

ENGLAND TEAM FAVOURED TO RETAIN ASHES

BETWEEN now and the beginning of December when the first Test match starts at Brisbane both countries will have studied their forces; sorted their players in form and out of form—considered team balance, and we hope, fitted themselves for the battles immediately ahead. Obviously it is impossible at this early stage to have any idea of the final makeup of the teams—less of form—illness or injury can play a big part. One has only to remember the last tour of Australia by Len Hutton's team to realise how very far away even last-minute assessments can be. Hutton started that tour with big Alec Bedser getting an attack of shingles; off-spin bowler McConnon went down with a knee injury; Wardle and Appleyard, England's other spin bowlers, found the hard Australian pitches completely to their disliking. Fast bowler Tyson was so erratic in direction, there were times when he couldn't have hit a haystack. Compton was nursing a troublesome knee injury, Evans went ill and an England team with batsmen and bowlers completely out of form, lost the first Test match at Brisbane by an innings and 154 runs. There wasn't a critic in the world who was not prepared to write off any chance the England team might have had. The best they could suggest was an alteration here and there which might make defeat less overwhelming. It is necessary to recapitulate the eventual outcome. Hutton told Tyson he had to cut down his long and laboured run up to the bowling crease. It was found that by doing so Tyson lost nothing of his speed but gained immeasurably in accuracy. He swept through all opposition. Wickets went down like ninepins. Typhoon Tyson became the spear-head of the England attack and the focal point of England team tactics. Bedser was

The first of two talks on the forthcoming England-Australia Test series, specially recorded in England for the NZBS by BILL BOWES.

dropped. England won the second Test by 38 runs, and with glowing confidence and improved tactics both round Tyson, won the third Test match by 128 runs and the fourth Test match at Adelaide—a victory which meant they had won the first series in Australia for 22 years—by a comfortable five wickets' margin.

Perhaps some of the listeners to this talk will remember that three and a half years ago, following that tour in Australia and before the team moved over to play the Tests with New Zealand—which are always tacked on to the end of an Australian series—I made reference to England then having a team likely to beat the best in the world, especially on hard wicket conditions. Maybe it was nothing more than a hope I was expressing, but that hope is now an established fact. England are world champions. Since 1951 they have not lost a Test series to any other country and in the meantime either at home or abroad, they've beaten all comers. So far as Australia is concerned, England have won the last three series—two in England and one in Australia. South Africa they've beaten in England and drawn away. They've drawn with West Indies away but in England completely punctured the mystery bubble of bowler Ramadhin and humbled one of the greatest batting combinations produced in the Caribbean—Weekes, Walcott and Worrell, the famous three W's.

Pakistan, India and New Zealand, although producing good cricket at times have been an obvious second best, and if I may be permitted a slight digression, let me say how disappointed we were in England that your 1958 touring team did not match up with the splendid performances of Wally

Hadlee and his men in 1949. I know they had bad luck especially with the weather but I know similarly that in New Zealand you wouldn't like me to make excuses for a poor showing. The fact is simply this. On England-type pitches, England has perhaps one of the greatest bowling sides she has ever possessed. Spin bowlers Laker and Lock (if the ball will turn) have an ability to make a team of Bradmans look silly. Trueman, Loader and Statham can take any advantage to be found in a green or grassy pitch; and in a wet season like the one we've had in England, just as with the Australians, South Africa and West Indies in previous years, New Zealand batsmen couldn't find the answer. When pitches have favoured the batsmen, Peter May—whom I believe to be the best batsman in the world—Richardson, Cowdrey, Graveney, Wat-son, Milton and the rest of the England players have all got the runs they wanted, and I repeat, most unfortunately in the series preceding an Australian tour, New Zealand had wet pitches and failed to extend, in particular the England bowlers. You see, conditions in Australia are very much different from those in England. Rain doesn't now enter into calculations. In the unlikely event of rain falling it's been agreed that pitches shall be completely covered. This means immediately, a great deal of the power of Laker and Lock is diminished. Unless the pitches crumble they will be unable to make the ball spin, because with ordinary finger spin, unless the ball pitches into a soft surface or into a sandy surface where the spin will bite, the ball will move along without any deviation.

Of course, the power of fast bowlers is increased. They can get more speed, get the ball to hurry along more, and the England attack for that very reason now consists of four fast bowlers, Statham, Tyson, Trueman and Loader with support from all-rounder Bailey too. Study of Australia's cricketers reveals that they've found another good batsman in O'Neill, but he still has to prove himself. England are much more concerned with those wristy spin bowlers Kline and Benaud—this latter player said to be greatly improved—who have been meeting with great success. If wristy spin bowlers are to be match winners in Australia, it was necessary that England should have one in the tour party too. England only had one such bowler, Johnny Wardle of Yorkshire, but as you will have read, Yorkshire had to sack him because he was considered not a team man. It's all very well to argue



BILL BOWES, photographed at the microphone when he was here as a commentator in 1955

that England are not concerned with domestic matters between a county club and a player. Perhaps Wardle, had he kept it to a domestic matter would still be in the tour party, but instead he rushed into print; accepted the fee offered by a newspaper and publicly condemned his captain, many of his colleagues and the club which last season provided him with an £8,000 benefit. He broke a rule of his county that he must submit all newspaper articles for approval. In his own words Johnny Wardle asked for it and he got it! He's going to get another nice fat fee for commenting on the present Test series and any regrets that might be entertained that Wardle was a loser financially can be forgotten, the loss is entirely that of the England Test team. With Wardle, 17 players had been chosen to represent England and from those 17 it would have been possible to choose a team likely to do well under all conditions. On fourth and fifth day pitches it is possible to imagine that Australia, with wristy spin bowling can claim an advantage denied England. The England selectors did not name a replacement for Wardle because there wasn't a replacement to be found. It is one of the regrets of England cricket at the moment that all our goods are in the shop window. We've very little, especially in the bowling department, under the counter. The team with only 16 players looks unbalanced. There's too much fast bowling and too much depending on the fitness of Lock's knee to make us happy about the spin, but one thing can be boasted. Every player in the side with the exception of Subba Row and Milton (two new batsmen) have all done well in Test cricket over several seasons. There's strength and experience in the team. There are fieldsmen for every specialist position, up close to the wickets or in the out field. England at this stage of the programme with every player fit have every reason for confidence. They are favourites to retain the Ashes.

(Next week Bill Bowes discusses Australian pitches and the problems they present to players accustomed to England's well-grassed wickets.)



"WRISTY SPINNERS": L. Kline, of Victoria (left) and Johnny Wardle, England's only answer to Kline and Benaud, who talked himself out of the team