

Forget Eton ... most English Ashes triumphs were won on the playing fields of Pudsey



HUTTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (3)

Class distinction: Nets at St Paul's, Hammersmith, wall and railings at Gateforth Street, Marylebone, but David Smith finds the best captains were underprivileged

THE SELECTION OF Andrew Flintoff instead of Andrew Strauss as England's Ashes captain represents a vote for a state-educated captain over one from a private-school background.

During the captaincy debate amusing stereotypes surfaced. The "well-educated" Strauss was often referred to as "the perfect son-in-law". The brawny Flintoff's captaincy was always of the "lead-by-example" type.

We should avoid such stereotyping. Even that most hard-nosed of professional England captains, Ray Illingworth, discriminated between the so-called toffs who went before him. He is disparaging of Colin Cowdrey, who "could never make up his mind whether to call heads or tails". And he observes wryly of Ted Dexter that he would be "miles away imagining a marvellous eight-iron to the green when the ball was coming towards him in the gully". But Illingworth has enormous respect for Peter May (Charterhouse and Cambridge). "I thought he was a great man, a very tough man. His background was pure establishment but his attitude was highly professional."

Yet the presumption lingers, at least in the media, that the well-educated chap will make a fine leader of men. Although just a bit of fun, our table seems to debunk that myth.

Since the Second World War England have been led by a privately-educated captain in 20 Ashes series and won five. State-school captains have a much better record: six wins in 11 series.

Of the 12 privately-educated Ashes captains since the war only Brearley won more Ashes series (3) than he lost (0), though his side did lose a non-Ashes series 3-0 in 1979-80. In contrast, four of the eight state-educated

PRIVATE-SCHOOL CAPTAINS P20 W5 SUCCESS RATE 25%

		ASHES	WINS
Wally Hammond	Portsmouth Grammar	1946-47*	0/1
Norman Yardley	St Peter's, York	1948	0/1
Freddie Brown	The Leys, Cambridge	1950-51	0/1
Peter May	Charterhouse	1956, '58-59, '61*	1/3
Ted Dexter	Radley College	1962-63, 1964	0/2
MJK Smith	Stamford	1965-66	0/1
Colin Cowdrey	Tonbridge	1968*	0/1
Tony Greig	Queen's College, Queenstown, SA	1975*	0/1
Mike Brearley	City of London School	1977, '78-79, '81*	3/3
David Gower	King's School, Canterbury	1985, 1989	1/2
Mike Atherton	Manchester Grammar	1994-95, 1997	0/2
Nasser Hussain	Forest School, London	2001*, 2003-03	0/2

STATE-SCHOOL CAPTAINS P11 W6 SUCCESS RATE 55%

		ASHES	WINS
Len Hutton	Littlemoor Council, Pudsey	1953, 1954-55	2/2
Ray Illingworth	Wesley Street Council, Farsley	1970-71, 1972	2/2
Mike Denness	Ayr Academy	1974-75*	0/1
Bob Willis	Guildford Royal Grammar	1982-83	0/1
Mike Gatting	John Kelly Boys High, Cricklewood	1986-87	1/1
Graham Gooch	Norlington Junior High, London	1990-91*, 1993*	0/2
Alec Stewart	Tiffin School, London	1998-99	0/1
Michael Vaughan	Silverdale Comp, Sheffield	2005	1/1

*Did not captain whole series. Brearley lost the 1979-80 series 3-0, but the Ashes were not at stake.

Private schools are those where fees were paid during player's time as a pupil. A drawn series to retain the Ashes is counted as a win.

MEMORIES DOWN UNDER DAVID SMITH

Not a memory but ... In 1950-51 Alec Bedser gave his bunny Arthur Morris a coaching book with passages on batting underlined. Morris promptly scored 206 and returned the book - with a cross marking hints on bowling.

1 PREDICT SERIES DRAWN 2-2

captains have a better-than-even record - Len Hutton, Illingworth, Mike Gatting and Michael Vaughan.

And those four (along with Graham Gooch) come from arguably the least privileged backgrounds. The other state-educated captains - Mike Denness, Bob Willis and Alec Stewart - attended schools with outstanding sporting and academic records.

The omens for Flintoff are especially good in series in Australia. Since the war Hutton, Illingworth and Gatting have all won the Ashes there. For the private schools only Brearley has come home with the job done.

In fact, it can be argued that league cricket in Pudsey has provided a better cricketing education than any school. It produced Hutton (two wins from two) and Illingworth (ditto). On this basis the Pudsey man Matthew Hoggard should be made captain immediately.

So what can Flintoff learn from his northern state-school predecessors? They all had enormous admiration for the Australian approach and emphasised extreme resilience. This attitude was most eloquently expressed

by Hutton in his book *Just My Story*: "I admire the Australians' approach to the game ... Australians have no inhibitions. They respect a fighter, but woe betide the weak-kneed."

To win Flintoff will have to show mental toughness. All the northern state-school captains showed ruthlessness. Hutton left Tony Lock and a young Fred Trueman at home in 1954-55, then dropped the iconic Alec Bedser. Illingworth led his team off the pitch in 1970-71 when bottles were thrown by spectators in Sydney. And Vaughan told his opposite number Ricky Ponting where to go - ie back to the slips - when he was eyeballed at the crease at Lord's. But Vaughan himself has qualms about Flintoff as captain. In his Ashes book, *Calling The Shots*, he wrote: "He couldn't act as he is now and still be captain. He likes his fun and games. He has a good enough cricket brain but the key to captaincy is managing other people."

One final thought: it is also true that state-school England captains with no middle names (R Illingworth and L Hutton) have a 100% record in the Ashes. Which bodes well for A Flintoff of Ribbleson Hall High School.

David Smith is a freelance journalist and former cricket writer for Channel 4 online. He went to Hipperholme Grammar School, Halifax

