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JUSTIN LANGER SAYS THE ASHES TOUR WAS NOT ABOUT WINNING

FIGHTING FOR THE BAGGY GREEN TRADITION

JOE SPAGNOLO



WINNING back respect for the embattled Australian cricket side has mattered more than success, according to their coach Justin Langer.

Fresh from retaining the Ashes on English soil, and back home in Perth after

spending a gruelling five months away from his family, Langer said Australians' newfound respect for their cricket side had been the most pleasing and important achievement of his 17 months so far in the job.

"No doubt that word cul-

ture came up a lot when I took over the role," Langer told *The Sunday Times* this week.

"What I am most proud about over the last 12 or 18 months is that we set out to make Australians proud of us again.

"I said at the time (of tak-



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ing on the role) that you couldn't just flick a switch and our culture would be better.

"I said that we had to make sure that our behaviour on and off the field had to be good so that we could make Australians proud of us again.

"And what has made me most proud is the number of people that have said to me in emails or letters or at Fremantle Markets or in the shopping centre or at a cafe petrol station 'well done, we are so proud of the Australian cricket team'.

"After the World Cup and Ashes so many people have said 'we love watching the Australian cricket team again. You and the team have

brought Australian cricket back to life'.

"That is what has made me so proud. While we are always striving to win, it's the way our

players are holding themselves that makes me proud."

Reflecting on the World Cup and Ashes tour, Langer said even the Aussie side's harshest critics, the English's Barmy Army of cricket supporters, appeared to have gained new-found respect for their rivals.

In particular, former Australian captain Steve Smith and his former deputy David Warner — who had previously been suspended from domestic and international cricket after the infamous ball-tampering scandal of 2018 along with WA batsman Cameron Bancroft — had regained respect for the way they conducted themselves in England. But not before coping abuse the likes of which Langer has never seen before.

"The best thing of it all, one of the highlights of the tour was at the end when there was a standing ovation for Steve Smith," Langer said.

"From the day we arrived

there was booing for him and Dave Warner. The level of abuse those guys copped. It (abuse) must have had some effect on them — they are human beings.

"Grown men and grown women. We'd be getting on the bus and they'd be singing songs and shouting at them and abusing them.

"I've never seen anything like it. At the end of it, even the English crowd had softened, which tells me they (Smith and Warner) had earned their respect.

"One of the great things about the game is that you have the opportunity to earn respect.

"And Steve Smith and Dave Warner — albeit he (Warner) didn't make many runs in the Ashes but he did in the World Cup — earned the respect from the opposition, the public and the media. You can't ask any more.

"My respect for both of them has soared not just as cricketers but as men. They have learnt from their mistakes, and are back into it."

Langer said compari-

sons between run machine Smith — who had averaged more than 100 with the bat during the Ashes series, which included a double century — and Don Bradman were probably over the top.

There was "only one Bradman", he said.

But Smith was undoubtedly among the best Langer had seen.

"I have never seen anyone problem solve like he does," Langer said of Smith.

"The art of batting is about problem solving.

"If you ask me to

describe Steve Smith in one word it would be 'hunger'. He has an insatiable hunger for batting."

Equally, Smith was as courageous as he was brilliant, Langer said.

Coming back to score a double century after being felled by England speedster Jofra Archer was testimony to the man's greatness.

"There are a lot of scars there with Australian cricket, with what happened to Phil Hughes," Langer reflected.

"It was a terrible blow (to Smith) but the way he came back was amazing.

"For him, the thought of not playing because he had been hit didn't even enter his mind."

Langer is an Australian cricket legend. As an Australian opener, he was a ferocious competitor and brave.

He was happy coaching

the Perth Scorchers when the job of Australian cricket coach became vacant in March, 2018, after Darren Lehmann resigned after the ball tampering scandal that rocked the

“ We have to keep making Australians proud ”



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cricket world.

When Langer talks about that decision to take the job of Australian coach, a job that would keep him away from his four daughters and wife for much of the year, he speaks of “we” – not “I”.

He says it was a family decision.

Langer says his family joined him for two weeks in England after the World Cup.

The rest of the time he was separated from them, face timing every morning and every night to speak to them.

It was tough being away from the ones he loved, he said.

“We as a family knew it (coaching job) would have its challenges — including the last five months in England,” Langer said.

“I got home last Thursday night. I was sitting there on the couch and I was saying ‘I can’t believe that it’s been five months’.

“We knew when I took on the job that the World Cup and the Ashes in England was going to be a huge challenge.

“But we got through it. And we got through it unscathed hopefully.

“If we got through this, we can get through anything as a family. Life keeps moving forwards. They are healthy and happy. It’s worked out OK.”

Langer says coming home to Perth, is “like being on holidays”.

It’s the simple things in life he loves most — walking the dog, sipping a coffee at his local, taking his youngest daughter, Grace, 13, to school.

“Coming home refreshes me and gives me a chance to reflect,” he said.

“I go and have a coffee, walk the dog. The simple things in life give me great energy.”

Langer is on a four-year-contract, but he doesn’t like to think too far ahead. He’s previously said the job at times makes him feel like the “director of soap opera”.

“The lessons I have learned about leadership in the last 18 months are great,” he said. “The job (of Australian cricket coach) is tiring and stressful.

“There are times when I think ‘how do I keep going’. But what gets me out of bed every day is that I am learning and I am getting better and I am learning about leadership.

“With earning respect (for the Australian side) I know we are not there yet. We have to keep making Australians proud and earning that respect. That’s the challenge of it. It’s a relentless job. But I love it mate.”



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From left:
Cameron
Bancroft, Steve
Smith and
David Warner.



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