

THE FIRST TEST

Led by the Maestro of Cricket, Don Bradman, the Australians take the field at Nottingham in the 149th battle for The Ashes. Len Hutton and Cyril Washbrook go out to face a team which have a fair claim to being unbeatable and are acclaimed the winners before the first ball is bowled. As forecast by nearly all sports writers the England batsmen suffer the fate predicted for them.

Fast bowler Ray Lindwall (hurling them down at top speed) keeps the score down, helped by Sid Barnes who, fielding at forward short leg, stands perilously close to all batsmen. In slow motion, speed-merchant Lindwall again seems very near to bowling a No-ball ... but he goes unchallenged.

With England's score fifteen for two and Bill Edrich at the wicket, the prophets of gloom are proved right. Batting half-heartedly, the Middlesex man doesn't stay long. Skipper Bradman, shrewdest of strategists, keeps his fast bowlers - like Keith Miller - plugging away, exploiting to the full the English weakness. Not even Denis Compton (never nervous) can settle down. Joe Hardstaff, a Test player for thirteen years, comes and goes. The walk between the Pavilion and the field becomes a procession. Compton (last season's hero) is next to go. Left-hander Bill Johnston is doing all the damage. His third victim in two hours is Gloucester's Charlie Barnett. The rout is non-stop. Godfrey Evans of Kent is out, caught Morris, bowled Johnston.

With eight wickets down, there comes the hero of the hour, Jim Laker, a last minute choice picked for his bowling. With Surrey team mate, Alec Bedser (another bowler) he proves that the Australian bowling can be handled. Jim Laker, twenty-six years old, Yorkshire-born, is a cricketer who'll always be remembered gratefully when talk revolves on Test Matches. Saving England from a lowest-ever score, he gives the side a total the batsmen had failed to get. A splendid debut for a newcomer, Laker knocks up more than the first seven players combined.

Scoring sixty-three, the Surrey man's fighting innings shows that the wicket that turned from a batsmen's paradise into a Paradise Lost wasn't so unplayable after all. With their total a lowly 165 England go out to field before a thirty thousand crowd who had come to see Compton, but stayed to see another classic display by Bradman.

The great Don seems strangely subdued against Bedser's bowling and the run-getting machine is ticking over slowly in the opening stages.

Suicide fielder Sid Barnes is getting his runs together with his skipper, but the hero of England's innings, Jim Laker, is there again - this time keeping the runs down and sending up the rattle of balls.

With Barnes back in the Pavilion, Bedser almost gets Bradman in the next over... but the Maestro is after his thousand runs and stays on.

Century-maker Hassett, hitting out at Edrich, joins Bradman, and together they send up the total.

But it's Bradman's day. A menace to English bowlers for eighteen years, the 39-year-old Australian knocks up his eighteenth test century. Bradman remains the world's greatest batsman. The Ashes (down under the fourteen years) look safe in his keeping.