

The towering  
figure of  
Tony Greig.

# WHEN GIANTS WALKED THE EARTH

It's 40 years since World Series Cricket changed everything, from the way the game was played to the way it was televised – the way, in fact, sport was televised. It introduced coloured apparel, lights, day-night Tests and one-dayers – the list is endless. People look back now with fondness at the WSC revolt, suggested at first by Dennis Lillee, instigated by some of the world's best players, funded by Kerry Packer. Two of our interviewees, Clive Rice and Tony Greig, are now sadly departed, but our intrepid correspondent, **CRISPIN ANDREWS**, had long-ago managed to get their thoughts on the Packer revolution. He managed to track down many of the other protagonists recently. Here are their memories of one of the biggest upheavals ever witnessed in world sport.

Packer faces some of the music he helped create, after the news of WSC broke.



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**O**n December 2, 1977, an Australian team captained by Ian Chappell faced Clive Lloyd's West Indians at Melbourne's VFL Park. A drop-in playing strip had turned the Aussie rules stadium into a cricket ground of sorts. The Australian team was the strong side that had toured England earlier that year, with the addition of Ian Chappell and Dennis Lillee, who had missed the Ashes tour due to injury. However, the West Indies had the stars who made Tony Greig's England grovel in 1976, and won a close game by three wickets.

Up at the Gabba, in Brisbane, six players were making their Test debuts, as the official Australian side, led by the returning 40-something stalwart, Bob Simpson, was playing a Test match against India. The Australian public either embraced both forms of cricket, or were clearly divided during that first season – or at least when it started.

Either way, World Series Cricket had arrived. The lights came on. The coloured gear was donned. On-field microphones were picking up colourful banter. In January, the top West Indians were joined by Pakistan's, South Africa's and England's best players to make an even more formidable opponent for Australia: the World Series Cricket World Eleven.

Channel Nine's media mogul, Kerry Packer, had signed the players on lucrative contracts.

How did it begin? The Australian Cricket Board had refused to give Packer the media rights to Australia's international matches, even though he offered substantially more

## **"I'D PUT IT ON THE LINE AGAINST LILLEE, THOMSON, ROBERTS AND THE OTHERS, IN FRONT OF PACKED CROWDS." TONY GREIG**

than the Australian Broadcasting Corporation had been currently paying. Packer decided he'd just put on his own matches, and knew there were enough dissatisfied players around to back him.

During the next two seasons, the official Australian side debuted 23 players and lost to England, the West Indies and away to India, drew with Pakistan and beat India 3-2 in a great series at home.

By the time Packer and the Australian Cricket Board reached an agreement over media rights, two seasons later, World Series Cricket had changed world cricket forever.

But there was much more to this than a ruthless billionaire wanting his own way. The players themselves had thought for a while that it was about time they started earning more for their role in bringing crowds to games and viewers to TV screens. Those who grew used to seeing Tony Greig on their screens during the cricket season as a key commentator on Nine, and spruiking memorabilia, might find it hard to believe he ever struggled for a quid. But he did back then.

and didn't hesitate to sign, and then sign up as much talent as he could, for Packer's "circus", as it was dubbed then.

"I'd put it on the line against Lillee, Thomson, Roberts and the others, in front of packed crowds, yet when I was captain of England we were paid just £200 a Test," Greig said back in 2011. "I was 32 with a young family and had to think about my future."

Ian Callen, the Victorian fast-bowler who played one Test for "official" Australia during WSC, reveals what it was like to struggle as a Shield player. "Back in the late 60s and early 70s, there were 40,000 people watching some of the state games and the bloke on the gate was getting more money than the players. Test players like Paul Sheahan and Bob Cowper retired early to make a living."

With the help of Greig and Ian Chappell, Packer went about recruiting the world's best. The players didn't have to be asked twice.

At last, the world would get to see men like the great Mike Procter in action. Procter had been confined to county cricket because of the ban on South African players competing in Tests. He immediately went about suggesting other South Africans for the World team.

"In May 1977, Tony Greig invited me and Eddie Barlow to a meeting at the Dorchester where we discussed who would be in the World team. We suggested Graeme Pollock and Denys Hobson, a really talented South African leg-spinner. Neither of them were allowed to play, because they weren't playing in county cricket. Politics."

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Greig went on a recruiting binge. The England opener Dennis Amiss got a guernsey when he had the cheek to ask: "I was 34 and thought my Test career was over. I asked Greig if they were interested in signing me, he told me yes."

Kepler Wessles was at the other end of his career: "I was 19, just starting out, playing for Sussex in 1977 and Tony Greig saw me play a few good innings. He got Kerry Packer to sign me. I couldn't get out to Australia for the first season because I was on national service."

One of the more exciting signings was a batting genius even Bradman had as opener for

his all-time XI, despite the fact that he'd only played four Tests. Barry Richards couldn't wait to sign. "I wanted to prove myself at this level, after all those years away from Test cricket." There would be no higher level.

Some, like promising Australian opener Ian Davis, had other reasons for joining. "I was only 24, so for me it wasn't about the money. I signed up because Ian Chappell wanted me and everyone else had signed."

Not everyone was tempted, though. England fast bowler Bob Willis stayed with the establishment: "I went to a meeting with Greig and Richie Benaud in London. Bob

Woolmer was there, and Derek Randall. Bob signed up, Derek and I and decided to stay with the establishment. Warwickshire, my county, looked after me during World Series Cricket. They gave me a longer-term contract and promised to compensate me, financially, if my career ended because of injury."

Australian opener Alan Turner was asked to join: "Outside cricket, I worked for Benson and Hedges, who sponsored the ACB. I felt that it would be disloyal to the company who had looked after me so well, throughout my career. I stopped playing soon afterwards. Went to work full-time for Benson and Hedges."

Others who ended up on the establishment side, like Callen, just felt left behind: "We didn't really know what was going on. It was like a group of mates had gone off together to play somewhere else."

All the Packer players had been sworn to secrecy, but in May 1977, with Australia in England for the Ashes, the news finally broke. The establishment was not happy. The English media called it "Kerry Packer's cricket circus". In England, Greig got more stick than all the other Packer players put together. He was branded as some sort of Judas by sections of the cricketing establishment.

From their point of view, the England captain had turned against his team, his adopted country and the game itself. Greig was sacked as captain, but allowed to continue playing. His story typified the deep divisions the cricket split had caused. "I'm ashamed of the way certain parts of the press behaved," he said. "It got so bad that my little girl was stopped from going to her friend's birthday party by the friend's parents, who obviously disapproved of what I did."

Len Pascoe, competitive as he was, was amazed at the assembly of talent Packer had managed to muster. "The Rest of the World team was so strong that Mike Procter, who scored 48 first-class centuries, batted at nine! The West Indies were fantastic and Australia was strong enough to field a team that could compete with these two, and another that could hold its own in Test cricket."

Amiss, an excellent Test opener, struggled in such company. "There were some terrific players in the World team: Barry Richards, Eddie Barlow, Zaheer Abbas. I only made the first team once and didn't do myself justice. Shame there wasn't a WSC England side."

The Australian side, though powerful, had been decimated by the World Series split, and hit by injuries. Ian Chappell, the captain, had been retired from international competition, and came back upon Packer's request – and for other good reasons. He'd been a vociferous campaigner for better player pay for years, and besides that, he was a competitor. He couldn't resist the temptation of playing against the best in the world. But it might be argued he was past his best, as were a few other members of his great team of the mid-1970s.

Clive Rice told me in 2013 that he was impressed with how far they went: "Australia was a tough team, never gave up, but against the best from South Africa, England, Pakistan and the West Indies, they were just outgunned."

Barry Richards: "Ian Chappell would end up getting Australia to both Super Test finals,

## "I WANTED TO PROVE MYSELF AT THIS LEVEL, AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS AWAY FROM TEST CRICKET." BARRY RICHARDS



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

Ian Davis, dressed for the hardest job in cricket history.

but lose them both. He was furious. Only the winners got any prize money."

Kerry Packer's Channel 9 marketed World Series Cricket as a gladiatorial contest between terrifying fast bowlers and superstar batsmen. According to Richards, he wasn't far off the mark: "There was Dennis Lillee, Jeff Thomson, Len Pascoe, Garth Le Roux and Imran Khan. Procter was there too and all the West Indians."

The bowlers had a field day. For many reasons, the batsmen got the crappy end of the stick. Greg Chappell was impressed but never bowed. "That's some of the best fast bowlers

that have ever played the game," he said. "And you were batting in some pretty challenging conditions." He and Barry Richards were two of the best-performed batsmen of the entire two-year series. The bowling was unrelenting.

Pakistan great Zaheer Abbas, playing for the World XI, noted that batting conditions were unprecedented: "Against these bowlers, you had to build your innings slowly and there was still always a chance that you would get a really hard ball."

The fiery Pascoe was one of those bowlers, and he agrees. "Imagine Roberts, Holding, Croft and Garner against Lillee, Thomson

and Pascoe," he said. "All in our prime. It was relentless pace."

The state of some of the pitches exacerbated the problem for batsmen. "The wickets were difficult", says Abbas, "laid down outside the ground and then put in. Batting on them wasn't that easy."

Greg Chappell agrees: "Some wickets worked quite well, others didn't quite gel."

Amiss pioneered the use of the batting helmet during WSC, and it was just as well. "In one game, a lifter from Australian fast bowler, Wayne Prior, smashed me in the visor," he said. "Without my helmet I'd be wearing false teeth now. The helmet was made of fibreglass by a motorcycle helmet manufacturer. It could withstand a double-barrelled shot gun at ten paces. At first, the crowds would bait me saying, 'Amiss - where's your skateboard?' But other players soon started using them. Helped batsmen become more confident against all those fast bowlers."

"David Hookes asked me if he could borrow the helmet for his comeback game, after he'd had his jaw broken by Andy Roberts. Roberts bounced Hookes again, but this time Hookes, wearing the helmet, pulled it for six. Richie Benaud in the commentary box said it was a great moment for cricket."

Rice relates one passage of play that illustrates the type of cricket being played. "Tony Greig had taken some stick from West Indian and Australian fast bowlers while playing for England. But with the World XI, he knew he had the bowlers to give it back. In one limited-overs game for the World XI, against the West Indies, we'd been bowled out for 102. Majid Khan our opener had got one in the face from Andy Roberts, but when they batted we had them 67-9."

Mike Procter remembers it well: "Greig called over to the umpire as Joel Garner walked in. 'How many balls to go? Four? Ok, Ricey, give me the four quickest bouncers you've ever bowled.' Rice accommodated Greig. "He actually said: 'Four bouncers and make sure you don't miss', " Rice recalled. "Joel is six-foot-eight. I thought it would be difficult enough just to get it up there."

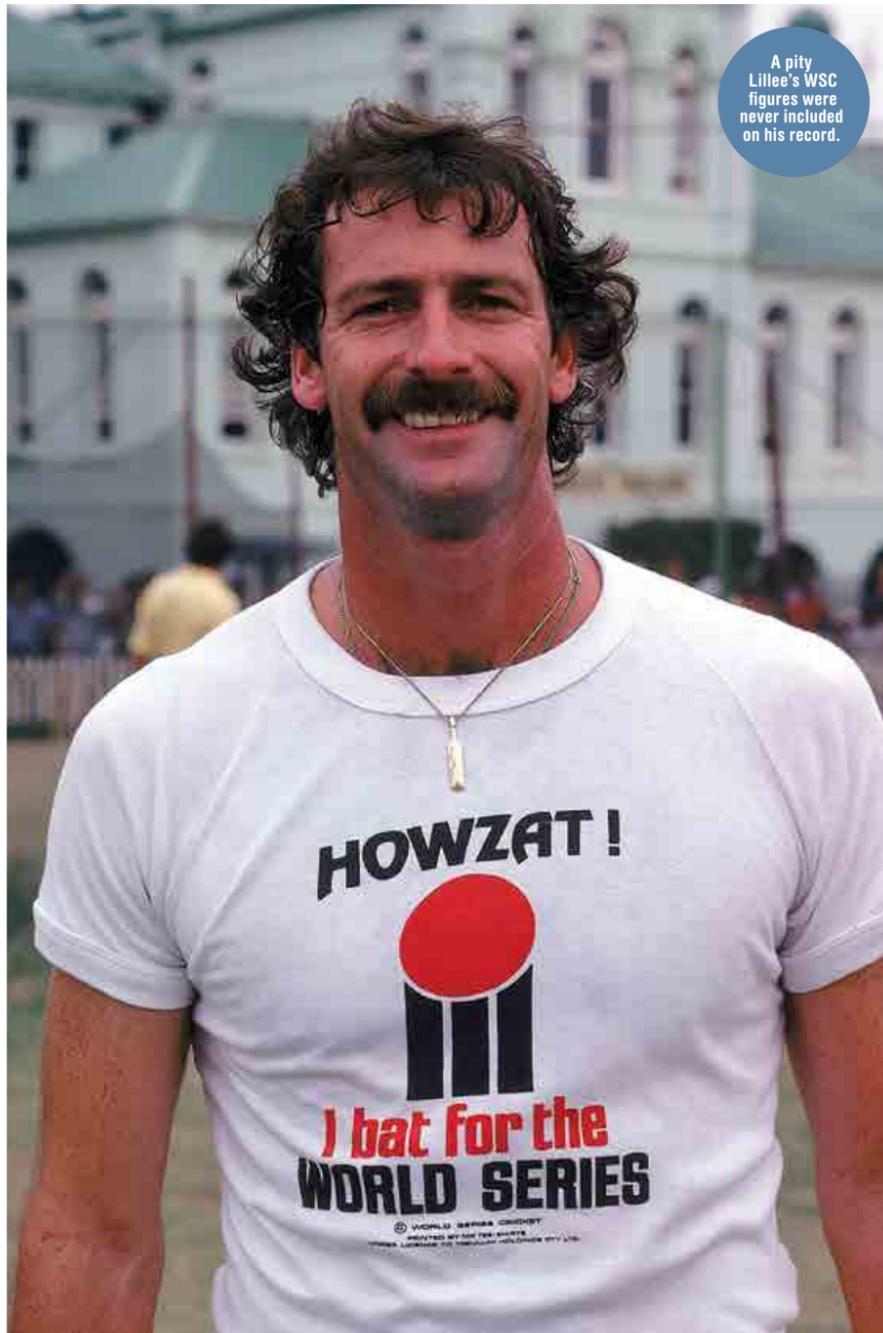
But he did, as Procter recalls: "Garner fended it off his earhole, and it hit him, right on the end of his injured middle finger. He threw the bat down, kicked over the stumps and walked off the field. End of game."

Rice laughed: "The bat went flying to cover. Then the glove came off and ended up at extra cover, another glove went to mid-wicket. Wayne Daniel at the other end walked down to see how Joel was, but Joel just walked around, picked up his bat and gloves and stormed off. It was a pretty lively wicket."

Some batsmen played the quick stuff better than others. Ian Davis recalls a famous day in Perth, January, 1978, when, in one Supertest Barry Richards (207) and Viv Richards (177) played together in the World side. Gordon Greenidge made 140 as well. The World XI scored 625 and then, on day three, a big crack opened up in the wicket and Australia got rolled for 393 and 159.

Australia's problem finding opening batsmen was addressed by Packer, who eventually got South Africa's Kepler Wessels, after wangling citizenship for him. "By then I knew I wanted

## "YOU WERE BATTING IN SOME PRETTY CHALLENGING CONDITIONS." GREG CHAPPELL



A pity Lillee's WSC figures were never included on his record.



Wessels, Hookes, Lillee and Gilmour after losing the WSC Super Test final in 1979. Chappelli was livid.

to settle there, anyway", says Wessels.

The teething problems didn't end with pitches. World Series Cricket was a major logistical operation, especially given the short timeframes within which it operated, and the untried innovations it hastily introduced.

As always, it seemed batsmen were at the greatest disadvantage. Richards gives some idea of the challenges faced by the world's best bladesmen: "Cricket hadn't been played under lights before and they had no idea when to take the mid-innings break. It ended up happening about 6pm, but it gets darker later in Australia and when the second team came out to bat, the lights hadn't fully taken effect. So you'd be facing Roberts, Holding, Lillee and all those other quicks in not-so-good light, often with a red ball. I had my eyes tested after that."

For year two, Packer did a deal with the Australian Cricket Board to use the main venues. Other nations were including WSC players in their establishment teams. The West Indies Cricket Board had already arranged a series in the Caribbean between Australia and the West Indies. Pakistan, too, was keen to play its Packer players.

England continued to object, and on those occasions Packer players came into contact with establishment players, the cultural fissure was evident, as Bob Willis notes: "The Packer players were banned from playing for England but couldn't be stopped from playing county cricket. They were openly ostracised, though. Amiss had a very rough time in the 1978



Another reason Chappelli was livid. Garth Le Roux cleans him up during the same final.

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

season, back at Warwickshire. Mike Smith and Alan Smith, establishment figures, were involved with the club, so Warwickshire's stance was very much anti-WSC. There was a lot of hostility for about 18 months."

Toward the very end of WSC, one of the most tightly-contested, tense and controversial series was played between the Australian and West Indian WSC teams, in the Caribbean. The series was drawn, and there are very few reports in existence today, and no footage.

Pascoe remembers it well. "The atmosphere in the Caribbean was amazing. Imagine bowling at those great West Indian batsmen,

in their own backyard, with thousands of fanatical supporters jumping up and down. In one game, I got Roy Fredericks out LBW and there was a riot. The game was abandoned." In Guyana, riots affected the Super Test after play was delayed due to rain.

**T**he impact of World Series Cricket was felt by everyone, whether they played in it or not. Rodney Hogg, who'd enjoyed a 41-wicket summer at home against England in a losing side (a 5-1 series defeat), watched WSC from the other side of the Establishment fence. "We'd played two Tests against England

**"DAVID HOOKES, ASKED ME IF HE COULD BORROW THE HELMET FOR HIS COMEBACK GAME, AFTER HE'D HAD HIS JAW BROKEN BY ANDY ROBERTS."**



Barry Richards – along with Greg Chappell, the best performer in WSC's diabolical batting conditions.

at the SCG that summer on low-spinning pitches. Then I turn on the TV and watch the WSC game and see Garth Le Roux, Imran Khan and Dennis Lillee making the ball fly everywhere. Wicketkeeper Alan Knott was taking them above his head. I know Kerry Packer always wanted fast, bouncy pitches, but I couldn't believe this was the same ground we'd played on."

The effect it had on those batsmen – at least the best of them – was profound. Richards simply believes it was "the toughest, most competitive cricket, ever played, by anyone. Everyone who played will tell you that."

Greg Chappell agrees: "I had to operate at 100 percent for the first time in my career." Richards' only disappointment is the fact that the whole experience is not a matter of first-class record. "It's disappointing that the runs I scored against all those fast bowlers don't count as first-class runs."

The bowling was so competitive, starting positions in the top teams were hard to come by, even for the very best. Rice felt the pressure, and loved it. "I had to learn how to bowl really quick, just so I could get on to bowl."

Apart from the pay, the most profound change wrought by WSC on the players was the level of professionalism it demanded. Gordon Greenidge believes it changed the Caribbean team forever. "The West Indies became fitter, more professional and a much better team. On the 1975-76 tour of Australia, we lost 5-1, got a real thrashing from a very professional hard, unified side. After that we became more committed and started playing for each other."

By the 1979 Caribbean tour, the Australians, too, had decided to take their fitness to another level, and for many, that tour, barely recorded though it was, was the most

**THE GREATEST WSC PLAYERS**

Len Pascoe: "Viv Richards was the batsman I feared the most. Bowling to him, finishing two-thirds of the way down the wicket after your follow-through, if you pitched one up too far, you'd likely get a bowler-killer' straight drive coming back at you."

Clive Rice: "Garth Le Roux was fast and would have got 200 Test wickets really quickly. He'd have been a fast bowling legend if he'd played Test cricket. Dennis Lillee was magnificent, never gave up. Although he didn't much enjoy coming out to bat. He was always going to get a few (bouncers) back."

Kepler Wessles: "Both the Chappells were amazing and had a big influence on my career. Ian, you just wanted to follow into battle. He would take the pressure off you and put it on himself. Greg was my captain at Queensland and when I first played for Australia in Tests. His batting was amazing."

Ian Davis: "Viv and Barry Richards. Both dominated with so much power."

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

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important of their careers to date. They treated it that way, and the 1-1 outcome, in extremely hostile conditions, reflected that.

**W**SC ended when Packer and the ACB finally reached agreement over TV rights, ahead of the 1979-80 season. The ACB quickly arranged for England and the West Indies to tour and WSC players were available. Many wanted WSC to go on forever.

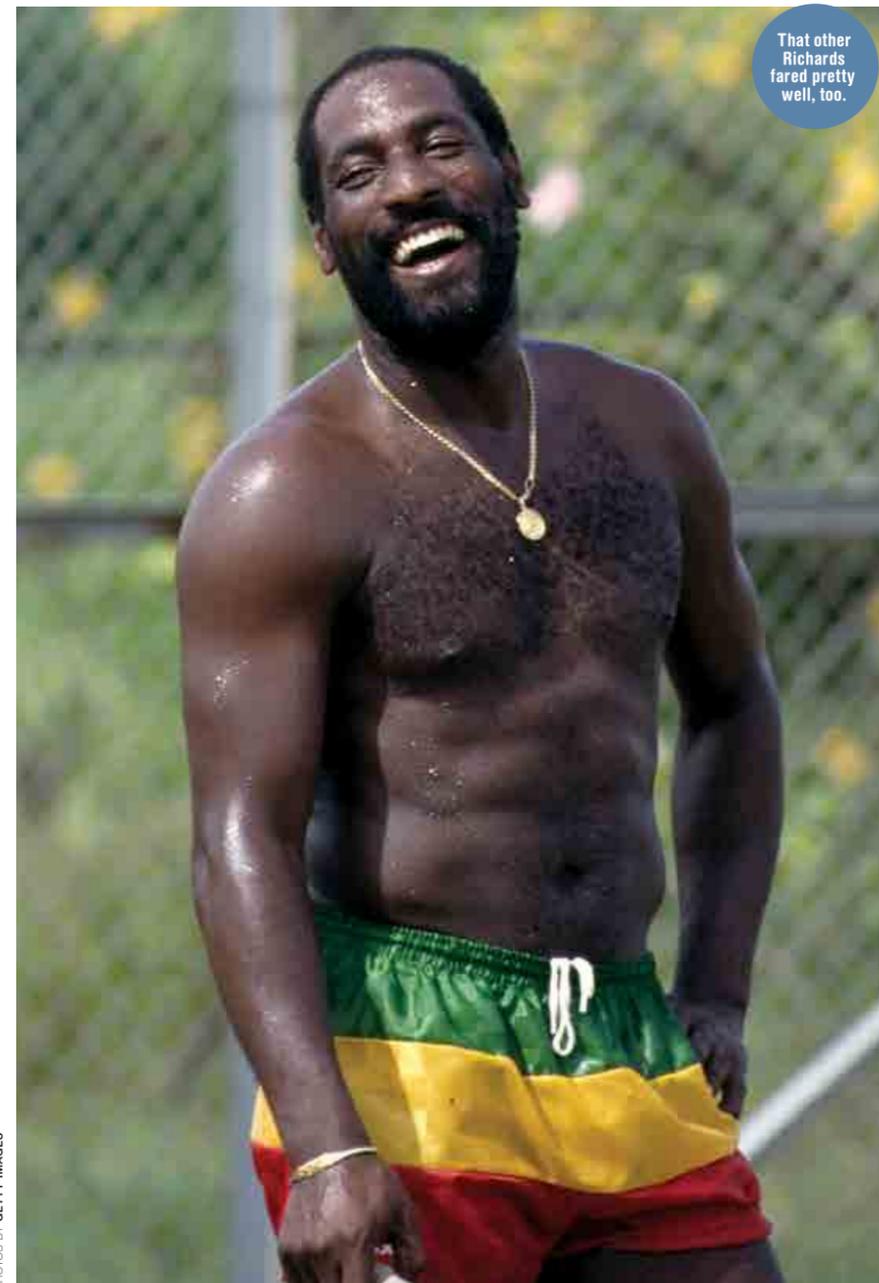
Ian Davis was one: "It was a bit of a shock when it came to an end. To his credit, Kerry paid us for the final season of our contracts. Myself, Gary Gilmour and Kerry O'Keefe were left out of the first 1979-80 Sheffield Shield

game for New South Wales. I got back in after four games, but the other two never played for NSW again, let alone Australia. Nothing was ever said. There was just a bad vibe around. Remember, state selectors were all ACB guys."

Gary Cosier, famously omitted from negotiations between Packer and the players, was affected by the reconciliation. "There was a lot of pressure on the guys in World Series, the guys outside, between the WSC guys and state associations. A lot of animosity. And no matter what they say, there was. As soon as it started to come back on me personally, I said 'bugger it.' I was 26 and I stopped playing."

Greg Chappell experienced it differently: "It

**"GARNER THREW THE BAT DOWN, KICKED OVER THE STUMPS AND WALKED OFF THE FIELD. END OF GAME." MIKE PROCTER**



PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

wasn't that difficult for the returning senior players. A few of the younger players suffered because they went to World Series Cricket. There were a few who could've and should've played a lot more Test cricket for Australia."

Rodney Hogg never had a problem. "The first Test after WSC, we played West Indies at Brisbane. Lillee and Thommo were in the team and I got on with them like a house on fire." Hogg, never sympathetic toward some teammates from the 1978-79 establishment team, saw no problem post-WSC. "Maybe a few batsmen were grumpy because they didn't get picked when the Packer players returned. But if these guys had been averaging 50 and we beat England 5-0 instead of losing 5-1, they might have had something to moan about."

Callen noticed little discord: "I don't remember much trouble. We respected what these guys had done. Max Walker, Ray Bright and Richie Robinson came back into the Victoria side. Bright played for Australia."

Kim Hughes, who'd remained with the establishment, famously had some spats with Marsh and Lillee, but WSC was merely the catalyst. Cosier felt Hughes' pain. "Kim Hughes experienced what I was experiencing, but 100 times over, because he was playing for Australia and he was the captain." 🍌

## THE LEGACY

Forty years after the first ball was bowled, Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket, is remembered as one of the most significant moments in the game's history.

Bob Willis: "My opinion has changed, over the years. Clearly, it was exactly what cricket needed. Over 250,000 people watched the Centenary Test and the Australian players were paid \$250 for their efforts. After Packer, our pay went from £275 per Test to £1000, overnight. So he did everybody a favour in the end. Gordon Greenidge: "It was a time when players needed to have more say over their careers. The establishment ran things and the players didn't have a voice. The establishment would make decisions which affected our welfare and we'd just go out and play. World Series Cricket changed all that, but I think today, things have gone too far in the other direction."

Ian Callen: "Five years ago, I had to have a shoulder replacement operation. Arthritis had set in, after all the wear and tear of bowling down the years. The Kerry Packer Foundation (which was set up in 2006 to help disadvantaged cricketers) paid for the op. No way would I have been able to afford it, otherwise. Without the op, I might have lost the use of my arm. Packer wasn't just in it for the money. He really cared about the players, too."

Rodney Hogg: "I was a nobody, lucky to get a Shield game for South Australia. Then along comes World Series Cricket and the next year, I'm playing in the Ashes for Australia."