

## Notes, Commentaries., Essays

# THE ORIGIN OF THE GREEN AND GOLD

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The attractive green and gold striped blazers adopted by the Australian Eleven during the 1993-94 summer begs a number of previously unsolved questions. What is the origin of our national colours? Why were these colours selected? Which team or individual first introduced the green and gold to the world?

It is generally believed that Australia's national sporting colours, now our national colours, were first worn soon after Federation.<sup>1</sup> However, this is not strictly correct. On examination of the available evidence a different picture emerges.

Prior to the formation of the Australasian Cricket Council (1892-1900), Australian Elevens playing in England wore a variety of colours. The blue and white of the 1878 team gave way to the faded magenta and black of the 1880 side and the red, black and yellow - the colours of the 96th Regiment - featured in 1882.<sup>2</sup> Later teams wore the magenta, blue and white striped blazer of their chief sponsor, the Melbourne Cricket Club. However, on one occasion, the light blue caps and light blue and white striped blazers of the East Melbourne Club were used. The photogravure by G H Barrable and R Ponsonby Staples of the 1886 Australians in the field at Lord's shows Tom Garrett's cap emblazoned with the distinctive Melbourne Cricket Club's colours.<sup>3</sup> 'The impressive 'Vanity Fair' caricature by 'Ape' (Carlo Pellegrini) of the giant Victorian batsman, George Bonnor, depicts him wearing the light blue cap of the East Melbourne Club in 1884.<sup>4</sup>

The 1890 Australians were photographed in England wearing dark blue blazers and dark blue caps with gold trim with the Australian coat of arms on the blazer pocket and on the cap. This is the first instance of a

sporting team wearing the Australian coat of arms.<sup>5</sup> The motto, 'Advance Australia', incorporated into the coat of arms, was very popular throughout the land as the push towards nationhood gathered momentum. To-day's cricketers wear 'baggy' green caps with only 'Australia' underneath the coat of arms. The 'Advance Australia' motto was in use on the Victorian Goldfields as far back as 1853, the year before the Eureka Stockade. An S T Gill print of a subscription ball decoration, housed in the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, shows the words, 'Advance Australia', printed in a scroll with a shield containing the Southern Cross – soon to become the symbol of the Eureka uprising.

The 1893 Australians in England wore blazers and caps with a patch on the blazer pocket and cap in the shape of a shield within which were the stars of the Southern Cross.<sup>6</sup> This design is a replica of that appearing in S T Gill's Ballarat print forty years earlier.

At a meeting of the Australasian Cricket Council in Adelaide on 8 January 1895 a motion by J Portus (NSW) that 'the Australian Eleven's colours be olive green with the Australian coat of arms worked into the cap and coat pocket', lapsed without a seconder. However, Percy Sheridan (after whom the former Sheridan Stand at the Sydney Cricket Ground is named) proposed a motion that the selection of colours for future Australian Elevens be decided by a sub-committee of J Portus, Mostyn Evans (South Australia) and E H Budd (Victoria). This was seconded by J W Colton (South Australia) and carried unanimously.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Australasian Cricket Council was not a fund-raising body, it was the governing body of cricket in Australia before the Board of Control was formed. Part of the Council's charter was 'the regulation of visits of Australian teams to England and elsewhere'.<sup>8</sup> The Council also approved the appointment of national selectors. Despite the Council's charter, A E Stoddart's England team of 1895-96 was brought out to Australia under the joint sponsorship of the Melbourne Cricket Club and the Trustees of the Sydney cricket Ground but apparently with the

approval of the Council.

At the Australasian Cricket Council's meeting held at the Oxford Hotel in Sydney on 8 October 1895 it was decided to send an Australian team abroad for the English summer of 1896. The Council was made up of twelve members, four each from New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.<sup>9</sup> Heading this group was J M Gibson.

It is unclear what influence the Council's sub-committee for the choice of the Australian Eleven's colours had on the 1896 Australians or what the subcommittee's recommendation was as no minutes are extant. However, the 'Special Correspondent' for the *Sydney Morning Herald* filed the following report from Colombo on 1 April 1896:

Agreements for the tour were all signed when the *Cuzco* was about 10 miles out from Albany, and therefore within the jurisdiction of the British Courts, which extends 30 miles from British ports. The team now seems thoroughly satisfied and content that after all the best possible selection has been made. Of course we have all manner of sports within limits, and 'Jonah' Jones carries everything before him. The weather, however, has been wet, and not at all conducive to outdoor games; but we have other amusements. Harry Donnan has had a tooth out, and Charles Eady has been vaccinated for the first time in his life. The only event, however, in connection with our sports which is likely to achieve classic fame is the tug-of-war, when the Ninth Australian Eleven was badly beaten by a team from the second saloon.

The night before reaching Colombo an important meeting of the team was held in the saloon. The selection committee was voted for, and the result was a little surprising. It consists of Harry Trott (who was elected captain), George Giffen and Syd. Gregory. The colours of the team were also decided upon, and are to be the same as those worn by the 1890 team – dark-blue coats and caps with gold binding, the Australian arms on each article.<sup>10</sup>

This was the year of the inaugural Olympic Games of the modern era held in Athens in early April and although Australia was superbly represented by Edwin Flack it was not until 1908 that an Australian Olympic team wore green and gold uniforms and single.<sup>11</sup> As this team included New Zealand participants, its members wore a fern leaf insignia on their green and gold hats.

Max Howell has provided some details of the first use of the green and gold at the Olympics. The 1908 team, representing Australasia, had no uniform when it left Australia. There was in fact no organised team departure. After the British organisers of the Games insisted on a uniform, the General team Manager, William Hill, appealed to the Commonwealth Government for money to outfit the team. The *Referee* reported on 12 August 1908 that:

After some strenuous ‘battling’ by Mr. Hill, a sum has been set aside for the purpose, and for the first time in the history of the Olympic Games, Australia’s men will step forth headed by a handsome banner, and costumed alike in green and wattle of the land so dear to them.

The Australian athletes wore white shorts and green shirts featuring the Australian coat of arms and, curiously, the swimmers marched in their swimming costumes, all wearing caps. The Rugby Union team, which carried off the gold medal, wore the sky blue and waratah symbol of New South Wales Rugby.<sup>12</sup> At this time Australia’s Rugby League representatives wore sky blue and maroon striped jerseys, a combination of the New South Wales and Queensland colours. It was not until the 1929 tour of England the Kangaroos finally donned green and gold uniforms.<sup>13</sup> The great turn-of-the-century professional sprinter, Arthur Postle, chose a variety of national emblems: he wore green shorts and a vest with gold trim with an emu on one breast and a kangaroo on the other.

The first official Australian Olympic uniform dated from 1912 when competitors wore green vests with gold trimming and white shorts with myrtle green and gold trimmings. As the team again represented 'Australasia', the word 'Australasian' appeared in gold lettering across the breast while below this, each competitor wore their State or Dominion badge. Swimmers Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie attracted attention with their ankle-length green cloaks with gold trimming and green swimming caps.

During the Second Test match played on the Melbourne Cricket Ground in late January 1898, the Australian cricketers wore the dark blue caps of the Victorian Eleven. At this time it was customary to wear the colours of the State in which the Test match took place. Mostyn Evans, the South Australian member of the Australasian Cricket Council's sub-committee on Australian cricket colours, is reported to have suggested 'a very attractive arrangement of green and gold colours' for the forthcoming 1899 tour of England.<sup>14</sup>

The Tenth Australian team to England obviously took note of Mostyn Evans' suggestion as they became the first Australian sporting team to wear our national colours. Shortly after their arrival on the mail-steamer, *Ormuz*, the Australians raised a green and gold flag on the flag post at the Inns of Court Hotel in High Holborn, London.<sup>15</sup> The *Nepean Times* of 10 June 1899 informed its readers that:

A great amount of interest was manifested among members of the team when being measured for their blazers (the colours, by the bye, are sage green and gold and green with gold-braided edge) as to who would have the greatest chest development. Howell was easily the first with 45 inches. Jones next with 42 inches.

The Manager of the very gifted 1899 Australian Eleven was Major Benjamin Wardill, the well-regarded, hard-working Secretary of the Melbourne Cricket Club. The Selection Committee was Joe Darling

(Captain), Hugh Trumble (Vice-captain), a medium-paced bowler who was later to snare two hat-tricks in Test cricket and went on to become a long-serving Secretary of the Melbourne Cricket Club, and Syd Gregory who was a stylish right handed batsman.<sup>16</sup> Assisted by a chanceless 135 not out from a youthful Victor Trumper in his Test debut at Lord's, and by Clem Hill who made the same total, the 1899 Australians recaptured the Ashes in an absorbing series.

The decorative menu for the farewell dinner for the 1899 Australians at their Inns of Court Hotel is appropriately tied with deep green, and bright gold, ribbons, colours which would become synonymous with the emerging spirit of the new nation.<sup>17</sup> From this time all Australian cricket teams touring England wore dark green blazers and caps with gold trimming, both articles of clothing being decorated with the now familiar kangaroo and emu coat of arms inscribed with 'Advance Australia'. The latter-day green and gold striped blazers of the 1993-94 Australian Eleven are 'first' but are obviously influenced by the attractive striped blazers worn by club cricketers throughout Australia earlier in this century.

However, it was not until after Federation that the green and gold colours of the Australian Eleven were first seen in a Test match on the Melbourne Cricket Ground when the home side sported our national colours in the Second Test against Archie MacLaren's Englishmen on 1 January 1902.<sup>18</sup>

These colours were not to be ratified by the infant Board of Control until 1908. Meeting at Melbourne on 29 May the members of the Board passed a motion proposed by H Blinman (South Australia), seconded by J Allen (Queensland) that the official colours for future Australian Cricket teams be 'Gum-tree Green and Gold'.<sup>19</sup> This official sanction by the Board on a combination of colours that had been in use for nine years set the seal on the future use of the Green and Gold.

The historic decision by the Australian Board of Control, although long overdue, prompted an amusing exchange of words from the members of the New South Wales Cricket Association that were reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 18 August 1908:

What is Gum-tree Green? - It was stated at the New South Wales Cricket Association meeting last night that 'gum-tree green and gold' had been adopted as the Australian colours. This raised a general query, 'What is gum-tree green?' And someone suggested, 'Why not wattle-gold?'<sup>20</sup>

It appears then that the Green and Gold were first adopted by the 1899 Australian cricket team<sup>21</sup> and were only later adopted by the Australian Olympic movement<sup>22</sup> and other team sports. It is also of interest that the national colours were decided, in part, by players as well as by administrators. This article has suggested two possible reasons why Green and Gold became the national colours. Some Australian teams played in light and dark blue and even maroon but these colours were too closely linked with particular colonies (states). The adoption of a new set of colours represented an attempt to transcend intercolonial (interstate) rivalries. There are also strong suggestions that the colours Green and Gold were chosen because of their association with the Australian landscape, most notably the gum tree and the wattle.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

1. Sunday Telegraph, 14 Feb. 1988.
2. Richard Cashman, *The 'Demon' Spofforth*, NSWUP, Kensington, 1990, p. 119.
3. There is a copy of this impressive work housed in the Melbourne Cricket Club's Museum. The author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance unselfishly proffered by Annie McGlade, Librarian at the Melbourne Cricket Club Library, Ray Webster and Alf Batchelder, who assist at this Library along with Ross Dundas, Hon. Librarian NSW Cricket Association and Stephen Gibbs, Hon. Library Consultant. Thanks are also due to Max Howell who provided me with information about the adoption of the green and gold in the Australian Olympic team and the rugby codes.
4. Vanity Fair, 13 Oct. 1884.
5. Black and white photograph, Melbourne Cricket Club. The colours worn by the team are confirmed by *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 Apr. 1896.

6. Black and white photograph, Melbourne Cricket Club.
7. Minutes, Australasian Cricket Council, 8 Jan. 1895, Australian Cricket Board, Melbourne.
8. Newspaper scrapbook, NSWCA Library.
9. Newspaper scrapbook, NSWCA Library.
10. Sydney Morning Herald, 23 Apr. 1896.
11. Reet and Maxwell Howell, *Aussie Gold: The Story of Australia at the Olympics*, Brooks Waterloo, Brisbane, 1986.
12. Howell and Howell *Aussie Gold*.
13. Sunday Telegraph, 14 Feb. 1988.
14. Hugh Field, 'History of the Melbourne Cricket Club', unpub. manuscript, Melbourne CC Library, p. 136.
15. Newspaper scrapbook, NSWCA Library.
16. Some modern-day writers continue to describe Hugh Trumble as an 'off-spin bowler' but he was described by numerous contemporary sources as a medium-pace bowler who could bring the ball back sharply from the off. At the turn of the century this was described as 'break-back' a synonym for 'off-cutter'. This may account for the inaccurate labeling of Trumble as a slow bowler or off-spinner. In a series of articles written for the *Sydney Morning Herald* during the 1932-33 'Bodyline' series Clem Hill wrote that 'He [Trumble] always worried F S Jackson, who could never decide when the long Victorian was going to cowl a slow one', an obvious reference to a bowler with some pace using a disguised slower ball much in the manner of Steve Waugh.
17. Author's collection.
18. Field, 'History of the Melbourne Cricket Club', p. 137.
19. Minutes, Australian Cricket Board of Control, 29 May 1908.
20. Why did the Board of Control wait so many years to acknowledge a uniform that had been worn by every Australian Eleven in England since 1899? The answer may lie in the growing rift between representative players and members of the Board which was to culminate in the withdrawal of the 'Big Six' from the 1912 Triangular Tournament in England. With the Board and some representative players spasmodically feuding from 1905 onwards it is understandable that the Board would be loathe to sanction a set of colours promoted by the players for almost a decade.
21. The idea of an article on the green and gold emerged while I was researching the 1899 Australian cricket tour of England. A manuscript has now been completed on this tour.
22. At this stage I can only infer the Australian Olympic movement 'borrowed' the green and gold from cricketers. Further research may establish whether this apparent borrowing was direct or indirect.
23. I have heard of a report, which I have been unable to locate, that an Australian rower in the 1890s attached a sprig of wattle to his blue singlet. See, also the *Referee* quotation in the text, of 12 Aug. 1908.