

Tall tales & no balls



BY IAN CHAPPELL

England's cricketing bovver boy, Ian Botham, freshly knighted, has published a new book of fables. We especially like his bar-room ripping yarn: "How I flattened the Australian captain."

IAN BOTHAM HAS written a new book. It should be titled *More Cricket Fairytales* because, far from "setting the record straight about himself", as it suggests on the back cover, he actually embellishes previous historical inaccuracies.

In 1996, I was at Augusta covering the US Masters golf tournament for Channel Nine when a BBC radio journalist asked me for an interview. In one question, he recited a Botham quote and asked for a response. I called the English cricketer "an habitual liar" and this latest publication is further proof of that assertion.

Apart from having us in the same bar, the rest is a fairytale. How did we happen to be together in a bar in Melbourne in 1977?

Botham was in Australia on a Whitbread scholarship playing for Melbourne University in the VCA district competition. I was playing for North Melbourne and the previous Saturday – the first of a two-day contest – Botham had injured his shoulder batting and had his arm in a sling. I was rather surprised then to discover that when University had to bowl one over later that afternoon, it was Botham who took the new ball.

The following Friday night, I arrived at the MCG bar, a small hotel next to the Hilton, and

He was adamant I'd abused him, and when I asked for an apology, he refused. He then accused me of retiring from cricket to avoid the upcoming tour to England where "every fast bowler was looking to knock my block off".

As I'd faced the English speedsters John Snow, Bob Willis and Alan Ward in their prime, I felt entitled to brush that one aside, which I did with a few uncomplimentary remarks. Botham now began to have second thoughts about who had abused him in the Somerset match and said: "It might have been someone who looked like you."

I'd had enough of his bullshit by this stage, and said: "I gave you the chance to apologise and you didn't, so you can f--- off."

With that, he put an empty beer glass against my face and threatened: "I'll cut you from ear to ear."

"That will only confirm you are a coward," I said. "It will mean more if you cut me with a cricket ball tomorrow and I'll give you every chance, because I'm going to bat all adjectival day."

I was leaning back in my chair at the time and, when he pushed me in the chest, I fell backwards. As I got up, he suggested we settle it outside to which I replied: "I don't fight. You either finish up in jail or hospital and I don't intend visiting either over a c--- like you."

I turned and headed outside where he yelled something about knocking my block off the next day. As I was walking across Wellington Street, I turned and replied: "What, with your sore arm and all, Deary?"

With that, he became enraged and the former Australian fast bowler Ian Callen had to restrain him by clutching him in a bear hug.

We did battle the next day on the cricket

W I set off in hot pursuit, chasing him down the street and hurdling the bonnet of a passing car //

IAN BOTHAM AKA SUPERMAN

The book recycles another version of our 1977 spat with added twists. He relates how, during the Centenary Test – it was actually a month earlier, during a Sheffield Shield match between Queensland and Victoria – I started rubbishing English cricket in a bar. "I gave him three official warnings," writes Botham, "all of which he ignored, so the next time he started, I just flattened him. He went flying over a table and crashlanded on a group of Aussie Rules footballers, spilling their drinks in the process".

After explaining how I bolted for the door, he couldn't contain his Superman self-image, describing how he "at once set off in hot pursuit, chasing him down the street and even hurdling the bonnet of a passing car".

the young Englishman was boasting in a very loud voice that he could drink Australian beer all night and it had no effect on him.

This amused rather than bothered me, but I did become extremely annoyed when he accused me of verbally abusing him during an Australia v Somerset match. He said that "as a number 11", he didn't mind a bit of abuse, but when I had said to him, "Does your mother f---?", that was going too far.

I told him I didn't believe anyone should stoop so low on a cricket field by making those type of remarks. I then pointed out to him that I'd only played against Somerset in 1968, and as English counties weren't known for their youth policies, I doubted he was in the side at age 12.

TOUGH GUY

England all-rounder Ian Botham sorts fact from fiction in the tabloids



pitch and, while batting for around 40 minutes against Botham, there were no bouncers. I was then dismissed by Graham Stevenson – another Englishman here on a scholarship – incorrectly given out caught behind. I’ve never been so pissed off about getting a bad decision in my life.

After play, we were having drinks at the Arden Street ground when Stevenson called me over. He said his flatmate Botham had come home ranting and raving about what he’d done to me the previous night and asked me for my version of the story.

Just then, Botham came over and I said to Graham: “I’ve come here for a pleasant drink and that doesn’t include talking with this c---. If you want to hear my side of the story, he has to go, but if you want to talk to him, then I’ll leave. You make the choice.”

With that, Stevenson told Botham to leave and I related my version to him.

The matter would have ended there if Botham hadn’t gone home and cooked up one of his fairytales.

When the story first appeared in print, the late Peter McFarlane, *The Age* cricket writer



Ian Terence Botham

Age: 51 **Played for:** England, Durham, Queensland, Somerset, Worcestershire

Nicknames: Guy the Gorilla, Beefy

Tests 102 **Captain** 12 (3 v Aus), 8 draws, 4 losses, 0 wins

Batting 5200 runs, 33.54 **avg**, HS 208

Bowling 383 **wkts**, 28.40 **avg**, BB 8/34

Catches 120

Honours Walter Lawrence Trophy, 1982 & 1985; awarded OBE 1992; knighted 2007

SOURCE: CRICINFO

who had witnessed the whole incident, rang Botham in England and asked why he was spreading a version that wasn’t true. In a telling response, Botham said: “Because it makes me look a big man in England.”

It’s interesting that in Botham’s first book, in collaboration with journalist Dudley Doust,

he has me running out the back door into the car park and not as he does in this latest version “out into the street.”

A few years ago, Ian Wooldridge, the English sports journalist who died in March this year, asked me at which hotel the incident had occurred. I told him and, after checking for

HOOK SHOT

Ian Chappell dismisses Botham's punch line

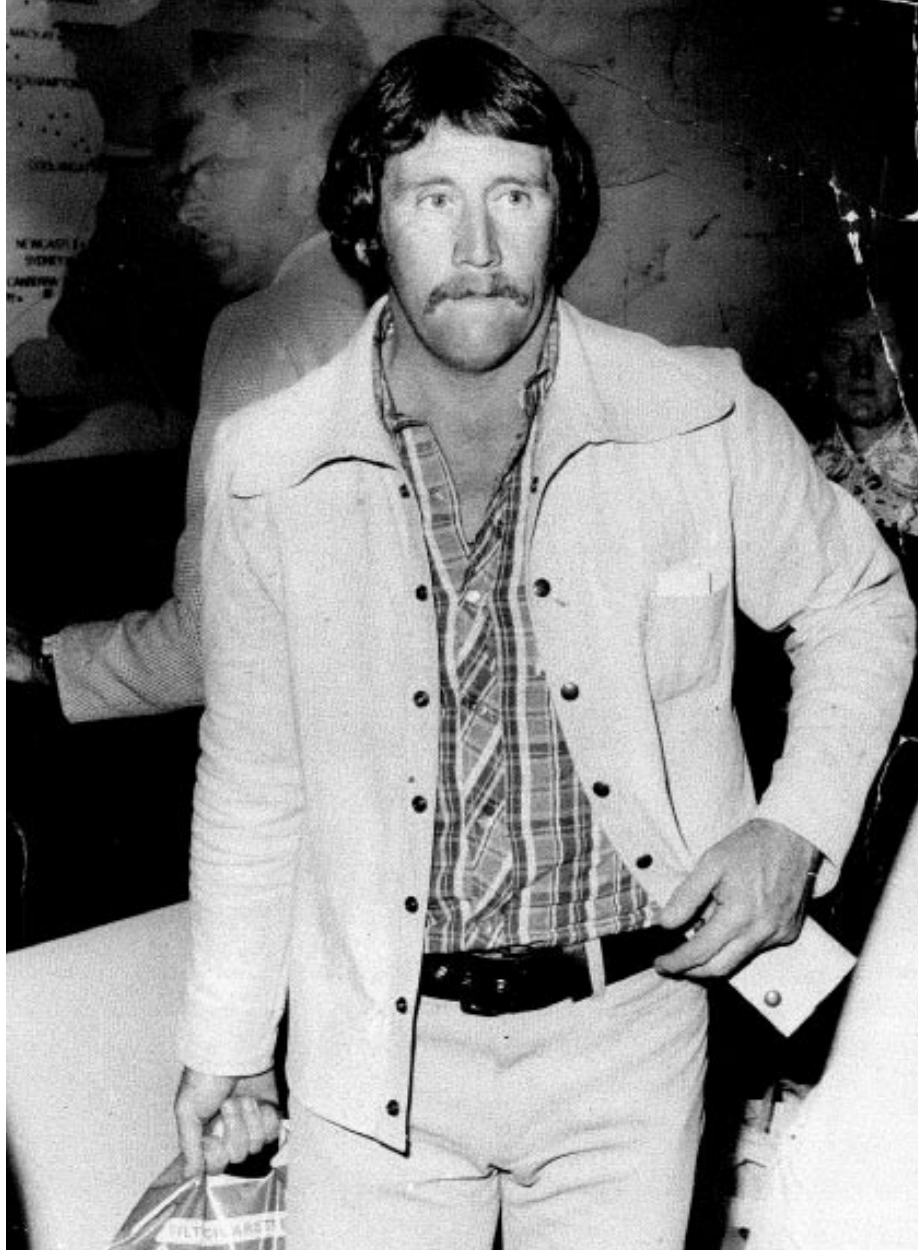
himself, he said: "There is no car park at the back of the hotel."

In this latest book, Botham has also added a new tale to his repertoire in which he claims: "First under Ian Chappell and then Allan Border, Australia's sledging had grown so vicious and so widespread that it was in danger of destroying the friendly relations between opponents that was one of cricket's most cherished characteristics." He goes on to describe it as "a cold, calculated campaign to intimidate and unsettle opponents".

I only played five matches against Botham, all in 1979-80: one as captain of South Australia, plus two Tests and two One-Day Internationals for Australia. In the SA match, he dismissed me for nought and told me to "f--- off" as I was leaving.

There's no point in responding when you have nought against your name, but in the first of the ODIs at the SCG, Botham came on to bowl in the final overs of our innings. Twice I hit him back over his head for four and he followed up with a bouncer that was called a no-ball for overstepping. I seized my opportunity: "At least have the courage to bowl them from a full distance," I shouted down the pitch, "rather than running through the crease, you gutless p----."

At the completion of the innings, I returned to the dressing room to find our captain Greg Chappell on the phone. On hanging up, he told



Aw diddums, did someone say something nasty to you? Here, cry into this, you gutless p....

IAN CHAPPELL AFTER BOTHAM DEMANDED AN SLEDGING APOLOGY

me it had been England captain Mike Brearley ringing on behalf of Botham to ask for an apology for what I'd said to him on the field.

When Botham came out to bat in the evening, I wandered over to him and said: "Aw diddums, did someone say something nasty to you?" and then offered him my handkerchief. "Here, cry into this you gutless p----."

That was pretty much our last conversation. Apart from me telling him he's "dead from the neck up" a few times, we haven't spoken since 1980. His ludicrous assertion about me utilising verbals in "a cold and calculating campaign to intimidate and unsettle opponents", requires a response, however. It never occurred to me that words would be that intimidating when Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson were bowling.

As Botham never played against me when I was captain of Australia, the opinion of former England batsman David "Bumble" Lloyd is probably more pertinent. He played against Australia in 1974-75 and, when someone recently asked about the aggro that season, Bumble replied: "I played in that series and I've read what the Australians were supposed to have said and it didn't happen."

There are many skeletons dangling in Botham's cupboard, ranging from stories of drug-taking to general thuggery, and if he keeps peddling his lies, there's every chance more of these stories will emerge. As I said when asked about his recent trip to Buckingham Palace: "Someone is going to regret awarding him a knighthood." ●

Ian Michael Chappell

Age 64 **Played for** Australia, Lancashire, South Australia

Nickname Chappelli

Tests: 75 **Captain** 30 (16 v Eng)
15 wins, 10 draws, 5 losses

Batting 5345 runs, 42.42 avg. HS 196

Bowling 20 wkts, 65.80 avg, BB 2/21

Catches 105

Honours Wisden Cricketer of the Year 1976; Australian Cricket Hall of Fame 2003

SOURCE: CRICINFO

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