicketkeeper Bert Oldfield on the head, antagonising the crowd further. Tate wrote that "the situation looked very ugly, and I am convinced that it only wanted one man to put a foot over the pickets for murder to have been done". England won, but highly controversially, with diplomatic wranglings to last for months.

Tate's primary concern was his omission from the team. He was one of only three members of the squad – along with reserve wicketkeeper George Duckworth and all-rounder Freddie Brown – not to feature during the series. The non-players created an informal group called the "ground staff". The self-deprecating humour and mutual mockery covered insecurities, as is so often the case within dressing rooms on tour.

Even Bradman's 1948 Australians, nicknamed the "Invincibles", had to leave someone out. Jack Fingleton, the doughty batsman who featured in the Bodyline series and who worked for many years as a journalist, wrote after Bradman's retirement that the legendary skipper had had his "favourites". He added: "Those not in the beam of his smile often received scant opportunities, so that this English tour was not a happy one for some." Rather like the 1932/33 MCC tourists, those left out in 1948 christened themselves the "ground-staff bowlers" and even composed their own song, presumably to the tune of the music hall classic 'Champagne Charlie', which had been made into a film starring Tommy Trinder and Stanley Holloway in 1944:

*Ground-staff bowlers is our name.*
*Ground-staff bowling is our game.*
*At the nets, we bowl all day;*
*In a match, we're never asked to play.*
*We're the heroes of the dressing room;*
*Ground-staff bowlers is our name.*

In those pre-flight days of long tours, as Tate was discovering in 1932/33, there was plenty of time for distractions for those not playing.

In February 1933 the *Daily Mirror* related a bizarre episode. Tate, who had met his wife in a cinema, was something of a film buff. He described George Arliss, best known at the time for his portrayal of 19th century British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, as his favourite star. It was quite a cultured choice.

Acting looked like fun. So, towards the end of the Bodyline tours Tate agreed to take part in a film. Called *Society's Shame*, it starred the Nawab of Pataudi as a moustachioed villain. Tate, according to the *Mirror*, also had a "leading role". It reported that he "needed much disguise and make-up ably to fulfil his part as an aged father with a long, black, bushy beard and side-whiskers". Goodness only knows what the film, shown around Sydney cinemas, was about, but the title raises all sorts of questions. No trace seems to remain.

Tate was a gregarious figure even when not playing. He got on with most people on tour but there was obviously no personal warmth between him and Jardine, despite their shared freemasonry, at least until Tate left the organisation in the January of 1933, midway through the tour.

An Australian newspaper took the strained situation further when it reported that Tate had had a public argument with his captain and thrown a glass of beer over him. Tate denied this, writing: "Everyone in the team congratulated me on my throw, because Jardine and I were 60 miles apart when the incident was supposed to have occurred.

Another story stated that the pair had come to blows. Tate suspected a chambermaid of going to the press with this lurid tale. To counter the reports, he related that Jardine had congratulated him on the phlegm he had shown when not picked and called him a "hundred per center", in contrast with MCC's attitude towards him at that odd Lord's meeting the previous summer.

Tate was still brooding on the stories when interviewed at Hove at the beginning of the 1933 season: "The Australian pressmen made a friendly man-to-man talk with Jardine into a squabble. I do not know how they heard about it. I and the others accepted the selectors' decision. If we chipped each other, with a bit of leg-pulling it was not anything nasty about the captain. The 'ground staff', as we called ourselves, were too good sportsmen to say anything to annoy our pals. When I said that I felt I was not wanted I meant that I was not needed in the side. And didn't we whack 'em."

There was even a sense of admiration for Jardine's courage under fire, during the 'war' at Adelaide, and disgust at some of the language used by the barrackers towards the captain and Larwood.

Tate again had to watch as England won the fourth Test at Brisbane, with Lancashire's Eddie Paynter coming off his sick bed to get England into a decent position. He praised the little man's pluck, but was more scathing of the England bowling, insinuating that Jardine was monomaniacal in his tactics: "We heard, as usual, from the kangaroo's tail: I noticed that not one of our bowlers could think of bowling a yorker to any of their last four batsmen, who were drawing away and slashing at everything." This had been going on for two or three Test matches, he complained.

Yet England won the series, making the last game, in Sydney, a matter purely of honour. Tate had some hope of playing, but it was a Test and Jardine was not of the 'give everyone a go' mentality. England triumphed again, taking the series 4-1, as in 1928/29, but Tate recounted feeling "sad" not to have taken part after his successes on his previous two tours. He was merely trying to be on-message when he called Bodyline "legitimate".

Tate's enduring popularity in Australia may even have been intensified by his non-involvement in the series. At the end of February, members of the Sydney Repertory Theatre presented him with a cutlery set for baby Michael. He was not unwanted by the public, just MCC management.

During the tour Tate received an invitation to settle in Australia. Alfred Jenkin, who owned a chain of shoe shops, offered him a "lucrative" position with the firm. The understanding was that Tate would join the St George cricket club, of which Jenkins was president, and which included Bradman among its players. It was a mouth-watering prospect for fans and journalists, but nothing came of the scheme. Tate's usefulness to a shoe company, except as a comical ambassador, was dubious.

Tate played in the game after the final Test, against Victoria, ahead of the next stage of the trip, to New Zealand. While he batted, a wag shouted: "Don't get too many, Maurice, or else Jardine won't give you a game in New Zealand." This could have been related to a newspaper article published in England on the first day of the match. Kathleen had clearly developed a taste for media campaigning, telling the *Daily Sketch* her husband had not had a "fair deal". "They might have left him with me if he wasn't wanted for the Tests," she added. To be fair, they had tried.

The newspaper stated that Tate had written letters to his wife criticising the tour selectors, following his exclusion from the third Test. An excerpt read: "I did so well against New South Wales, I thought they must in justice give me a chance. I can only think someone must be up against me." He later denied having written anything pejorative.

After one further game, against South Australia, MCC sailed across the Tasman Sea for the quieter charms of New Zealand. Tate was delighted to be selected for the first Test, in Christchurch, his first international game in almost two years. Three days were scheduled, so England were too greedy for runs in compiling 560 for eight declared off 147.3 overs. Hammond hit a double century and Tate was ten not out when Jardine called time on proceedings.

New Zealand lacked talent but not gumption. They went to 223 all out in 116.1 overs. Tate was restored to his old position as an international opening bowler. He took two for 42 off 37 overs—having wicketkeeper Ken James lbw and bowling debutant fast bowler Dennis Smith—on what was reckoned to be a near-perfect pitch. The Kiwis followed on and Tate bowled three overs for five runs in his opening spell. Soon afterwards, rain and heavy winds came, ending any chance of a result. Tate said the match had been a happy experience, mainly because of the lack of Australian-style barracking.

The team went from Christchurch to Auckland, where an unnamed member of the MCC selection committee told Tate, who was approaching his 38th birthday, that he had not been picked because he was "getting too old". At least that is what Tate claimed, saying he "resented" the assertion but that, as a professional cricketer, he would have to "grin and bear it".

The match ended in another draw and, the next day, MCC, away from home now for five months, set off on the journey back to England. They sailed across the Pacific to the western Canadian city of Vancouver, via Fiji and Hawaii, where Tate had a go at surfing. There was a suggestion that he had danced with the film star Ginger Rogers too. A stuffed crocodile that Tate had purchased in Australia was

sent on to Brighton, rather than carried throughout the voyage. The exotic beast caused quite a stir on arrival, the local boys keen to inspect it.

MCC crossed Canada by train and sailed across the Atlantic from Montreal on the DUCHESS OF ATHOLL. While on board the team presented Jardine with a silver cigar box, bearing all their signatures. Tate wrote that MCC had been a "happy team throughout", despite the "private griefs" of those not playing in the Test matches. Jardine presented every player with an ashtray. Tate's, bearing the pro forma words "from a grateful skipper", has recently been donated to the Sussex County Cricket Club museum by one of his grandsons. Jardine's detractors would question the sincerity of the words.

The DUCHESS OF ATHOLL arrived at Glasgow on the first Saturday in May. James Ferguson, a Scottish cricket enthusiast who lived in Billingshurst, West Sussex, travelled out on a small boat to greet the team. He presented each player with a pocket watch. A kangaroo was embossed on one side of the silver case and an emblem of St George on the other. A bagpipe band welcomed the team, with Jardine proclaiming: "We are a happy and united band." The team, unlike previous tours, got back to the UK too late on Saturday to make it to the FA Cup Final.

Finally, almost seven months after Michael was born, Tate was about to meet him. At Euston Station Jardine was besieged by admirers. The *Mirror* reported: "Tate turned up his coat collar to hide his MCC tie, but he too was mobbed. His greatest anxiety was to get on to Brighton to see his baby, who was born while he was on the way to Australia." A cheeky reporter asked: "Are you teaching him leg-theory?" A few hours afterwards, late on that Saturday night, the loving family were reunited. Such was the interest in Tate that the *Mirror* spread a large photograph of him holding Michael for the first time across its front page the following Monday.

He might not have played much that winter, but Tate was still a national hero. His views on the controversies of the winter were keenly sought. The MCC players were urged not to talk to the press, for fear of losing their tour bonuses, but Tate was obliged to say something, as he was contracted to write a column.

In *Reynold's Illustrated News* in mid-May, he asked: "Shall we ever play Australia at cricket again?" He at least questioned the possibility of doing so in the right spirit unless MCC could "find a way out of the maze". Without directly criticising Jardine, the thrust of his argument was clear. If only 'hard words' were possible between teams, they could not be friends.

Tate decried "wild shrieking" over his personal disappointments in Australia, but added that his heart was "very full". "Ever since I got into first-class cricket, I have had what might be called the superiority complex as a bowler," he said. He felt he could dismiss any batsman, including Jack Hobbs or Don Bradman, by producing a ball on a normal length which would "send his pulpit flying through the air".

Tate felt he was "at least as good as some of the men who did play", and said he had not gone to Australia for a holiday but with the "burning desire" to help England win. He went on to reaffirm that some of the stories told about the tour, such as his alleged fracas with Jardine, were untrue. However, he said his feelings

had not been “disguised from my friends out there”. So he admitted moaning, but not drenching or punching Jardine.

It was common for Tate to say he was not going to complain, then proceed to do so, at length. In another column he complained that the pitches on the tours he had played on, in 1924/25 and 1928/29, had been harder to bowl on than those provided for Larwood et al in 1932/33. They were no longer “so good, so perfectly true or so lasting”. Tate argued that Australian Rules Football was now being played on some pitches during the winter, allowing them less time to recover to a pristine condition. The poorer quality of the Australian tail-end batsmen was also noted.

By late July Tate was still chuntering. While expressing his admiration for Larwood as a man and a bowler, he worried that cricket would “suffer” if Bodyline was allowed to continue. On another occasion, he advocated painting a white line across the middle of the pitch. He wanted to ban anyone dropping the ball short of this mark. It was a crude antidote to the previous winter’s tactics and unlikely to work, as a bouncer pounded into the bowler’s end of the pitch is likely to balloon harmlessly over the batsman’s head.

In September 1933, the Sussex committee was asked for its views on Bodyline by MCC. It stated that the captain on the pitch should handle the situation, and that “no alteration to the Rule is recommended”. Perhaps influenced by Tate, or at least his admirers, the minutes continued: “It seems superfluous to add that the Committee of the Sussex County Cricket Club would not for a moment countenance anything in the nature of Terrorism.”

Bradman, hurt by the suggestions that he had been afraid of Larwood and company’s pace, used Tate’s plight to criticise his bitter enemy, Jardine. After the England skipper had made it clear in the press that he thought only extreme pace or genuine spin would succeed in Australia, Bradman retaliated in the *Brisbane Courier* in August 1933, casting doubt on the theory. Leg-spinner Clarrie Grimmett had been more successful in England than Australia, while Tate had “proved himself to be infinitely better on our wickets than those of the Old Country. It would be no exaggeration to say he was the outstanding bowler on either side for at least two tours”. Bradman’s implication was that Tate had been wronged by Jardine. Tate agreed, for different reasons. Bodyline had probably curtailed his England career.

He was no youngster by this stage, though, and England were looking for some younger bowlers. This meant Tate, who had moved his family a few miles north from Brighton to a house called Wanaka, in Burgess Hill, would have more time to help Sussex towards that elusive championship

# Chapter 27

## Leading the Charge.

“*You are pulling my leg.*”

—Maurice Tate

SUSSEX HAVE HAD two generally recognised ‘golden ages’. The first was at the start of the 20th century, when CB Fry and Ranjitsinhji demolished all bowling. They and less garlanded figures such as Fred Tate helped them to second place in 1902 and 1903. The second period was Sussex’s unprecedented run of success a century later when, led by Chris Adams, they took the championship for the first time in 2003, and again in 2006 and 2007. The early 1930s have a claim to be considered almost as great a time.

After the disappointment of Sussex’s second place in 1932 and his problems on the Australia tour, Tate returned to action in 1933, having missed the first four games. As Kathleen noticed, perhaps jealously given the solo childcare and attendant lack of sleep she had endured over the winter, her husband was well-rested.

With Duleep’s career over, Sussex turned to 24-year-old all-rounder Robert Scott as captain. Tate made a quiet start to the 1933 season, taking three wickets in his first two games. But Sussex were white hot, beating Nottinghamshire by ten wickets and Gloucestershire by an innings. Tate took nine wickets in the next match, a thrashing of Somerset. During the Nottinghamshire game, at Hove, an unknown admirer came into the home dressing room and presented Tate with a gigantic bottle of beer. It was a nice welcome back after the ordeals of the winter. For good measure, the kind benefactor attached a poem:

*Great big heart, great big feet,*
*Give him a great big cheer.*
*Also give him a great big treat*
*Here’s a bottle of beer.*
*Popular here, popular there,*
*He’s a favourite everywhere.*
*Never known to be a failure,*
*Even popular in Australia.*

It was a lovely thought, but Tate would have been wary of having photographs taken with the bottle following the allegations of a beery set-to with Jardine over the winter.

After their wonderful start to the season, Sussex’s form declined, with draws against Warwickshire, Surrey and Lancashire and an innings defeat to Middlesex. Tate was still on good form, however, taking a five-for against Surrey and several contributions of three or four wickets against other sides.

He was far from being the only high-quality bowler on the staff. James Langridge was a Test-class left-arm spinner, who missed out on significant international honours because of the magnificent Hedley Verity. Twenty-one-year-old Jim Cornford was very much like Tate in style. He was not as big or good and claimed not to have modelled himself on Tate, but he was a useful performer.

By the end of June Sussex had managed eight championship wins, putting them in contention again. The last of these was a ten-wicket mauling of the mighty Yorkshire, everyone’s favourites to take the title. Tate did his bit, with five wickets

in the game. They then beat Kent by the same margin. Somerset and Derbyshire subsided, as did Gloucestershire and Derbyshire again. Apart from the Yorkshire win, a highlight was an innings and 65 runs victory over Middlesex at Hove. Yet Hastings week proved a disappointment, with a draw against Surrey and a 149-run loss to Kent. Sussex won the next four games, against Glamorgan, Worcestershire, Leicestershire and Yorkshire, but it was to no avail. They finished second to Yorkshire.

Tate, who had missed a few games with niggles, did not get 100 wickets in the season for the first time since the early 1920s. He ended up with 99 at the good average of 18.26. The Sussex committee report for the year noted he had failed for the "first time in many years" to reach the target, but acknowledged "there were times when he bowled as well as ever and was quite unplayable". It offered sympathy for his injuries and a tendency to miss the stumps narrowly, despite the recent expansion in their size.

He had this tendency throughout his career. Perhaps one criticism of Tate's bowling is that he landed the ball a tiny bit shorter than was ideal. He had his wicketkeeper standing up, partly in an effort to stop the batsman stepping out to drive, and this ploy might have been a factor. It always looks good when a bowler beats the bat, or gets one over the stumps, but inducing an edge or bowling someone out is infinitely preferable. Sometimes it is better to pitch it up a little more. Tate's career figures were so marvellous that such criticism is close to sacrilege. Yet no one is perfect. We make our own luck and this, rather than Monty Noble's critique of a lack of 'versatility' or 'spin', was his only true failing. Even then, it was a matter of centimetres.

In 1933, Tate's batting, always less reliable than his bowling, incontrovertibly declined. He made just 325 runs at 12.50 in 29 innings. Sussex's strength in batting meant, though, that he could concentrate on what he did best.

In 1934 the Australians were back. Tate, who had not been picked during the previous Ashes tour or the three Tests against the West Indies in 1933, harboured some hopes of re-selection. Once again, he was thinking little beyond the 22 yards of turf on which he was so at home. Ahead of the season, he revealed that he feared never playing against Australia again, given his experiences on the Bodyline tour and missing the three Tests against the West Indies in 1933. "It is a sad thought for one of my enthusiasm with so many years of first-class cricket left in me," he wrote. In his late 30s, there was no sense of an impending, necessitated change of career. Tate must have known, deep down, that it could not go on forever, but he was loath to show it.

Denial of doubt is important to a successful sportsman's psychology, but not always as useful when dealing with the real world. Any questioning of Tate's suitability for England was viewed in a way that might be called mildly paranoid. In his book, he referred to "subterranean influences which spoil players' chances of representative honours".

Over the winter of 1933/34, the Sussex committee added to Tate's sense that the end was nowhere near nigh. It agreed to keep his wages at £416 a year for the next three years, leaving him secure in his job until May 1937, when he would be almost 42, quite an age for a pace bowler.

An article by William Pollock in the *Express* would have increased his hopes of further international honours. In late April 1934, he wrote: "I wonder if Tate can make a comeback this season? I saw him bowling in the nets at Hove yesterday, and wonderfully fit he looked—brown-skinned, clear-eyed and weighing a stone less than he did a year ago."

"A winter's beagling has done me a lot of good," Tate told Pollock. "I should love to be able to bowl myself back into Test cricket." The selectors, now led by Sir Stanley Jackson, one of the heroes of Fred's match in 1902, had been duly notified.

Sussex started 1934 brilliantly, with wins against Hampshire, Derbyshire and Gloucestershire. The last of these, at Hove, was especially significant in the career of Tate and the history of Sussex. With no amateurs in the side, the veteran all-rounder, less than a fortnight short of his 39th birthday, became the first professional to captain Sussex in the 20th century.

Tate won the toss and batted but was not needed himself, strangely positioned at number 11, as the home side amassed 406 for eight declared. Jim Parks top-scored with 181.

When Gloucestershire went in, Tate took five for 26 as the visitors fell for just 101. He bowled three players, the captaincy appearing to be a source of energy. On rampaging form, he enforced the follow-on and had two men out within minutes, to leave the score on six for two. Tate managed two more wickets—both bowled—as Gloucestershire were dismissed for 167. Sussex had won by an innings and 138 runs. It was a more than decent start. Remember, this was the man who, after the First World War, had declared he was not "cut out to rise to be the youngest Brigadier-General in the Army".

Tate returned to the ranks as Sussex won three of the next four matches, taking five for 50 against Leicestershire and seven for 42 against Northamptonshire, including the third hat-trick of his career. The victims were John Timms, caught at short leg by Jim Cornford, Alan Liddell lbw and Thomas Elderkin, bowled for nought in his only first-class game. *The Times* reported that "it must be admitted that the batting of Northamptonshire, who have lost every one of the six matches they have played, was not of the strongest". Hat-tricks are never to be sniffed at, however. The first of the three men out, Timms, scored more than 20,000 first-class runs in his career at an average of almost 45. With the Ashes series ahead, Tate was creating headlines.

He was again made captain for Sussex's away match against Warwickshire. This time, the match was a draw. As a mere player once more, he enjoyed a nine-wicket win against Surrey and an innings and 116-run destruction of Yorkshire at Sheffield, in which he took just one wicket.

In a draw against Lancashire, the *Manchester Guardian's* Neville Cardus, who had noticed a decline in Tate's wicket-taking powers as early as the mid-to-late-1920s, singled him out for praise for bowling "magnificently", despite "wretched" luck. Tate's passion stood out. He threw his hands in the air as a snick missed leg stump, sometimes standing and looking down the pitch in bewilderment, scratching the back of his head. Tate's bowling, Cardus asserted, was "the best of its kind that I have seen this year" and, even if there was "not quite the old velocity from the pitch, there was enough of it to cause the batsmen to keep wide awake".

“He declines to grow old,” Cardus added. “His feet won’t let him.” While framing his article, Cardus had the temerity to ask Tate if he had ever bowled a full toss or a long hop. “Certainly not,” he replied. His qualities did not move the selectors to act romantically, though, and Tate was to spend the whole season with Sussex.

July saw his longest stint as skipper: three games in a row. The first, against Northamptonshire at Hove, was one of the high points of his career. Amid changeable weather, Sussex opted to bat first and Tate made the decision to declare on just 287 for seven. Northamptonshire then fell for 182, Tate leading the way with four for 51. Sussex went in again and had reached 115 for five off 25 overs, when the skipper did something extraordinary and declared a second time. Northants required 221 to win. It was a sporting contest now.

Northants came in to face again, but Tate had one of his finest moments, especially considering he had engineered the whole thing. He proceeded to take six wickets for just seven runs in 10.4 overs. Northants went for a miserable 57 and Sussex had won by 163 runs.

It was captaincy of the highest order. The skipper’s bowling was equally superlative, the last three wickets falling without Tate conceding a run. Moreover, Sussex’s fielding was brilliant, galvanised by Tate’s refreshing captaincy. *The Times* congratulated Tate on his “foresight in declaring his first innings closed with only 287 runs for seven on the board when play on the second day was not possible until four o’clock”.

In his *Reynold’s Illustrated News* column in 1931, Tate had expounded his views on the ‘declaration rule’, the convention, to be promoted by umpires, that games should proceed as naturally as possible, rather than in a contrived fashion aimed at achieving a result. He complained that this would stifle captains’ imaginations. As with his bowling, Tate seemed a natural at leadership. He had been observing and thinking about it for some time, though. A few more games like the Northamptonshire one and the crowds would flock in, he reasoned. He was probably right.

In the next game Tate took seven wickets as Sussex beat Hampshire by an innings and 119. A draw followed against Nottinghamshire. With an amateur available, Tate was relieved of the captaincy for one match against Leicestershire and returned to lead the side to a draw against Kent.

The match against Warwickshire saw him reach the lofty landmark of 2,500 first-class wickets, as he took four in each innings. Only 13 players in cricket history have been as productive with the ball, and Tate had not started in earnest until he became a medium-pacer, aged 27.

Sadly, Sussex’s season was to lead to a third disappointment in a row. Several draws once again condemned them to second place, this time to Lancashire, by 14 points. Lancashire had won 13 games and Sussex 12. They deserved the title.

It had not been an international summer for Tate and the championship had ended in heartbreak, but he had proved his leadership credentials. His bowling figures were 142 wickets at 19.69 and his batting improved to a more-than-respectable 615 runs at 29.28. The Sussex committee, looking back at 1934, judged that Tate had a “wonderful season, his bowling at times being almost unplayable”. His leadership won plaudits too. The committee stated that “he captained the team on several occasions with great success”.

And it marked the achievement with an unusual accolade. It was resolved that "Maurice Tate be elected an Hon. Life Member of the Club as an appreciation of his services to the Club in so many ways". It was the next step down from committee membership and gratefully accepted by Tate. His forename was even used in the minutes!

Sir Home Gordon was lavish in his praise of the work Tate had done as leader, calling the declaration against Northamptonshire a "stroke of genius". He added that he had "displayed judgment and ability which raised him to rank among the foremost leaders, though it may be doubted if his temperament would not be affected if the authority were thrust upon him from beginning to end of the season". Gordon was effectively accusing Tate of a susceptibility to big-headedness, particularly egregious for a mere professional.

In an article written in January 1935, West Indian Learie Constantine used Sussex's treatment of Tate as captain to illustrate what he saw as the absurdities of the English system. He praised Tate's "marked ability and enormous success" but attacked the received wisdom that "a professional player as captain of a team composed of amateurs and professionals will not receive the respect and support due to a leader". Constantine concluded that "this attitude, far from being a reflection on the (professional) captain, is distinctly a discredit to the more famous amateur".

Tate clearly agreed, saying he had enjoyed "whole-hearted support" from his players. He even suggested, two decades before Len Hutton did it, that a professional should be allowed to captain England: "We have had pros whom I'm sure could have done it very efficiently—Jack Hobbs, for instance. But old customs die hard." Maybe he had himself in mind. Tate also suggested that England appoint a permanent manager, an idea far ahead of its time.

Tate, no longer as busy in his now tour-free winters, was engaged in whist drives around Sussex, usually in the company of Arthur Gilligan or club secretary Lance Knowles. They went from town to village, entertaining and enlisting the support of cricket fans. There was also the matter of money-raising for the club's Nursery. Just before the 1935 season got under way, a special Sussex CCC whist committee awarded Tate £10 and ten shillings for his efforts. The newly elevated professional and the county's hierarchy were on good terms, for the time being.

There was some anticipatory joy for Tate and his fellow bowlers as, at last, it was announced, the lbw law was to change in their favour. Under an experiment affecting the rules of county cricket, rather than the laws governing the game as a whole, a ball pitching outside the off-stump could now result in a wicket, if it was going on to hit the stumps. Tate told the *Sunday Dispatch*, which had changed its name from the *Weekly Dispatch* a few years earlier: "We should get more wickets, but the batsmen will soon get used to the alteration and the spectators will see brighter cricket."

But the veteran Nottinghamshire batsman George Gunn was understandably less enamoured, pronouncing it the "biggest blunder in the history of the game". He argued that small counties, already used to losing quickly, would surrender more gate receipts and that: "Cricket will be reduced to the level of the village green and cow shots and mowers will be the only possible strokes. Tyros will equal

Hammond, Sutcliffe, Leyland and Woolley, but Farnes and Tate will reap a rich harvest, and Larwood and Voce will pulverise their opponents."

As Sussex set off on their 1935 campaign, under the leadership of Alan Melville and his deputy Jack Holmes, Tate wished for some belated justice for his bowling, after all those years of near misses, dropped catches and unsuccessful lbw appeals.

CB Fry—a veteran of the disappointments of 1902 and 1903—presented every member of the Sussex team with a pair of boots to celebrate King George V's Silver Jubilee and told them he hoped they would win the championship. It did not turn out that way. Sussex declined markedly. The first championship match resulted in a three-wicket defeat by lowly Glamorgan, while Leicestershire triumphed by an innings, as did Yorkshire. The latter was the first match that year in which Tate was named captain. There were also some wins, but the glory, or near-glory, years were fading.

The next match, a loss to Lancashire, saw Tate reach his 40th birthday. Despite his boyish optimism, even he must have felt he had little chance of taking on the South Africans, who were playing England in that summer's Test series. He was still getting wickets, though, including five for just nine runs in Sussex's win over Gloucestershire in early July, followed by four for 79 against Hampshire and five for 23 against Essex. In the latter two games he led Sussex to victory.

And so it was that, after several injuries to others, Tate was selected once again to play for England. The *Daily Express* reported the news with a flurry of laid-back, avuncular Tate-talk on its front page. Tongue planted firmly in cheek, it revealed: "When a *Daily Express* representative broke the news to him last night—gently because of his years, Maurice exclaimed: 'I've heard that story before. You are pulling my leg.'"

After a few moments of contemplation, the bowler was quoted as saying: "Well, I'm dashed. And the blessed selectors never told me… This is a shock. I never dreamed that I should be asked to play for England again. I am quite an old 'un. You cannot expect to be so good when you get to my age."

It must have felt like a second debut when he arrived at Old Trafford, such an important ground to the Tates, for the game starting on 27th July. Tate, who had recently started writing a syndicated column, Maurice Tate Calling, for newspapers around Sussex, thanked people for sending him telegrams of congratulation. "I had no idea I was still so popular with such a host of cricket enthusiasts—and not all from dear old Sussex either," he exclaimed.

Cardus summed up a lot of supporters' feelings. The comeback did not seem destined to be a long one. "The return of Tate is either humorous or mournful, according to the point of view," he remarked. Tate had not improved since 1934, when he did not appear against the Australians, but it would "still be good to see him in a great match once more… It is safe to say that Tate this morning will be the most astonished and amused man in England".

The selection news was sensational but the match turned into what Tate described as a "tame draw". England, captained by Bob Wyatt, were 1-0 down in the series. Wyatt won the toss and batted, England putting up 357. Tate provided a nostalgic dash of flair, scoring 34 off 34 balls.

However, his bowling was not as invigorating as of old, albeit on a soporific pitch entirely unsuited for a game England had to win to square the series. His first victim was wicketkeeper Jock Cameron, caught by speedster Bill Bowes at mid-off for 53, attempting a drive. His second was number 11 Sandy Bell, lbw for one.

Tate had taken his 155th—and last—Test wicket. Against the new ball, batsmen had played forcing shots on the on side off his bowling, a *lèse-majesté* almost unthinkable in his pomp. Tate took two for 67 off 22.3 overs. They were still decent figures, but much of the nip, which had given him an advantage over his peers even at international level, had gone. Cardus said: "Tate could not recapture the fires of youth; he worked hard and well; but this is the cricketer's tragedy—his physical powers wane while his love of the game waxes."

England batted again and declared on 231 for six. Tate, promoted to number seven to get a shift on, was bowled first ball by slow left-armer Cyril Vincent. As a batsman, it was exactly the same ending, in exactly the same location, by exactly the same kind of bowler, as Fred had endured when dismissed by Jack Saunders in that Ashes decider 33 years earlier.

Unlike Fred's match, though, the dismissal did not end the game. South Africa still had an innings to go, and Tate bowled again. He could not shift anyone in his nine overs for 20 runs. South Africa easily survived 83 overs, losing just two wickets for 169. Tate, one of the greatest players England had ever seen, would not play again. As an ending it was tinged with low-key sadness, but not out-and-out ignominy.

In his match report, Pelham Warner effectively bragged about his own prescience in doubting the bowler's powers: "He was clearly not the Tate of old, and it is probable that a mistake was made in bringing him back to Test cricket." Warner had once again been appointed chairman of selectors that year, though. So his comments were a curious mixture of egotism and self-deprecation. Tate was dropped but, even with the old man gone, England still failed to win the last Test at the Oval and lost the series.

As Tates always did, he returned to Sussex and kept bowling. There were no spectacular hauls, but he ended 1935 with 113 wickets at 18.94. He was never to captain the county side again, with enough amateurs for the Sussex selectors to choose from. The team finished seventh, nowhere near winners Yorkshire. The committee, in its annual report, praised Tate as the "mainstay" of the attack and offered its "hearty congratulations" on his Test selection. It was an achievement in itself for a 40-year-old.

Sussex had a poor season in 1936, slumping to 14th place, only Leicestershire, Glamorgan and Northamptonshire below them. They won four games and lost ten.

Tate's figures also declined. He managed 78 wickets at, for him, a disappointing average of 22.41. He still had his hot days, with seven five-wicket hauls, but they were becoming fewer. In May he took six wickets in an innings against Surrey and repeated the feat against Middlesex.

The latter game, at Lord's, was most significant in being the debut of Middlesex and England legend Denis Compton. The 18-year-old came in at number 11 on the first evening to join captain Gubby Allen. The team needed 24 to take a first-innings lead.

According to writer and broadcaster EW Swanton, Allen told his young charge: “This chap comes off much quicker than you expect. Whatever you do, play forward.” Compton replied: “Yes, sir.” But, instead, he played back. The first ball pitched on a length and passed over the off stump. After some strong words from Allen, Compton started playing forward. The pair put on a stand of 36, before Compton was dismissed by Jim Parks. The young man was to get far better. After the return match at Hove in August, Tate wrote in his column: “I was much impressed by the display of young Denis Compton, who scored 80. Here is a boy only 18 years of age who is consistently making good scores, and he surely will develop into a ‘real good ’un’.”

It was the type of encouragement Arthur Gilligan, Walter Brearley and Ernest Tyldesley had offered Tate himself a decade and a half earlier, and just as prophetic – and generous. Tate got five wickets in the innings, but not Compton’s, and Sussex lost by an innings. A week before praising Compton’s talent, Tate had recommended that England give the young Yorkshire batsman Len Hutton a go. Both he and Compton were picked the following summer. Tate knew talent when he saw it.

His last big bag of wickets in first-class cricket was seven for 19 against Hampshire at Hastings in August, the final time in his career he exceeded five in an innings.

The press that September reported that Tate and Middlesex’s Patsy Hendren were all set to quit cricket to play the increasingly popular sport of baseball. The *Daily Mirror*, keen to promote the game, as it was sponsoring a competition, stated that Hendren had signed a contract to play full-time for the White City team in 1937 and Tate had agreed to “similar conditions”.

Nothing came of Tate’s supposed switch, or Hendren’s. Tate was due to be out of contract at Sussex the following summer and rumours about his future were swirling around the Sussex supporters. The man himself probably had no idea what awaited him. With hindsight he might as well have had a go at the American game.

# Chapter 28

## Sacking.

“*I don’t love you, ’cause your feet’s too big.*”
—Fats Waller, 1936

SQUIRREL MONKEYS NEED love. So do hamsters. Ball sports players are no less dependent on the warmth and company of their fellow mammals.

A study by psychologists at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), published in 2003, suggested that people react very similarly to smaller, furrier creatures when dropped from the gang, tribe or family. This probably has its origins in the need for congregation to survive against predators in the natural

world. Mammals had a tough time in their early days, with larger reptiles ready to gobble them up at any moment. Even when some grew into hunters themselves, they still needed their mates to help.

The UCLA psychologists Naomi Eisenberger and Matthew Lieberman have probably never heard of Maurice Tate, but their study looked at the feelings he and many cricketers have experienced at the end of their careers. They monitored undergraduates' reactions to a simple 'ball-tossing' computer game called Cyberball. Although the figure to whom the ball was 'thrown' was entirely digitally created, players were led to believe they were competing against a real person in another room. Cyberball had little intrinsic value. Lieberman, in the same terms as the unenlightened reserve for cricket, described it as "really the most boring game you can imagine". Participation was what counted.

The players were put through three rounds of the Cyberball experience. In the first, they were told to watch the other on-screen players because 'technical' problems meant they could not join in. In the second round, players were allowed to join in the ball-tossing. But in the final round they were excluded from the last three-quarters of action by the other 'players'

The researchers found this simulated rejection by their peers resulted in brain activity similar to that which occurs when the distress of physical pain is induced. In the dorsal portion of the anterior cingulate cortex, to be precise. Phrases like "broken-hearted" and "emotionally shattered" took on a new significance. Sticks and stones could break one's bones, but games could also hurt.

The three stages of the Cyberball experience were emotionally similar to many a first-class career, including Tate's. In his early days, like stage one of the experiment, Tate was a peripheral figure, missing many games because his skill had not developed. After 1922, or even slightly earlier for Sussex, he was very much included in the game, knowing little but praise and affection for almost a decade. From the early 1930s, he became less and less wanted, first by England, then by Sussex, his powers fading and his kudos declining. 1937 was to be the year that Tate, like many a sportsman, was to feel the acutest pain. He was forced to venture, like a companionless rodent, into the dangerous unknown, and he hated it.

Subtle signs were there from the beginning of the year. At the county's annual general meeting on 22nd February, Laetitia Stapleton heard it remarked of Tate: "The side will not be lacking in character and conversation so long as he is present." She wrote in her diary: "But underneath there seemed to be a dig at him from the platform." In March it was proposed to the Sussex committee that life members, of whom Tate was now one, should "have the privilege of using the committee room". This was voted down, the opposition efforts led by Sir Home Gordon. More significantly, having been given a three-year contract in 1934, Tate was now to be retained only on an annual basis. This was not a vote of confidence.

However, the whist drives, in which he had been so heavily involved, raised £465 for The Nursery over the winter of 1936/37. Arthur Gilligan, as chairman of the special Sussex sub-committee dealing with whist, proposed: "That a hearty vote of thanks be given to Mr WL Knowles and Mr Maurice Tate for their unceasing work during the past winter and for many years past, it being entirely due to their

efforts that the season 1936/37 has proved to be a record one." They were kind words from an old friend who understood his emotional needs, or so it seemed.

Spring nets went ahead as usual and Sussex's octogenarian president Alex Miller-Hallett, in his younger days a celebrated breeder of Jersey cattle, laid on a pre-season dinner for the team and selection committee at Brighton's Royal Albion Hotel. Gilligan, Tate's former captain and mentor, was now, on top of his whist duties, one of the Sussex selectors. During the function he took the 41-year-old Tate to one side and informed him that he was going to be 'rested' until the Whitsun game against Middlesex at Lord's. Tate related the development to readers of his column: "As I have been keeping fit all winter by getting out training with the beagles and the foxhounds, you can be sure I was very disappointed to hear the sad news."

So Tate spent two weeks away from the first team. Coincidentally, on 6th May, the former Warwickshire bowler Sydney Santall, now that county's coach, broadcast a programme, aired only in the Midlands, on the BBC. In it, he said his "chief grievance" against modern bowlers was a failure to use the non-bowling arm to get "impetus and rhythm" into their actions. "Have you seen a picture of a man about to throw a javelin?" he asked. "That's a perfect pose for a man about to deliver a cricket ball, and I know of no finer examples than the beautiful actions of Larwood and Maurice Tate." Santall would have enjoyed watching Jeff Thomson in the *The World's Fastest Bowler* competition of 1979.

When Tate returned to action against Middlesex, as Gilligan had promised, he took five wickets in the game and made 44 in the second innings, as Sussex won by 210 runs. He then took four wickets in the second innings of the next match, a victory over Northamptonshire.

The following four games were unproductive, Tate managing just seven wickets. When playing against Essex at Hove he injured himself, meaning another fortnight off. In mid-June he returned but was not his old self, taking just five wickets in four games. He suffered another injury and was not reselected when he recovered, turning out instead for the second XI.

Not everyone was as appreciative of Tate's brilliance as Sydney Santall. While still a technical example for any youngster to follow, he appeared to be a fading force, time finally catching up with him. John Langridge, a fine slip fielder, was to recall Tate becoming frustrated, blaming the catchers when edges did not reach them on the full, rather than admitting his own drop in pace. It did not make for a happy situation.

On 28th July, the *Brighton Evening Argus* printed an interview with Tate at his home in Burgess Hill. He described himself as "keenly disappointed" not be in the first team, and fretted over the "uncertainty about my future". In words similar to those used by the UCLA researchers in their Cyberball experiment, he said: "I dare not go near the county matches these days. It would be too heart-breaking. People come up and express sympathy. I don't want it. I want to be playing for Sussex." He claimed he did not want a quarrel and that he was, in contrast to the days when he used its threat as a bargaining tool, "not at all sure" about a career in the Lancashire League.

Gilligan also spoke to a reporter, stating: "Obviously it would be absurd to alter a team which is playing so well as Sussex. We saw Maurice recently, and the

position was put to him – that we cannot very well alter the team at the present time. Maurice took this in the best possible way, as everyone knows he would." Gilligan was partly right. Sussex were doing well and were comfortably in the top half of the table. Official meetings are rarely occasions for shows of passion, though, and he was profoundly wrong about Tate's state of mind.

However, Tate, never one to look forward, was not expecting what happened next. In a scene reminiscent of his harrowing trip to Lord's before the Bodyline tour, in which he had been told to try harder, he was summoned to the committee room at Hove at the beginning of August.

The news this time was even more devastating. The club's chairman, Brigadier-General D'Arcy Charles Brownlow, informed Tate that the selectors would not be recommending his reappointment for the following season. He added that they could not envisage needing him to play any more in 1937.

In his column a couple of days later, Tate wrote of his sadness at not being picked to join "the boys by the seaside" during Hastings week, where he had "always done well". "But when you are an old man with a white beard, decrepit and haggard" he added, "one can't expect to play. Actually, I have never felt better than I do at present."

Age, in his mind, could not weary him. A photograph appeared in the press of Tate playing leapfrog in his garden with son Maurice junior, now a teenager. It demonstrated him to be in rude health, if looking a little on the chubby side. The shot looks like it was arranged. Perhaps the media-savvy Kathleen was once again trying to salvage her husband's reputation—and his career.

Tate marked the "sad anniversary" of the meeting with Brownlow in a column he wrote in 1938: "I shall never forget how I felt on returning home, after 27 years' loyal service, to think that I had been told in that fashion that I was not wanted. How I wished that the Selection Committee might have informed me in body." This was a direct criticism of Gilligan and his captain, Jack Holmes, for not "fronting up", as it is sometimes described. To be fair, Gilligan had tried to soften the blow by telling him early on of the 'resting' policy. His job was now to select the team, not nurture Tate. Yet how it hurt.

However, an injury crisis forced the selectors into a rapid change of plan and Tate was picked to play against Kent at Hastings. "So virtually I was recommended for dismissal one day and recalled the next," he told his readers. Tate was telephoned at home on the Friday evening to be told the news. Initially thinking it a hoax, he eventually recognised the caller's voice.

Tate did well against Kent, scoring 73 and taking four for 61 and two for 70 as Sussex triumphed by ten wickets. The festival crowd gave him a tremendous ovation after his innings. Tate still had the fans' adulation and continued to bowl with well-honed guile for the rest of the season, though observers noticed a slowing down.

There was, and is, confusion over just how definite Brownlow's words had been when telling Tate he was no longer needed. One would expect brigadier-general to be quite direct, unlike a politician. In an interview in October, Tate said: "I received a hint in August, but I thought I would have been engaged by Sussex for at least another year. I'm only 42, and I keep myself very fit." Had he been misinformed or

was he just kidding himself that he would go on forever? Typical of Tate, he probably thought that success on the pitch would sort out everything else.

He continued to pick up wickets, although not in large clusters, for the rest of the season, including four for 116 in the first innings of the final game, against Surrey at Hove. The *Sussex Daily News* described the early play as less than scintillating, reporting that "one of two very charming ladies, engaged in knitting, was heard to remark: 'Oh, isn't it all so peaceful.'" But then Tate "started on one of his old-time paths of destruction", bowling Andy Sandham after he had been in for more than three hours, having Stan Squires caught at the wicket, and getting Tom Barling caught in the gully by James Langridge. There was a knowing tone of nostalgia, of impending change, in the reporting.

In the second innings, Tate took one for 50, as Surrey won by seven wickets. The victim, caught and bowled, was Squires, a 28-year-old who had given up a promising career in stockbroking to pursue his love of cricket. It was Tate's 2,784th and last wicket in first-class cricket. He finished the season with just 46 wickets at an average of 29.67, his worst figures since 1914. Tellingly, though, Sussex did quite well, climbing to fifth.

On the night of 3rd September, the last day of the season, Sussex held a dinner at the Old Ship Hotel in Brighton. Miller-Hallett, who would live to the age of 97, paid tribute to Tate, according to the *Sussex Daily News*, remarking that "his name would remain in their minds as one of the giants of the cricket world". The same newspaper's end-of-season review said Tate's return of 46 wickets for the season had been "not a bad performance with his limited number of appearances".

The Sussex selectors, unlike the press, clearly felt Tate was no longer necessary to the team's success, and the rise up the championship must have offered them a further sense of vindication. The player did not share their view. Apparently oblivious to what he had been told in August, he bade the readers "au revoir for the season" and gave an "assurance that my heart and soul is in the welfare of Sussex cricket". It is reminiscent of the *Beyond the Fringe* sketch in which, just before a mission over enemy lines, an overly optimistic Second World War pilot, played by Jonathan Miller, asks commanding officer Peter Cook: "Goodbye, Sir, or is it au revoir?" "No, Perkins," is the hilarious reply. Tate's predicament was just as permanent, but nowhere near as darkly funny.

The club stood firm and, at a meeting on 11th September of the finance and general purposes committee, it was decided that "MW Tate's agreement be not renewed, but that he be given a bonus of £250". This was proposed by a WN Riley and seconded by none other than Sir Home Gordon himself. One can imagine a sense of glee as he sunk the second metaphorical knife between the mighty shoulders which had carried Sussex's attack for so long. The minutes are very matter-of-fact. The only official mention of the discontinuation of Tate's contract was recorded as the sixth, and final, point on the salaries section of the brief document.

When he heard, Tate was furious, although, not a wealthy man, he decided to accept the £250. The committee hoped the situation was all sorted, that it had bought silence through Tate's inherent loyalty and the payment it had promised. However, the situation festered and gradually became just like the pre-Bodyline tour shenanigans all over again. A war of words developed in the press. In late

October, a still seething Tate told reporters: “There is something wrong with a system which allows a cricketer with a service like mine to be dropped by his club unceremoniously.”

In a swipe at Brownlow and Miller-Hallett, he added: “There is a good deal I would like to say about the way cricket is being run. There are too many old men in charge… I do not know what I will do. I am thinking of running an hotel. Of course, I might get my name on the umpires’ list—if I am not too old.”

Sussex, aware of the negative publicity, responded. When secretary Lance Knowles was asked whether the £250 bonus was on the meagre side for a playing career stretching over 25 years, he reminded the public that Tate had received a club record of almost £2,000 for his benefit in 1930, adding: “We are not a particularly rich club.”

Sussex received letters of complaint and the press coverage was almost unremittingly negative so, a few days later, the club issued a lengthy statement setting out its case: “It is held in some quarters that Tate is fit enough to play for another season, and should have been given longer notice. An exceptionally strong selection committee considered that there was no room for Tate in 1938, and for that reason Tate was told on August 3 that his services would no longer be required.

“To enable him to look round he was told that he would not be asked to play for the remainder of the season unless casualties occurred. Tate left the room in a state of emotion. It so happened that casualties did occur and Tate played again, but there was no suggestion that he would be re-engaged.

“The past season has been a yearly engagement, thus the writing on the wall was clear to see. There is a vast difference between non-renewal of a yearly engagement and sacking. Recognising Tate’s popularity and gate drawing powers, the committee voted him an *ex gratia* payment of £250.

“Sussex admittedly owes much to Tate, but Tate owes something to the county which brought him out. Tate, who is still the committee’s servant, appears to have been somewhat free and inaccurate in his criticisms.

“It is pleasant to read that he has been inundated with offers. The committee hopes he will be able to secure a good appointment.”

The phrase “committee’s servant” must have rankled, but it was largely true. Also, the writing *had* been on the wall. Tate averred that he had been told he was among the top choices to run Sussex’s Nursery, but nothing came of this. This felt like rejection, pure and simple. Laetitia Stapleton wrote in her diary that “it might have been done more graciously”.

Tate was furious and resentful over his treatment. Replying to the county’s statement, he said: “I have nothing in view for next season. Three counties have asked me to play, but there is the question of qualification. Apparently, however, they agree with many Sussex people that my cricket career is not yet finished.”

Cricket is not a democracy, though, and there was no way back. The much-vaunted offers of contracts with other counties came to nothing. His journalism, with *Reynold’s News* (the newspaper’s title had been shortened in 1936) and various Sussex weeklies, was his only immediate source of income. He felt he had been let down, but he could have made a few more provisions for his future.

Stapleton, who had grown up watching Tate, was saddened, describing the Hove ground as “full of ghosts”, the player leaving in a “welter of bitterness”. “Surely things could be done otherwise,” Stapleton mused. “Maurice Tate continually referred to his ‘firing’ and was very low in spirits.”

The *Sussex Year Book* for 1938 dealt initially with the Tate issue in a pleasant, even generous, manner: “There will be general regret that Maurice Tate will be seen no longer in the county team. Not only has he been the greatest bowler in Sussex, but probably the best bowler in England since the War.” It offered Tate “best wishes for every success in the future”.

After this, though, its author Sir Home Gordon could not resist the urge to criticise. His words on the now-departed did a disservice to the club. Gordon described the “premature ageing of the county’s greatest cricketer”. Tate had become “a mere trader on his past reputation of having been the best English bowler since the War”, and remained the “idol of the faithful non-critical”. Tate was long to complain that it was not the fact he was sacked which upset him, but the manner in which it was carried out. Given Sir Home Gordon’s words, he had a point.

Trevor Wignall, in his column in the *Daily Express* on 21st October, praised Tate as a “bullock, smiling chap of the undefeatable spirit” who always spoke his mind and “never lifted his nose in the air”, his behaviour “invariably natural”. He went on: “Tate had his heart broken on very many occasions, but it was only on very rare occasions that he permitted it to be known. The way of his departure makes him out to be much greater than the game he adorned.”

Tate had indeed had his heart broken many times. But in contrast to Wignall’s stoical pen portrait, he demonstrated a sometimes controversial level of anguish each time an edge was missed or the ball went past the stumps. Wignall got it right when he articulated the public’s affection. He got it wrong in trying to portray Tate as a stiff-upper-lip type. It was his emotional openness and childlike emotional involvement with the game which gave him his popularity. Douglas Jardine rarely made his feelings known; Tate was no Jardine.

During his career he was also not averse to reminding over-familiar or condescending spectators of his status. Several times he told Sussex members to call him “Maurice” or “Mr Tate”, never “Tate”. At the Oval Test in 1926, Peter Dickson, then a boy of around nine years of age, asked Tate to “get me Chapman’s autograph”. Tate replied: “Chapman? Chapman? I don’t know of anyone of that name.” After a pause, he added: “Do you mean Mr Chapman?” Proper respect had to be maintained. Dickson, in a letter he wrote in the mid-1970s, said: “Whether this was a mark of respect for his captain, or a sarcastic comment on the attitude of players towards gentlemen, I don’t know, but it taught me a lesson in manners I have never forgotten.” Cricket’s administrators were not so easy to tame—and now he was out of the game.

On 23rd October Tate told the Brighton Herald that several counties had suggested some work “in an advisory capacity”, such as coaching. Was this genuine or a sad reprising of his old tactic of dealing with the Sussex committee. If the latter, it was not likely to work. Anyway, Tate said he was likely to leave a decision until after his next adventure, something he had lined up for the winter.

# Chapter 29

## Homecoming.

"*It was part of his nature that he always had to have a little grumble.*"
—Laetitia Stapleton

DURING THE 1937 season, Tate gained permission from Sussex to go on a cricketing tour of South America over Christmas and New Year. The team was led by Sir Theodore Brinckman, whose entire first-class career consisted of the games on that trip against the Argentinian 'National' XI, a team made up mainly of ex-pat Englishmen and their offspring.

Brinckman was a decent player, turning out on many occasions for MCC sides, but nowhere near the standing of Tate. The other big names selected were England players Andy Sandham, Bob Wyatt and Jim Sims. Brinckman's team suffered an embarrassing upset when they lost the second game, with Dennet Ayling, a Buenos Aires-born off-spinner, taking 11 wickets. But they won the first and drew the third, and last, match in the series, leaving it tied at one-all. The games were not well attended, interest in cricket being limited among the wider Argentinian population.

Sadly for South American fans of medium-paced bowling, Tate was not involved. During the voyage out to Argentina, seemingly run-down by the events of the past few months, he contracted pneumonia, having left with a "slight cold". His foot also became severely poisoned, leading to concerns about whether it might have to be amputated.

Luckily this was not necessary, but Tate was forced to spend several weeks in the British Hospital in Buenos Aires, missing Christmas at home, while his team-mates performed. It was intended as a 'social' tour, much like that Tate had gone on to India and Ceylon in 1926/27. However, it was the antithesis in terms of enjoyment. Back in England, Laetitia Stapleton noted that Tate's ailment and illness "were, doubtless, due as much to his unhappiness as to anything else"

The tour over, Tate's ship, the HIGHLAND BRIGADE, returned to England on 8th February 1938. The journey had taken in stops at Montevideo, Santos and Rio de Janeiro. He rested his leg at home.

The day after German leader Adolf Hitler annexed his native Austria in the *Anschluss* of 12th March, Stapleton had Tate and Kathleen around for tea. "Despite the gloom, it was impossible to feel depressed when Maurice was around," she wrote. Tate complained that "one or two people" on the tour had not visited him in hospital, including his former England captain, Bob Wyatt. But "it was part of his nature that he always had to have a little grumble about something and one did not take it too seriously".

Tate, too incapacitated to play league cricket, was now a full-time journalist. Among his greatest triumphs for *Reynold's News* that summer was to pick Len Hutton for his England XI for the final Ashes match at the Oval, in which the

Yorkshireman scored the then record 364. He had singled him out earlier as a major talent, as he had noticed Denis Compton as something special right from the start of his career. Tate fretted about whether the Middlesex man could continue combining his cricket with playing on the wing for Arsenal in the winter without becoming stale and tired.

As the 1938 season was about to get underway, Tate was presented with his Sussex leaving cheque for £250 at a dinner held at Brighton's Old Ship Hotel on 2nd May. The *Sussex Express* reported that president Alex Miller-Hallett had "assured him of the affection which would always be felt for him in Sussex, and that there would be a warm welcome awaiting him on every Sussex ground". Tate acknowledged the good wishes "in appreciative and sincere terms".

This mutual politeness was a temporary respite. Tate was still extremely bitter about what had happened and the *Maurice Tate Calling* column that year reads like a course of therapy, during which the patient becomes, over time, more and more open about his true feelings.

On 13th May, he reported that his foot was recovering well, but he was missing the "hurly-burly" of playing. Quite desperately, judging by an idea he posited in June. Tate wrote that the president of Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club was keen on making lob bowling, that now quaint style from a bygone age, "fashionable" again. It was certainly a change of tone, not to mention pace, from the county which had given the world Harold Larwood and Bill Voce. Tate joked about the idea, but his comments suggest he might have regarded it as a possible, if highly implausible, way to make a comeback: "If lobsters come back to favour it may be that I can return to the game in my old age. If so, I think I'd grow a beard to hide the ball in the run-up behind the wicket." Tate had a funny idea of old age, often associating it with excessive growth of facial hair. His own mortality was a concept alien to him.

At around this time he made a visit to the Hove ground but, still smarting, did not leave his car. It was a peculiar stance, especially as he had conversations with several well-wishers while sitting there.

A letter from a reader in late June unleashed more of Tate's bitterness. They wanted to know the names of the selection committee which had decided to omit him. The list of guilty men, seemingly beyond forgiveness, was: "Arthur Gilligan, AJ Holmes and WN Riley." Tate added: "Another reader asks whether it is true I was told last year that they have no room for me. Yes, sir! Perfectly true." It was hardly a revelation. Sussex's statement of the previous autumn had confirmed as much.

Tate felt lonely. He was always one to court company in his day-to-day life. Think how communal and clubbable he was. His hobbies included beagling and watching Brighton and Hove Albion. For a few years he had been a Freemason. In the field, he was even known to indulge in what he called "Tatey-Tatey", effectively wittering away to himself, when no one on the field was in the mood for a chat. Tate needed people. It was no fun when people did not need him.

During his career he had hated being left out of any match, his enthusiasm to bowl matched by that of his captains to use him. So another column entry late in July was a bit rich: "Had I been given periodical rests throughout my career, as are some young players today, I think that probably I should have kept on until I

qualified for the Old Age Pension!" Later, he commented favourably on Lancashire's "team spirit", the implication being that Sussex's was not as good: "All play for the side and not for themselves. That's how it should be."

In August, the anniversary of being told his contract was not to be renewed, Tate declared himself "happy in my new career as a sports writer". He was putting on a front, made less effective by his frequent outbursts to the contrary.

Meanwhile, Tate's oldest son, Maurice junior, better known as Jimmy, was beginning to do well in club cricket. Aged 14, it looked for a time as if a third member of the family might make it into the county team. Tate was keen to talk up his chances. In one game, he told readers, Jimmy had taken eight wickets with his left-arm medium-pacers, "bowling really well" and with "natural bodywork", a quality he always attributed to himself. He added that two counties had approached Jimmy regarding possible qualification.

An unidentified newspaper clipping from a few years later was headlined "The Laugh was on Father". It reported that Tate had opened a letter sent from a boy requesting an autograph. In his "usual charming manner", he sent off a piece of paper bearing the message: "With best wishes from Maurice Tate." A few days later, however, Tate was surprised to receive another letter from the boy, saying there had been a mistake, and that he had "wanted the autograph of Maurice's son", who had "made a name for himself in Burgess Hill cricket, and has had trials for the county". Tate would have seen the funny side.

Jimmy was indeed later to get trials with Sussex and play for the second XI, but he was always regarded as a good club player, rather than first-class standard. There was some suggestion in the 1930s that Tate was so bitter at his dismissal that he wanted Jimmy to play for someone other than Sussex, but his comments did not support the idea.

There is a fascinating, possibly unconscious, echo of what Fred had reportedly said 36 years earlier on the train back from his ill-fated Test match at Old Trafford. By August 1938 Tate, now fit enough to take the field again, played with Jimmy for a Pools XI at Newdigate, in Surrey. In Maurice Tate Calling, he wrote of the drawn game, in which his bad foot had prevented him from batting: "Still, my young son made it up for me and played a great game." Like Fred, Maurice Tate was keen on the dynastic idea that sons should atone for the shortcomings of, and wounds inflicted upon, their fathers.

Maurice and Jimmy appeared together during a special wartime game for a Sussex XI in July 1941. The *Daily Mirror* excitedly reported: "Apparently it's the first time three direct generations of one family have appeared in a county team—and for grandfather, father and grandson to maintain an almost unbroken association with a club is certainly new. If Maurice-the-second attains Test rank—as well he may—cricket history will be made."

Jimmy had not played for the real Sussex team, but it was a nice story. Instead of pursuing a career in cricket he was instead to follow another Tate tradition and become a hotelier. He had nothing to 'make up' to such a successful father.

There is little to suggest that Tate, despite foisting his famous forename on his elder son, was a pushy father. Some of the family recall that he was quite strict at times with his children, particularly his daughters, but parental firmness in those days was the norm. Others, however, state that he was so laid back as to be near-

horizontal. Given his schedule as a player, Kathleen must have done the bulk of the childcare, although Tate was always keen to return to his home.

As the children grew up, they began to realise just how famous their father was. In the remaining photographs of family life, everyone appears happy. In a couple, one cannot help noticing the look of awe and adoration in young Michael's eyes as he gazes at his father. Millions of cricket fans felt the same. The Hove ground felt empty without the ever-present Tate. He and Fred had been on the staff for almost 50 years between them, and now they were gone.

Tate himself was entering middle age and not qualified to do anything but play cricket. He had made little provision for any other career, except his writing, and his celebrity status would not last forever. What was he to do?

# Chapter 30

## Poor, Poor Fred.

"*I hope to ask of you to extend the great hand of generosity and aid me with a few shillings.*"

—Fred Tate

MAURICE TATE WAS not in a good position. If not quite 'on his uppers', he was not a wealthy man. He must have felt directionless for a man in his early to mid-40s. But what of Fred?

He had lived to see his son avenge many of the wrongs he had suffered and was now in his seventies. From an unpromising start in the Brighton workhouse, he had sired ten children, one of whom had become a sporting superstar. In 1933, his daughter Muriel was named beauty queen of Derbyshire, a source of considerable pride.

Cecil Tate, one of Maurice's younger brothers, played some first-class cricket. Born in 1908 and a slow left-armer, he turned out for Derbyshire in 1928. He then moved to Warwickshire, where he made a few appearances between 1931 and 1933. Cecil was not to have as much success as his father or brother, making only 11 first-class appearances. A bowling average of 51.12 and a batting average of 9.11 were nothing special. Cecil, like his brother and grandfather, later moved into the licensed trade, living until 1997.

In 1921 Fred became cricket coach at Trent College, a boarding school in Nottingham, but the appointment was short-lived as, the following year, he took over the running of Derbyshire's own "Nursery", the equivalent of that at Sussex which had brought his son through.

Derbyshire were desperate for a modicum of success. In 1920 they had had a truly terrible season, losing 17 out of 18 games, and securing a truly remarkable zero points. The other game, against Nottinghamshire at Chesterfield, was abandoned without a ball being bowled. Under the system of the time this was declared a 'no result', with no points awarded. They used 39 players during the

campaign, as rudderless an effort as one could imagine. Fears were raised about the future of Derbyshire's first-class status.

Part of Fred's new job was scouting the county for talent. This was, given the scarcity of resources, a necessity. It was rather like his own discovery under the scheme run in the late 19th century by the third Earl of Sheffield.

At least Fred knew results could not get any worse. The team came 11th in 1922, tenth in 1923, last again in 1924 and 14th in 1925. It was a slight improvement, but the level of his influence is hard to gauge because this 'rolling stone' of a man was soon off again.

Fred retired from coaching and took over the running of the Robin Hood Hotel, in Derby. This was where Maurice discovered one of his own trademarks. On 17th January 1929, during MCC's tour of Australia, the *Adelaide Mail* reported: "Maurice Tate is famous for four things—his bowling, his feet, his smile, and his hat.

'There is a story connected with this hat,' he said, when asked if he wore the dilapidated head covering as a mascot.

'My father keeps a hotel in Derby. I went to visit him and hung my hat up in the dining room. When I went to get it my hat had disappeared and this (fingering the old brown felt) was there instead. There was only one thing to do. I did it. I told my wife I was going to take it to Australia as a mascot. I also told her I expected to get "the bird", but that I would chance it.'

'Did you get "the bird" In Melbourne?'

'No. It made the crowd laugh. I didn't mind that, and it kept the sun off.'

'Has it brought you luck?'

'Yes. It is a jolly old hat and, anyhow, it is the only one I've got,' Maurice concluded with an infectious grin."

The family had some fun times in Derby but, like most of his ventures, Fred's second stint as a landlord, after his years at the Burrell Arms in Haywards Heath, did not go well. He wrote in 1937: "I took a Public House and after a few years, the opening of various clubs and Legions compelled me to lose what little I had after a loss with Farrow's Bank."

Farrow's was the organisation with which Maurice had also held investments. It is uncertain who advised whom. Father and son shared a propensity for unfortunate financial decisions.

Fred, who surely deserved a contented retirement, had returned to the poverty of his youth. Perhaps Sir Home Gordon's comments about him being "inadequate" as a man stemmed from this as much as his personal life.

On 2nd December 1937 Fred, aged 70, attended court in Derby, accused of stealing a bottle of milk from a Co-Operative Society cart in the city. A PC Cameron told magistrates he had seen the incident while on 'special watch'. The case was dismissed, however. Fred, the *Nottingham Evening Post* reported, was described as having an "unblemished character", the newspaper adding: "All he did when he passed the cart was wave to an acquaintance. He did not touch any milk." Even though he was exonerated, it was a strange case, the reporting of it most unbefitting of a former England player.

Fred was desperate for money and started to try cashing in on his only bankable assets: his son and his past. A series of letters he sent from late 1937

into the next year makes abject reading. In the correspondence he tried to hawk much of the memorabilia of Maurice's career to George Wolfe, the Hampstead-based nephew of Sir Julien Cahn. Cahn, the heir to a furniture empire, was well known in cricketing circles in the 1930s, putting out his own teams of stars in friendly matches. He was especially prominent in the Midlands, where he was based. It was probably at a Derbyshire county match, or one of Cahn's friendlies, where Fred became acquainted with the family, and Wolfe, who was a collector of cricketing merchandise, in particular.

The first of the known existing letters, dated 9th December 1937, detailed Fred's sending of a photograph of himself and Sussex's Duleepsinhji. Fred's need for money trumped his pride, leading him to take an overly obsequious tone to his rich client: "I think there were only about two printed and it does me the very great honour to hand it to you to adorn your collection (might add that I have lost a stone since this was taken)."

Fred explained the collapse of his hotel business and told Wolfe that he was in receipt of welfare payments. He added: "My son Maurice is away but there are hopes when returning we shall be a bit better off." Another case of 'making it up' to his father?

Fred continued by describing the difficulties of family life. His wife Gertrude was suffering with her heart, meaning that he and beauty queen daughter Muriel had to care for her. "I hope to ask of you to extend the great hand of generosity and aid me with a few shillings," he continued. "It would help us wonderfully. I don't myself want anything, but it would make my wife happier."

Fred defends his "untarnished and unblemished" character, but adds that food is "dear and scarce". This complaint about the cost of living casts some doubt on his innocence when it came to the milk-cart incident. Fred insisted he did not "like to broadcast poverty" but was as eager to please as a dog lying on its back when greeting its owner, as he wrote to Wolfe: "I shall endeavour to get other mementoes for you. God bless you and spare you and yours many years and grant you your every wish."

Fred was not working alone, it seems. Maurice, on his voyage to South America, looked to have been colluding with his father to make a few pounds: "I have written Maurice at the Argentine to collect what cricket curios and statistics appertaining to Capt Brinckman's Team if he can and I will also obtain some of his former trophies."

And Wolfe appeared just as keen to buy whatever was on offer. In Fred's letter to Wolfe on 15th December, he offered to procure photographs by *The Tatler* magazine of Maurice returning from the 1928/29 tour of Australia and beagling. He also promised a Test match ball and tried to hawk a Sussex badge, adding: "Should like to see you on your arrival and grip your hand. Are there any signatures you would like me to get next summer?"

Whether Wolfe bought the items out of interest or philanthropy is uncertain, but his purchases were greeted with a cloying gratitude. There were shades of Fred's workhouse origins in his letter of 19th December: "Words fail to express our deep thanks for your great and kindly thought to gladden our Xmas—a real Dickensian token—thank you so much." He offered to "devote the whole of my future to endeavouring to obtain all you want and mention".

In the last of the known letters, dated 31st January 1938, Fred promised to send a ball used in Maurice's final Test, against South Africa in 1935, and a photo of Maurice with Bob Wyatt as they set off on the 1930/31 tour of that country. Wolfe had evidently requested the signatures of certain players, with Fred promising: "I think it shall be, but it may take a month or two but I shall always be on the lookout for you. I am approaching others."

He also revealed that Maurice, still to return from Argentina, was "on the mend". He added: "I don't quite know what he is about to do. He has been in a deep shadow these last three months. I hope Sir you are keeping well, looking forward to our great game. I long to grip your hand and orally thank you for your deeds."

Soon after this time Fred moved back to Sussex to be near Maurice and his family for the remainder of his years. He often visited them at home on Sundays.

In one cricketing sense he could say he had done better even than Maurice. Fred's Test match bowling average, albeit in a very brief career consisting of only two wickets, was 25.5. Maurice's, besmirched somewhat by Don Bradman, was 26.16. Ranjitsinhji always rated Fred the better bowler. It was an opinion shared by few.

A photograph from the 1930s shows Fred, a corpulent man, his hair now receded, standing proudly next to Maurice, Kathleen and the children, posing as the *pater familias*. His sense of self-worth—buffeted over the years by infamy and poverty—could not have been as strong as his burly physique. Poor, poor Fred.

Note: the letters mentioned in this chapter have been provided by kind permission of the Nicholas Sharp and David Frith collections

# Chapter 31

## Game Over.

"*Fancy them doing that to us.*"
—Maurice Tate

TATE, HAVING LEFT first-class cricket, remained a popular man. Every detail of even the rather obscure tour of Argentina had excited the press. How best to cash in on his fame was the question. He was writing for *Reynold's News* and reporting on football matches for the *Sunday Referee*, which also featured Middlesex's Patsy Hendren and Yorkshire's Bill Bowes among its writers. Another, more surprising, name was the film star Shirley Temple, bringing a bit of Hollywood glitz to this eclectic publication.

The *Referee* also included what it boasted were the most reliable tips for the football pools, a growing craze during the late 1930s. Perhaps it was this which persuaded Tate into a second ill-conceived business venture, following his short-lived sports shop in Brighton a decade earlier.

The *Daily Mirror's* gossip columnist Derek Tangye revealed in 1938 that he had been talking to a character called Bob Garrett, who had lost "much money" during a career in the film business. Instead, Tangye reported, "he's started a Cricket Pool with Maurice Tate, which he believes will be as big a success as the football pools are during the winter".

The rise of pools had caused a moral panic among politicians on the Left. In 1936, the former Labour leader, George Lansbury, told the House of Commons that "pool betting is spreading the evil of gambling very considerably".

In a debate on 5th November 1934, another Labour MP, Tom Williams, read out an extract from a letter to *The Times* the previous May, stating: "On the occasion of the match between Lancashire and Somerset at Old Trafford last week there was distributed to spectators leaving the field an envelope containing a description of Britain's First Cricket Pool.

"The claim was made that this Cricket Totalisator Pool presents the follower of cricket with an opportunity to make money in summer to the same extent as the football follower made in the winter.

"Having commenced with football, and made a real financial success of it, these enterprising pool merchants are now going in for cricket, so that there is to be no lull in their pools during winter and summer."

That would have been Tate's hope. However, the problem with cricket is that it is more complex in scoring terms than football. Outcomes would be harder to boil down to a 'tick-in-the box' format. The three basic results are still available—win, lose or draw—but how does one define the equivalent of a score draw or give extra points in the extremely unlikely scenario that a customer gets the margin of victory exactly right? Also, people had more to do in the summer than winter, and would have felt less disposed to filling in forms. Cricket, unlike football, takes varying lengths of time, so not all results could be discovered at the same time on a Saturday afternoon.

It looked as though Tate was once again being talked in to putting his name to a venture by an overenthusiastic businessman, with little thought about quite how it would work. Garrett might have been ahead of his time in other respects, coming up with another idea reported in the *Mirror*. He wanted to create in the UK what the smart set in Paris at the time called an "SVP" system: "By dialling SVP on the telephone a Parisian can get or find anything he wants, from an elephant to the answer to some general knowledge questions."

Even in the age of mobile phones, getting hold of elephants usually takes more than a simple call, but question-and-answer lines are big business. Unfortunately, Maurice Tate's Pools was not. In 1950 the company, dormant for several years, was formally wound up.

By 1939 Tate's troublesome foot had cleared up enough for proper consideration of a return to cricket. Rumours of a possible league engagement had circulated for years. Indeed, Tate had encouraged them during his pay-bargaining with Sussex. The president of Walsall Cricket Club, the titans of the Birmingham League, wanted to give Tate a contract for the summer, but the committee baulked at the £12 ten shillings weekly wage Tate required. Eventually the members were worn down and reversed their decision not to take him on.

Tate made his debut for Walsall in an away match at Moseley, about 15 miles away, in early June. Some 1,500 Walsall supporters made the trip, a huge number at a time when transport was much more difficult. The game ended in a draw, with Tate taking three for 73 off 26 overs as the home side declared on 206 for nine. Walsall got to 168 for two in reply, Tate not being required to bat.

The future Warwickshire County Cricket Club scorer, Philip Pike, then aged 12, watched the match. He wrote that his "main memory" was of obtaining Tate's autograph, "whilst after the Moseley innings he was sitting in the sunshine on the pavilion steps with his feet in a bowl of water". They were still giving him problems. A Walsall cobbler was detailed to make a special pair of boots, which helped subdue the pain incurred by a quarter of a century of effort and his travails on Sir Theodore Brinckman's South American tour.

Tate's stint in the Midlands was always going to be difficult, and not just because of its physical demands on a 44-year-old body. His predecessor, Kent and England leg-spinner Tich Freeman, had enjoyed wonderful times with the club. During his debut season of 1937 Freeman took 98 wickets at just 8.27 runs each. The following year he captured 75 at 13. Tate was not nearly as successful in 1939. He took 14 wickets at an average of 24.64, not too bad but below the standards expected of a club professional. With the bat he managed 380 runs at an average of 40, with a highest score of 61.

Under the bonus system, the Walsall professional got payments for every score over 50 or for each haul of five or more wickets. This meant that Tate received just one bonus, for his score of 61. Freeman was no John Paul Getty when it came to business, but even he had had written into his contract a guaranteed £100 benefit payment for the season. Tate's lack of commercial acumen told again, with no such proviso for himself.

As for Walsall, after years of total dominance of the league, they fell to a lowly sixth place in 1939. Tate was not retained. Always a home body, he could have invoked the words of *The South Country* by Sussex poet Hilaire Belloc, had he been so minded:

*When I am living in the Midlands*
*That are sodden and unkind,*
*I light my lamp in the evening:*
*My work is left behind;*
*And the great hills of the South Country*
*Come back into my mind.*

For the 1940 season, with cricket still going on despite the Second World War, Walsall replaced Tate with Worcestershire all-rounder Dick Howorth. He had a far better time, scoring 687 runs and taking 60 wickets, and was retained for 1941. Coincidentally, Howorth later shared a rare distinction with Tate. In 1947 he became the next England cricketer to take a wicket with his first ball in Test cricket. The next man after that to do so was another Worcestershire left-arm spinner, Richard Illingworth, in 1991.

His cricketing powers had evidently waned, yet Tate's expertise was called upon in a court case in late 1939. John Barfoot, an 11-year-old boy from Seaford, East

Sussex, fractured his skull when fielding during a school match. The family contended that the master in charge had placed him in a “suicidal” position around silly mid-on. They sued the county council.

However, the master, George Stevenson, argued that he had put the boy at square leg and that he had moved out of position and closer to the bat of his own volition. Tate, chosen as an expert witness, said it was dangerous for inexperienced boys to stand within ten yards of the bat. However, he added that fielding close in front of the batsman was no more risky than doing so square of the wicket.

“I have retreated often when the bowler’s length was not very good,” he told the court with the relish of a raconteur. “If you have a really good bowler like Larwood it is different. I have stood up within four yards for him, although now and again I have let one or two pass. I have had Hendren very successfully stand up within three yards for me on one Australian trip.”

The judge, Mr Justice Humphreys, decided the boy had been fielding too close and awarded him £750 in damages. Summing up, he decided that Stevenson, who had combined his field-placing duties with umpiring, had not exercised due care. He also disagreed with Tate’s assertion that silly mid-on was no more dangerous than short square leg.

Mr Justice Humphreys told the court: “With fear and trembling I venture to differ from Mr Maurice Tate. I find that the boy was in a dangerous position. I am satisfied Mr Stevenson would not have allowed the boy to be there if he had noticed him.” Tate would not have enjoyed having his opinion on a cricketing matter overruled, but not many can say they have made a judge admit to trembling.

At this time the world beyond the cosy confines of cricket was changing. War had been declared in September and the country was gearing up once more for protracted conflict with an implacable foe. Laetitia Stapleton recalled that, as summer was coming to an end, “I had another jolly tea with the Tates; Maurice, yet again, talking cricket all the time as if nothing else mattered”. It was typical Tate behaviour, ignoring the inevitable unpleasantness to come. But he was willing to do his bit for the war effort once more.

The 44-year-old applied for a posting with the Royal Air Force. Laetitia Stapleton’s husband, who was in the RAF, gave him some names to contact. Tate wrote to Mrs Stapleton on 18th April 1940 saying that “they have written stating my name is registered and they are considering it. That’s the position, so really I have not bothered Mr Stapleton’s friends”. In the end, the application came to nothing. Mrs Stapleton wrote that he had “gone into hiding” after being turned down, “feeling very low and thought he had an enemy. This was, of course, Tate’s imagination running away with him”.

Things improved, however, when Tate joined the army instead. Not only this, he was awarded a commission on 29th October 1940. Second Lieutenant Maurice William Tate was to spend the war as a billeting officer. He had commented after the First World War that he was not cut out to become the army’s youngest brigadier-general, but the title of ‘lieutenant’ was one which filled Tate with pride. Based largely in Sussex, he also loved the job of sorting out soldiers’ lodgings, which involved many meetings in pubs. More importantly, it meant he could keep

playing cricket, and was in demand, especially as so many young men from the county game were away on service.

During the Second World War, Tate appeared in several matches at the County Ground at Hove. The cricket was not described as first-class, but it was of a pretty decent standard. Much is made of Tate's disillusionment with the sport, and Sussex in particular, after he was released, but he still loved going back to perform, rather than sit in his car and watch.

In September 1940 he played in a Sussex Club and Ground v Local Defence Volunteers match. During play an enemy aircraft passed overhead and dropped two bombs on the ground. The players and spectators spreadeagled themselves on the ground. Luckily neither bomb exploded. Immediately afterwards Tate walked up to Arthur Gilligan, who was also taking part and, as always, whispered something, from behind a cupped hand, into his former captain's ear. He was asked what his team-mate had confided. Barely able to conceal his amusement, Gilligan repeated the remark: "Fancy *them* doing that to *us!*"

In 1941 Tate's daughter Betty got married. Tate gave her away at the ceremony in Burgess Hill, standing proudly in his military uniform. He played in four games for Sussex that summer: against his rejectors, the RAF, in three one-day encounters, and in a two-day game against Cambridge University. He enjoyed reasonable success for a 46-year-old, with a couple of three-wicket hauls.

Cricket kept going in 1942. Playing for Sussex against the United Services in a two-innings-per-side match, Tate got an early glimpse of a man who, to many, was to become his only equal as a medium to medium-fast bowler: Alec Bedser. Tate managed five for 37, coming on as first change. He remained 11 not out, batting at number eight, when Sussex replied. Tate went on to take another three wickets and hit 30 runs when he batted again, but the match was a draw.

In July, Tate put out his own XI at Bognor Regis, against Surrey and England bowler Alf Gover's team. Gover's side kept on batting after winning, to give the put-upon wartime crowd something to enjoy. Tate played a few more games as the war went on, but thereafter his career was more on the leisurely side.

On 24th February 1943 Fred died, aged 75. He had been extremely proud of Maurice's achievements. A likeable man, he was spoken of kindly by the cricket fraternity. On 3rd March *The Times* even accorded him the rare distinction of an entry in its leader column. The subject, inevitably, was "dropped catches". It read: "Empires have fallen since the ball slipped through Tate's fingers, but the moment's fumble has not been forgotten. Ordinary mortals armour themselves against fate by telling one another that the man who never made a mistake never made anything." But they did not have to deal with cricket fans, whose collective memory was "constantly refreshed at the fount of *Wisden*".

*The Times* noticed how exposed cricketers can be, compared with other sportsmen, expressing sympathy that the ball from Jack Saunders which ended the match in 1902 would have dismissed even the greatest batsman. However, it added that Tate's dropped catch was "high but easy". It voiced the hope that Tate had remained "sturdily indifferent to the tricks of fame" and put the incident into perspective by "remembering it, if at all, with a smiling sense of man's helplessness when the gods decide to amuse themselves at his expense". That was little more than wishful thinking, given the trauma Fred had endured. But he

would have managed a laugh at the mock seriousness of the piece. At least he was not forgotten.

Maurice Tate continued with his military work. At the end of the war, the army, happy with him, offered an extension, but he declined. This was maybe a mistake, as he had taken to military life, in some senses like that of being a county cricketer. It had provided a decent, reliable living, with the vast military bureaucracy meaning he did not have to face up to organising his own life. Tate's journalism was not quite so certain and his prospects otherwise were limited.

There was time, however, for one final cricketing flourish. Surrey, belatedly celebrating their 100th anniversary, organised a one-day game against an Old England XI. Herbert Sutcliffe, Frank Woolley, Patsy Hendren, Douglas Jardine, Percy Fender, Tich Freeman and Tate were among the players. Surrey declared on 248 for six. Tate took none for 26 off eight overs. He did not bat as Old England made 232 for five, the single-innings game ending in a draw. There were 370 Test match caps on show that day and the 15,000 spectators went home happy.

As the 1940s came to a close, Tate was still performing his duties as a press man. Denzil Batchelor, the sports editor of *Picture Post*, wrote of the "sheer entertainment and educative value" he provided. Tate was known to regale his colleagues of how it was once normal to eat a steak for breakfast before bowling in a Test match. "Having eased his belt at the thought of it, Maurice will gleefully comment on the perspicacity of a famous cricket writer who dismissed him, once and for all, as a mere seaside bowler," Batchelor wrote.

He was still dwelling on criticism. He could give it out too. Batchelor attributed to Tate a "fearless readiness to put his finger on feeble play which is rare in a professional in this connection… He is made of sterner stuff; not least because he comes from cricketing stock and knew the game, either at first-, or second-hand, in the Golden Age".

In 1946, Alec Bedser, who, like Tate, had had his substantive first-class career delayed by war, made his Test debut at the age of 27. The parallels were obvious. The 1947 *Wisden* noted that Bedser had never seen Tate in his prime and had not modelled himself on any other bowler. But it added: "He and his brother simply live for cricket and they are popular wherever they appear." *Plus ça change*.

In 1953, Bedser surpassed Tate's record for wickets taken in an Ashes series, managing 39. The Trinidadian ex-pat Aldwyn Roberts, known as Lord Kitchener, wrote a song to commemorate the feat, the 'Alec Bedser Calypso'. It asked: "Alec Bedser, who taught you to bowl Australia?" Not Tate, it seems.

Even the advent of Bedser, who went on to take 236 international wickets, was not enough to satisfy all in the absence of Tate. After the thrashing by Bradman's "Invincibles" in 1948, Pathé put together a piece a year later asking: "Can British Cricket Regain its Old Glory?" Typical of the soul-searching which goes on when one's Ashes opponents are in the ascendancy, it looked at what needed to be done to bring through more world-class players.

Tate's place in the pantheon looked even more assured when he, along with 25 other retired professionals, was made an honorary life member of MCC. He had come a long way since his uneasy dealings with Lord's in 1932.

Tate took to visiting the County Ground at Hove more often too. He got to know some of the players' wives, who sat in the same area as the former stars, who were

very fond of him. Money was still tight and, in 1950, Tate followed another family tradition and became the landlord of a pub, the King's Arms, in the delightful East Sussex village of Rotherfield. Tate was interviewed, rather cornily, by *Sussex Review* magazine. Asked how he was doing, he replied: "Oh, very well, although I've really only just taken over. I'm still, you might say, playing myself in… It's a family affair and we shall be all right once we've got things under."

Rupert Webb, who was the Sussex wicketkeeper at the time, thought Tate was a "lovely fella". On the day that petrol rationing stopped in 1950, Webb and his wife filled up the tank and drove out to the King's Arms to see their friend. "She knew him as well, because when he came to talk to me, she'd talk to him too, and she used to sit near him in the pavilion at the County Ground," Webb said. "So we went round and spent the evening with him, talking to him. It was just a lovely evening. We were happy that almost the last vestige of the war had been removed. There was nothing more that could be done. Everything else, I think, had been de-rationed. So we were all very pleased." The trio spent a couple of hours in conversation. "He was pleased that a Sussex player had come up to see him on a momentous sort of day," said Webb. "He was so nice."

Tate's kindly ways and good humour were ideally suited to coaching. He accepted a post at Tonbridge School, just over the Kent–Sussex border from Rotherfield. Among the boys in his charge was Colin Cowdrey, soon to become one of the giants of English cricket, and the first man to 100 Test caps. In one match when Tate was umpiring, a bowler let go a huge appeal against Cowdrey. He gave him not out and he proceeded to play beautifully. Tate admitted he might have got things wrong, but argued that, such was the grace on display, that it was surely worth it. It was not the sort of decision he would have taken lightly when bowling. Cowdrey remained fond of Tate.

He was not alone among the Tonbridge boys. One of them, JR Keith, recalled that, when umpiring, Tate would indicate when a batsman taking a 'two leg' guard had the spot on the crease "by elevating two fingers in a gesture that wasn't usually associated with polite society—with a perfectly straight face, of course".

Running a pub was hard work and Kathleen and the family had to pitch in while Tate was away. John Marshall, the Sussex-educated editor of the *London Evening News*, wrote a whimsical account of his own cricketing exploits, called *The Weaving Willow*. Its dénouement is a description of a match he played at Rotherfield, with the Tate family and his fellow journalist John Arlott on the same side. On the wall of the King's Arms hung that famous Tête-à-Tête picture, taken of Fred and Maurice on the green at Lindfield more than 50 years earlier.

Marshall reported happily that each of the Tate children, the twins, Jimmy and Michael, had "vied with the other to see to our well-being". Play got underway, Tate delivering the ball, still with a "grand spring in the run and a strong upward sweep to the arm", invoking memories of his "younger and slimmer, and rather less grizzled" self.

Tate failed to take any wickets, the surprise star being Arlott, who managed four with a mixture of slow deliveries. When the side batted, Tate opened with his old friend Tich Cornford. Jimmy Tate starred with 96 in about half an hour. Marshall's abiding memory, though—and who can blame him?—was when Tate ambled over to him at mid-off and, via the usual hand cupped to his mouth, "as if

about to impart some secret of the greatest import—a gesture all my own generation will remember with nostalgic affection—boomed: 'Care for a couple of overs before tea, John?'"

Rotherfield suited the Tates, but they decided to move in late 1952 to take over the Huntsman, a smaller premises, in Eridge, a few miles away. One reason might have been fear. The King's Arms is regarded by followers of paranormal phenomena as one of the most haunted pubs in Sussex. Kathleen and the children reported hearing light footsteps above and finding nobody present when they investigated. The family referred to one of the bedrooms as "the special room". On one occasion Tate was in there when he felt someone or something touch him. Thinking it was one of his children, he turned round to ask: "What do you want?" Nobody was there.

While he was landlord of the Huntsman, Tate's mother Gertrude died, on 3rd October 1955, aged 83. Overshadowed by Fred's fame, she was little mentioned by Tate in his writings, but she brought him and his nine siblings up, often under great financial stress, with a husband who was—at least early on—frequently absent. She was the unsung hero of the Tate story.

The Huntsman was, and is, a nice pub, but it was deemed too small to give the family an adequate income. With some help from the Cricket Welfare Association, they took over the larger Greyhound Inn in the East Sussex village of Wadhurst in late 1955. The pub is near the cricket green and, from the mid-to-late 19th century, it had been run by Jacob Pitt, a notable all-rounder of the time.

Tate, instantly recognisable and without airs and graces, became a popular figure in Wadhurst. Long-time resident Stan Cosham, who opened a museum devoted to the village in his back garden, was on nodding terms with the great man. "He was a nice fella, Maurice," Cosham, now in his mid-80s, told me.

Yet the calm of this picturesque village on the edge of the Ashdown Forest was to be destroyed. At around 3.15pm on Friday 20th January 1956, something truly horrible happened. Amid drizzly weather, the villagers heard a loud rumble then an almighty bang.

An RAF Meteor jet crashed into the International Stores on the high street, setting fire to the greengrocers next door and the village's other main pub, The Queen's Head. The plane also careered across the top of an adjoining bungalow. Four people were killed: the pilot and co-pilot, along with 70-year-old former publican George Stemp and his 60-year-old housekeeper Emily Reed.

It transpired the pilot, 23-year-old Flying Officer Leonard Stoate, was a local man who had veered well away from the intended flight path, possibly to impress his mother, who lived in a nearby village. Flying low through the air, the plane clipped a tree and ploughed across the fields before careering into central Wadhurst, the fuel tanks exploding. Luckily it was a quiet afternoon and the village school had not turned out, as fatalities might have been greater. The terrible incident would have served as a reminder to Tate of the destructive possibilities of the transition from his own time to the jet age.

Flying Officer Stoate's family left his bedroom undisturbed for many years. He was a talented artist who had drawn caricatures of his favourite cricketers, including Alec Bedser, Denis Compton and Colin Cowdrey. Tate knew them all.

Throughout the last few years, Tate had been undergoing a gradual rapprochement with the Sussex hierarchy. This was completed on 28th April 1956 when he umpired, with John Langridge, in the Duke of Norfolk's XI game against the visiting Australians at Arundel. It was a jovial occasion, the sort when, with Tate around, everything seemed right with the world – just like the 1920s and most of the 1930s. The event was wrongly described as having taken place on Tate's 61st birthday, people still getting it wrong after all those years.

By 1956, Tate was tiring of coaching the schoolboys, as it involved long periods having to stand and umpire. So he resigned. Since 1951, the Sunday newspaper *The People* had paid for former Australian player Alan Fairfax, with the help of Tate, to visit counties around England looking for gifted youths. The two best 12 to 18-year-olds, out of 8,000 or so of those nominated by schools and clubs, won a visit to a Butlins holiday camp for extra tuition. The former Australian leg-spinner Bill O'Reilly, mindful that his successor players were doing badly against England in the 1950s, looked on admiringly. He wrote in the *Sydney Sun-Herald* that it "could be studied with profit by those responsible for working out a scheme here".

Talent-spotting and refining was a job which suited Tate and it was much like the Earl of Sheffield's scheme at the end of the 19th century which had discovered Fred's abilities—and Fred's own efforts to search Derbyshire for players while he was coach at the county club. Tate threw in his lot with the Butlins scheme and, after leaving Tonbridge in the spring of 1956, spent a week coaching the selected boys and other holidaymakers at the holiday camp in Clacton, Essex.

A photograph in the *Brighton Evening Argus* showed the ex-England man, all dressed in freshly ironed whites, demonstrating forward play to a scruffily bearded youth in swimming trunks, looking like a modern music festival-goer returning home after a lively few days at Glastonbury. The contrast of generations was pronounced.

On Friday 18th May Tate returned from his first week's work at Clacton to the Greyhound at around 3pm, complaining of feeling groggy. He had not been due back until 8pm. Kathleen suggested fetching the doctor, but Tate opted instead to go upstairs for a lie down, saying it was probably just a chill. A little later Kathleen heard a crash and rushed up to check on her husband. He was found unconscious on the floor and died before medical help arrived. At just 60 years of age, Maurice William Tate, arguably the greatest all-round English cricketer of the inter-war period, was gone.

Son Michael, by then a strapping lad in his 20s, said: "It was a terrible shock to her [Kathleen]. It appears to have been a heart attack. He had apparently been in the best of health since he got over an attack of quinsy in the winter. He had been doing a lot at Clacton and was very much in the public eye. We're afraid it must have been too much for him."

Tate had suffered a heart attack. It came to light that he had visited a doctor after feeling poorly in Clacton. Some have suggested in the years since that his taste for alcohol, encouraged by his stewardship of pubs, hastened his demise. One elderly man who had known him in his youth told me: "It was the drink that did for Maurice." Yet there is no proof. Maybe his long years of service for Sussex and England, combined with stress over money, had taken their toll.

That Saturday night, the pub opened as usual. Daughter Betty, in true Tate style, told the press: “Daddy would have wished it that way.”

# Chapter 32

## Remembrance.

“*Sussex has not forgotten your Maurice.*”
—Duke of Norfolk

THE TRIBUTES TO Tate were immediate and unstinting. The most thoughtful was CB Fry’s. “Tate was a very great cricketer indeed,” he said. “He could make the ball swing away very late outside the off stump and even the best batsmen were often beaten by him. He could make the ball rear off the pitch like a snake striking. He was even more successful in Australia than in this country—in fact, he ranks with SF Barnes as the most successful bowler England has ever sent there.”

Sir Jack Hobbs, never much of an orator, thought it “difficult to find words to praise him sufficiently. I know from experience how difficult it was to play against him”. Arthur Gilligan, more effusive, said: “Not only was Maurice a great bowler; he was a very great sportsman. He played cricket for the real joy and fun of it. It was his life.”

Laetitia Stapleton, still in touch with the Tates, heard the news on the radio at 7am on the Saturday, feeling a “deep sense of loss”. She reminisced about the teas they had shared, the days out beagling and watching him bowl over after over, and said: “The county season went on—naturally—but many young people now on the ground were quite oblivious that a new, ever-bronzed ghost was haunting the Sussex turf.”

The news spread throughout that Saturday morning and the Sussex and Middlesex players, taking part in the traditional Whitsun fixture at Lord’s, lined up in silence to pay their respects. The flags of Sussex, Middlesex and MCC flew at half-mast. It was as solemn a scene as one could imagine.

John Arlott read the eulogy at Tate’s funeral, held at Wadhurst’s Church of St Peter and St Paul. He was buried in a spot which now overlooks the ruggedly beautiful Bewl Water reservoir, which crosses the border into Kent, the county where, according to Tate and Arlott, he had discovered his gift for pace bowling almost 34 years earlier. The gravestone wrongly states that he died aged 61, rather than 60. This was, again, a result of the lifelong misreporting of Tate’s date of birth.

The will was published in August. Tate left £824, 13 shillings and a few pence—worth about £16,000 today—all of which went to Kathleen. Arlott discreetly raised enough money from among her husband’s friends to allow her to keep the Greyhound going.

Sussex County Cricket Club felt it important to honour their most famous son, albeit one who had been involved in an almighty family row with them. So, with the Grace Gates, that impressive memorial to WG at Lord's, in mind—and the Hobbs Gates at the Oval—they commissioned a pair of gates for the County Ground.

Designed at Brighton College of Arts and Crafts, they measured 12 and a half feet wide by nine feet tall. Monogrammed with the initials MWT and with the dates 1895 to 1956 included in the ironwork, each gate has a central boss with a badge of six martlets, these stylised birds being the heraldic symbol of Sussex.

On 17th May 1958, almost two years to the day after his death, the Tate Gates were unveiled. A sizeable crowd arrived on that dank Saturday morning. Arthur Gilligan paid tribute to his old friend, saying: "Maurice had not a single enemy in the world, but he had countless friends. These gates are a reminder that he served Sussex and England with great distinction."

Gilligan and Jack Hobbs then revealed the memorial panels. Kathleen, wearing a light-coloured beret, white gloves and a fur, attended with Jimmy, Michael and Joan. It was her job to present the gold-plated key to the gates, before they were formally opened by the Duke of Norfolk, president of Sussex CCC and MCC. As he did so, he gently told her: "Mrs Tate, Sussex hasn't forgotten your Maurice." Few eyes were dry.

But who today talks of Tate in the rapt tones his achievements deserve? Traces are to be seen all over Brighton and Hove. As already mentioned, the number 46 bus, which runs very near his birthplace in Warleigh Road, bears his name, one of Brighton and Hove Bus and Coach Company's many tributes to famous former residents. Sometimes the vehicle is used on the 50 and 81B routes. CB Fry, Ranjitsinhji and the Langridge brothers are among other cricketers accorded the honour of a bus in their name. There is also a plaque on the wall of the house where Maurice was born on that sweltering day in May 1895, but it is now quite faded.

Sussex CCC recently widened the County Ground's entrance to allow better access to its renovated facilities. This meant the Tate Gates were transferred to a spot behind the pavilion, rather than facing the public as they come in for a game from Eaton Road. It is a pity but the ironwork has undergone a renovation and, painted in black, it looks as good as ever. It is a better fate than that of the Arthur Gilligan Stand, which was demolished, his name not used for the replacement building.

In 2009 the International Cricket Council created its own Hall of Fame, like that in place for many years for US baseball. So far 71 men and women have been inducted. Among them are Frank Woolley, Harold Larwood, Wally Hammond and Jack Hobbs. All deserve their place, but cricket-watchers of the 1920s and 1930s would have been amazed not to see Tate's name added. Was there ever a greater, and more original, seam bowler? His achievements and life story should have made him a certainty. However, he was a modest man who died young. There is no Kathleen to lead his PR campaign today. She died in May 1979, aged 80.

The saddest reminder of the neglect of an old hero, though, was the recently reported state of Tate's gravestone. In October 2010, the *Guardian* journalist Stephen Bates discovered it had become "overgrown with weeds, subsiding, the

whole grave lurching down the slope", with the name "still just visible". It was "in danger of sliding into oblivion".

Tate was at risk of becoming a modern-day Ozymandias, the subject of Percy Shelley's sonnet about a ruined statue of a long-dead, fictional Egyptian king:

*And on the pedestal these words appear:*
*'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:*
*Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'*
*Nothing beside remains. Round the decay*
*Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare*
*The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Tate's grave is nothing like as grandiose, its inscription referring to him simply as "a dear husband and devoted father", and a "Sussex and England cricketer". Its surroundings are also more verdant. His cricketing deeds, though, were colossal.

Bates's revelation inspired this book. It also inspired some kind-hearted cricket lovers to go to Wadhurst to tidy the grave. They cut the grass, planted cyclamens and cleaned the gravestone, so its inscription is easily visible once more. It still leans, though.

Heroes are usually forgotten over time, but in Tate's case the process started earlier than was decent. More than three decades before Bates's article, in 1976, the *Sussex Express* writer Michael Hardwick took a trip to the Wadhurst graveyard. By 'coincidence' it was the 20th anniversary of Tate's death. The gravestone was "straggly and untrimmed, and only some wilting old flowers in the urn". Hardwick placed some buttercups he found nearby on top, commenting: "If they're still interested in cricket in Wadhurst, perhaps they'll go and tidy up his grave; and hang at least a photo of him in the Greyhound. He was, after all, one of the all-time 'greats'." Nowadays the pub does have a small selection of photographs and press cuttings hanging in a large frame, tucked away by the fireplace.

Only Alec Bedser has ever emulated Tate's deeds using a similar style. Even then, the two men's methods differed, with Bedser focusing more on the cutter and Tate concentrating on perfecting the effects of the positioning of the seam, not the rotation of the ball. He saw himself as a development in bowling's evolution. But, really, he was an original, a one-off, unable to leave a stronger legacy because of the lesser talent and physical capabilities of others. Certainly no one has superseded him as a medium-pacer. Sydney Barnes had been a different type of player, effectively a fast spinner.

Tate would have been delighted to hear about the last decade for his beloved Sussex. They finally won the championship in 2003, thanks in large part to Mushtaq Ahmed, an equally quirky, loveable character. The Pakistani leg-spinner bemused batsmen in a style as out-of-the-ordinary as Tate's had been. "Mushy" took more than 100 wickets with his leg-breaks, googlies and top-spinners. Tate would have approved. Joyously, Laetitia Stapleton, Sussex and Tate's friend and supporter, although now too frail to visit Hove, lived to learn of it.

At the dinner to celebrate Sussex's first championship, Tate was named as the supporters' choice as the club's greatest ever player, beating the likes of CB Fry,

Ted Dexter, Ranji, Imran Khan and even Mushy. It was richly deserved. Tate, had he been there, would not have relished making a speech, but, my, how he would have enjoyed the winners' celebrations denied to him and his friends in 1932, 1933 and 1934—and to his father in the first years of the 20th century.

Tate was a contradictory figure: extrovert yet thin-skinned; laughing publicly while brooding on life's negatives; laid back but highly strung; the possessor of a "superiority complex" and a desperate need for reassurance.

His bowling style was likened to a machine. His personality never was. Tate, character-wise, was one of sport's most notable everymen, living in an era when players were not as separated from the public by wealth or security guards. He seemed little affected by fame. That is why he is so fondly remembered by those who take the care to look back beyond the last couple of decades of cricketing history. That and his brilliance.

Hopefully this book will, in some way, help to revitalise interest in Tate. In 1951, John Arlott prefaced his short, beautiful paean to the great man with this dedication: "For Maurice Tate, because I like him."

So do I.

## Career statistics

There was much more to Maurice Tate than statistics, but his achievements during his 27-year career were, nonetheless, remarkable. So, here is a selection of them:

### Test Match Records

***Batting overall*** M I NO R HS Ave 100 50 39 52 5 1198 100* 25.48 1 5
***Batting by series Season*** Op M I NO R HS Ave 100 50 1924 SA 5 3 0 98 50 32.66 0 1 1924/25 Aus 5 9 0 155 34 17.22 0 0 1926 Aus 5 3 1 61 33* 30.50 0 0 1928 WI 3 3 0 104 54 34.66 0 1 1928/29 Aus 5 10 0 214 54 21.40 0 1 1929 SA 3 5 2 182 100* 60.66 1 0 1930 Aus 5 8 0 148 54 18.50 0 1 1930/31 SA 5 8 1 192 50 27.42 0 1 1931 NZ 1 0 - - - - - - 1932/33 NZ 1 1 1 10 10* - 0 0 1935 SA 1 2 0 34 34 17.00 0 0
***Bowling overall*** B M R W Best Ave 5w 10w SR 12523 581 4055 155 6-42 26.16 7 1 80.79
***Bowling by series Season*** Op B M R W Best Ave 5w 10w 1924 SA 1304 68 424 27 6-42 15.70 1 0 1924/25 Aus 2528 62 881 38 6-99 23.18 5 1 1926 Aus 1251 64 388 13 4-99 29.84 0 0 1928 WI 762 43 246 13 4-59 18.92 0 0 1928/29 Aus 2226 122 697 17 4-77 41.00 0 0 1929 SA 972 43 333 10 3-65 33.30 0 0 1930 Aus 1681 82 574 15 5-124 38.26 1 0 1930/31 SA 1136 58 341 14 3-79 24.35 0 0 1931 NZ 234 15 37 4 3-22 9.25 0 0 1932/33 NZ 240 17 47 2 2-42 23.50 0 0 1935 SA 189 7 87 2 2-67 43.50 0 0

Tate also took 11 catches in international cricket.

***First-Class Records Batting overall*** M I NO Runs HS Ave 100 50 679 970 103 21717 203 25.04 23 93

***Batting season by season Season*** C'try M I NO R HS Ave 100 50 Ct 1912 Eng 1 2 0 10 6 5.00 0 0 0 1913 Eng 4 5 1 22 9* 5.50 0 0 3 1914 Eng 8 11 3 121 24* 15.12 0 0 4 1919 Eng 24 42 4 1033 108 27.18 1 4 15 1920 Eng 33 54 2 1325 90 25.48 0 6 15 1921 Eng 30 53 1 1460 203 28.07 3 4 8 1922 Eng 32 56 3 1050 88 19.81 0 4 9 1923 Eng 36 59 6 1168 97 22.03 0 5 9 1924 Eng 36 54 6 1419 164 29.56 2 5 21 1924/25 Aus 14 20 2 339 44 18.83 0 0 7 1925 Eng 35 59 4 1290 121 23.45 2 3 13 1926 Eng 28 46 4 1347 93 32.07 0 9 12 1926/27 Ind 24 29 0 1056 133 36.41 2 7 10 1926/27 SL 4 4 0 137 121 34.25 1 0 1 1927 Eng 35 49 2 1713 146 36.44 5 9 20 1928 Eng 35 49 1 1469 126 30.60 3 8 20 1928/29 Aus 13 17 1 322 59 20.12 0 2 8 1929 Eng 32 48 3 1161 100* 25.80 1 5 12 1930 Eng 32 47 5 799 111 19.02 1 2 8 1930/31 SA 12 17 2 516 115* 34.40 1 3 3 1931 Eng 33 40 11 777 142 26.79 1 4 17 1932 Eng 35 37 6 458 50 14.77 0 2 17 1932/33 Aus 5 8 4 157 94* 39.25 0 1 2 1932/33 NZ 2 2 1 29 19 29.00 0 0 0 1933 Eng 27 29 3 325 35 12.50 0 0 8 1934 Eng 31 29 8 615 81 29.28 0 4 14 1935 Eng 31 43 11 527 36 16.46 0 0 10 1936 Eng 29 36 5 743 69 23.96 0 5 8 1937 Eng 18 25 4 329 73 15.66 0 1 8

***Bowling overall*** R W Best Ave 5w 10w SR Econ 150449 7387 50571 2784 9-71 18.16 195 44 54.04 2.01

***Bowling season by season Season*** C'try B M R W Best Ave 5w 10w 1912 Eng 84 3 28 1 1-28 28.00 0 0 1913 Eng 432 22 193 11 4-28 17.54 0 0 1914 Eng 787 42 352 10 3-49 35.20 0 0 1919 Eng 2613 90 1339 48 4-28 27.89 0 0 1920 Eng 4015 215 1466 71 6-42 20.64 2 1 1921 Eng 4354 207 1774 70 6-125 25.34 2 0 1922 Eng 6011 299 2073 119 8-67 17.42 7 0 1923 Eng 9653 533 3061 219 8-30 13.97 17 6 1924 Eng 8795 466 2818 205 8-18 13.74 17 4 1924/25 Aus 4018 93 1464 77 7-74 19.01 7 2 1925 Eng 9567 472 3415 228 8-91 14.97 24 10 1926 Eng 7571 365 2575 147 9-71 17.51 12 4 1926/27 Ind 3791 193 1363 99 6-42 13.76 8 2 1926/27 SL 572 23 236 17 6-34 13.88 2 0 1927 Eng 9356 472 3018 147 8-68 20.53 10 2 1928 Eng 9506 492 3184 165 7-24 19.29 14 3 1928/29 Aus 4072 174 1329 44 5-35 30.20 1 0 1929 Eng 8518 393 2903 156 7-48 18.60 11 4 1930 Eng 7528 373 2449 123 7-45 19.91 10 1 1930/31 SA 2082 106 621 33 5-18 18.81 3 0 1931 Eng 7518 399 2179 141 8-31 15.45 8 2 1932 Eng 8281 440 2494 160 7-28 15.58 11 1 1932/33 Aus 775 16 309 12 4-53 25.75 0 0 1932/33 NZ 318 22 70 3 2-42 23.33 0 0 1933 Eng 5945 309 1808 99 6-25 18.26 7 0 1934 Eng 8852 463 2796 142 7-42 19.69 9 2 1935 Eng 6510 333 2141 113 7-59 18.94 6 0 1936 Eng 5179 222 1748 78 7-19 22.41 7 0 1937 Eng 3746 150 1365 46 4-27 29.67 0 0

Tate took hat-tricks for Sussex v Middlesex and The Rest v Lancashire in 1926, and for Sussex v Northamptonshire in 1934. He also took 282 catches in first-class games.

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[NOTE: The photographs were excluded, due to space. Several of the photographs are attached; all you them may be found in the ebook version.]

## Acknowledgements

MEDIUM-FAST BOWLERS IN the 1930s and 1940s were conscious of walking in the footsteps of a giant. Writing this book provoked a similar feeling in me. The two substantial previous works on Maurice Tate were by John Arlott and Gerald Brodribb. Arlott was an inspiring figure: a poet, a campaigner, a friend to cricketers. His book on Tate, published in 1951, was among the most elegantly written on cricket. Brodribb, in his own way, was an equally fascinating character. An archaeologist, a school-owner and a prolific author, his biography, in 1976, helped to keep Tate's name going.

Unlike these two men, I never had the chance to meet Tate, being born almost 18 years after his death. I have tried not to use either Arlott or Brodribb as source material. There will obviously be crossovers, but I hope my take is distinctive. I think both would be happy that someone is trying to continue their work.

I live about seven minutes' walk from Tate's birthplace. My early years were spent living halfway between Fred's old house in Kingsbury Street and St Peter's Church, where his interest in cricket was fostered. I played on The Level, just as he had done. Until recently, like those catching the bus with Tate's name on it, I had no idea of the area's associations. But now, to me, if few others, this sporting father and son's memory is everywhere. They were intriguing, entertaining people and it has been a privilege to learn more about them.

The writing of this book has reminded me of just how many wonderful people are involved with the game of cricket, and my life.

I would like to thank the Tate family, including Charlotte Tate, Marcus Rootes and Christina Freeman, who were all very pleasant to deal with, much as I had expected of grandchildren of such a charming man. I hope they feel this book does his life and legacy some justice.

Sussex expert bar none Roger Packham provided a keen reading of my manuscript, and the advice and amendments he offered were gratefully accepted. He worked tirelessly and selflessly.

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Nicholas Sharp, the proud possessor of a huge collection of Sussex memorabilia, very kindly invited me into his home and gave full access to his archive, including the letters of Fred Tate. His picture collection, along with items like the ball with which Maurice broke the wickets record for an Ashes series, helped bring the story to life. He also gave me access to Gerald Brodribb's correspondence, which was very useful. I used this sparingly, but it helped to provide 'flavour' of a time before I was born.

David Frith, a titan of cricket writing, offered this novice excellent advice on writing, publishing and research, along with access to another of Fred's letters.

Rupert Webb, a star in his own right, as a player, actor and raconteur, gave me some wonderful insights into the lot of a professional cricketer and Maurice Tate's personality. His knowledge of the technical aspects of the game, particularly standing up to keep wicket to quicker bowlers, was especially useful. Rupert's glamorous and charming wife Barbara was also very hospitable and made me the best cup of tea I have ever drunk. The biscuits were nice too.

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Another friend, photographer James "Stan" Boardman, made the effort to traipse around a damp Wadhurst graveyard looking for the resting place of Maurice. His pictures of the gravestone, the Tate Gates and the plaque commemorating the great man's birth in 1895 add a touch of artistic class to the photos section.

David Corney of St Peter's CC in Brighton provided me with the club's records from the 1890s and was thrilled to learn of its association with Fred Tate. He now includes Fred's story in the pep talk he delivers to young players. Hopefully this focuses more on his career as a whole than the 1902 Old Trafford Test! Fred would have approved.

Walsall Cricket Club's honorary secretary, Bob Whitham, provided a clear, authoritative account of Maurice's brief time as a professional in the Birmingham League.

Stan Cosham, the guru of all things Wadhurst, was a kind and welcoming interviewee. His interest in his locality was infectious.

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This whole book was made possible by my family. My father, Alan, was supportive from the start. My daughters, Iris and Nora, became two of the best-informed under-sixes in the country, maybe the world, when it came to Tate. Their shared giggling at hearing the name of the great Victor Trumper for the first time will stay with me forever.

My beautiful, talented wife, Caroline, although bombarded with cricket-related miscellanea, was encouraging throughout. She ensured I stayed focused and remained rather less tangential than tends to be my wont. Thank you.

My late mother, Lynda, was forever telling me during her sadly too-brief life that I should write a book. She will never see the fruits of her request, but she deserves eternal credit for her kindness.