MELBOURNE CRICKET CLUB

Test Cricket at the MCG

Beginning with the inaugural Test match in March 1877, 112 Tests have been staged at the MCG. England has been involved in 56 of the Tests played here. Australia has won 28 of these contests and England 20, with the other eight drawn.

Other sides to play Tests at the MCG are the West Indies (15), India (14), South Africa (12), Pakistan (10), New Zealand (4) and Sri Lanka (2). One Test, scheduled against England in 1970/71 was abandoned without a ball bowled and is not counted in the records.

Boxing Day Tests at the MCG

Traditionally, the Victoria versus New South Wales Sheffield Shield clash was played at the MCG over Christmas, and prior to the 1968/69 season, only two MCG Tests had included play on Boxing Day, the 2nd Test against England in 1950/51, which began on Friday December 22 (Boxing Day, a Tuesday, being the third day of the match), and the 2nd Test against South Africa in 1952/53, which commenced on Christmas Eve.

The first Test to **begin** on Boxing Day at the MCG was the 2nd Test against the West Indies in 1968/69, the 56th at the ground, when bleak conditions restricted the attendance to 18,786. During the following decade only two MCG Tests featured play on December 26, the 2nd Test against England in 1974/75, and the 2nd Test against the West Indies the following season, both of which commenced on that day.

Since 1980/81, only one season has not featured Test cricket at the MCG on Boxing Day. This was in 1989/90 when, owing to the late arrival of the Pakistan team, a One-Day International against Sri Lanka was played instead, the MCG Test involving Pakistan being put back to mid-January.

MCG Tests have begun on Boxing Day in each of the other seasons during this period, apart from 1984/85, when the 4th Test against the West Indies started on December 22 and in 1988/89 and 1994/95, when matches against the West Indies and England both commenced on Christmas Eve.

Vale Alan Keith Davidson AM, MBE (June 14, 1929 – October 30, 2021)

Today we pay tribute to Australian Cricket Hall of Fame inductee Alan Davidson, who died in October.

Test Career Batting and Fielding (1953-1962/63)

M	I	NO	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	Ct
44	61	7	1328	80	24.59	0	5	42

Test Career Bowling (1953-1962/63)

Balls	Mdns	Runs	Wkts	BB	Ave	5wI	10wM	SRate	Econ
11587	431	3819	186	7-93	20.53	14	2	62.29	1.97

South African Cricket Annual Cricketer of the Year: 1958
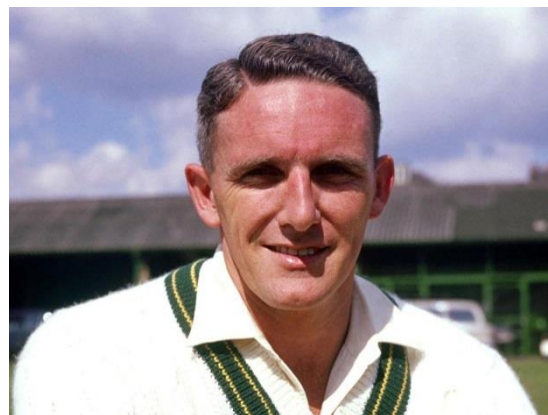Indian Cricket Cricketer of the Year: 1959/60
Wisden Cricketer of the Year: 1962
Member of the Order of the British Empire: 1964
Member of the Order of Australia: 1987
Australian Cricket Hall of Fame: inducted 2004
ICC Hall of Fame: inducted 2011

Alan Davidson was born and raised in Lisarow, on the NSW Central Coast. He started playing for Northern Districts in the NSWCA Grade cricket competition in the 1948/49 season. *"Alan Davidson capped splendid first season in grade cricket yesterday, by bowling Balmain out to give Northern District the first grade premiership. A medium paced left-hander, the 19-year-old Davidson is one of the State's brightest bowling prospects. With a late swing from the off, and the ability to run the ball away to the slips, Davidson becomes a distinctly hostile bowler on a pitch giving him any assistance. This season he has taken 44 wickets in grade matches. He was educated at Gosford High School and represented the Combined High Schools for three successive years."* (*Sunday Herald*, Sydney, April 3, 1949).

Davidson made his first-class debut for New South Wales in December 1949 at the Adelaide Oval in a Sheffield Shield match against South Australia. He took 4/32 bowling in his first innings, and scored 34 in his first time batting. He retained his place in the NSW side for the rest of the season, and was selected for an Australian XI tour of New Zealand from February - April 1950. His tour highlight was the two-day match, Wairarapa v the Australian XI at Park Oval, Masterton, March 29 & 30, 1950 (not first-class). As recorded by the *Cricket Almanack of New Zealand 1950*,

"Gaining a lot of lift from the pitch, Davidson, the young New South Wales fast-medium left-hander, completely demoralised the Wairarapa batsmen and secured all 10 wickets off 13.3 overs at a cost of only 29 runs to dismiss the home side for 70 runs, a total
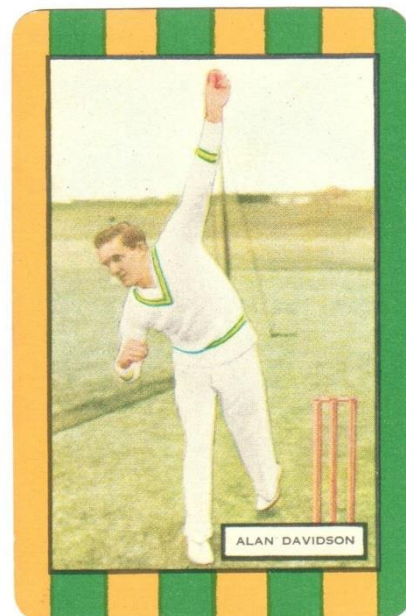
which was beyond expectations when eight wickets were down for 39. Davidson and Johnson bowled unchanged…Davidson's performance of capturing all 10 wickets in an innings and scoring a century in the same match is without parallel in New Zealand representative cricket, and a feat remarkable by any standards. His score [of 157 not out] included one six and 21 fours and he batted for 171 minutes altogether."

This impressive exhibition of his all-round skills was a portent of things to come later in his career. Davidson spent the next few seasons honing his craft for New South Wales in the Sheffield Shield and in tour matches against the visiting English and South African sides. He took a five wicket haul for the Australian XI against South Africa at the SCG in December 1952 and was unlucky not to be included in the Test team for that series. The selectors stuck with the established bowling line up of Lindwall, Miller, Johnston, Ring and Johnson for the opening Test, then included Benaud and Archer in later Tests.

However, Davidson was selected for the 1953 Ashes tour to the British Isles and he made his Test debut in the 1st Test at Trent Bridge – his 24th birthday fell on the rest day. He played in all five Tests, as well as 23 tour matches in total. In the first innings of the 2nd Test at Lord's he scored his first half-century, with 76. Davidson's bowling for this tour, and the first half of his Test career, was very much supporting the established bowlers such as Lindwall and Miller.

Davidson played three of the five Tests of the 1954/55 Ashes series, but was overlooked for the Tour of the West Indies that immediately followed. He returned to the team for the 1956 Ashes tour. However, in a catastrophic opening innings in the field during the 1st Test, Davidson chipped an ankle bone, forcing him to miss the next three, only returning for the Fifth Test.

> *"Striving for still greater speed Lindwall, a ball or two later, stopped suddenly in his run-up as if feeling something give way and, delivering a slow full pitch, hobbled abjectly to his place in the field rubbing his thigh. That same over, moving to field a ball, he shook his head, and calling for his sweater limped for the dressing-room. So Davidson bowled in his place, and hardly can Lindwall have taken the weight off his feet than Davidson, cartwheeling to the ground at the moment of delivering his fourth ball, was lying crumpled in agony like a rag doll."* (Alan Ross in *Cape Summer and the Australians in England*).

On the way home via Pakistan and India, Davidson played in the inaugural Pakistan v Australia Test match, and the second of three Tests in India. The Pakistan Test was held at the National Stadium in Karachi and played on matting. The Australians were soundly beaten, by nine wickets. Davidson extensively discussed the match, and the stellar performance of Fazal Mahmood, in an article in the *Courier Mail*.[1]

This second half of Davidson's career started with the tour of South Africa in 1957/58 by Ian Craig's Australian team. As Ron Roberts wrote in the *1959 South African Cricket Annual*, "Both Benaud and Davidson improved tremendously as the result of unlimited scope, generously furnished to them by Craig, a complete contrast to their roles in the days of Miller, Lindwall, Johnson and Johnston." It was in the first Test of the series, at New Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg, that Davidson, now aged 28, took 6/34, the first of his fourteen 5+ wickets in an innings hauls. While that Test ended in a draw, Davidson helped seal the series victory 3-0 with his 4/44 and 5/38 in the 5th Test at St George's Park, Port Elizabeth. In the final innings both Davidson and 27 year old Richie Benaud each took 5 wickets and became Australia's leading paceman and spinner.

The Marylebone Cricket Club's English team undertook an Ashes tour of Australia for the summer of 1958/59 under the captaincy of Peter May. Ian Craig, contracted a bout of hepatitis before the start of the season and was replaced as captain by Benaud. Australia won the 1st Test in Brisbane by 8 wickets. In the 2nd Test in Melbourne, Davidson took the first of his four 5+ wicket hauls at the MCG. His performance for Australia v England at the MCG, December 31, 1958 - January 5, 1959 was described by Jack Fingleton,

> *"Davidson was the Australian bowling hero. His swinging of the new ball was too much for the Englishmen but he also had lift and direction. On the first day, he had May play three times at balls outside the off-stump, which he missed. Davidson got 6-64 and this was his best ever feat against England, his previous best being 3-36 in the Brisbane Test. It was worth recalling that Australia lost a valuable Test bowler when Davidson broke that bone in his ankle in the first Test at Nottingham in 1956."* (Jack Fingleton in *Four Chukkas to Australia*).

> *"Davidson has developed since he was in England three years ago, and is, in the opinion of at least one Test Match opening batsman, the best new-ball bowler at present operating. He is very lively in pace, and, in addition to the awkward line of flight of the over-the-wicket left-hander, he moves the ball in the air very late in its flight."* (Ian Peebles in *The Fight for the Ashes 1958-1959*).

In the opening innings of the match, Davidson in his second over had Peter Richardson caught by Grout for 3, bowled Willie Watson and trapped Tom Graveney LBW both for ducks off consecutive balls leaving England 3/7. His other three wickets were Colin Cowdrey

caught by Grout for 44, Brian Statham bowled for 13, and Peter Loader for one. Davidson's 3/41 in the English second innings, alongside Ian Meckiff's 6/38, had the visitors all out for 87. Australia won by 8 wickets for the second consecutive Test. The 3rd Test in Sydney was drawn, before Australia won the final two Tests to take the series 4-0. Davidson took 24 wickets for the series, second to Benaud's 31.

(Footage from Davidson's six wicket haul at the MCG can be seen at… https://youtu.be/S7FEcLTdDZk
Alan Davidson 6/64 vs England- 2nd test MCG 1958/59 ASHES)

Davidson's next tour was with Benaud's Australians to Pakistan and India from November 1959 to January 1960. They played three Tests in Pakistan, including two on matting (the last two on that surface).Davidson took 12 wickets with the Australians winning the series 2-0. United States President Eisenhower was undertaking a state visit of Pakistan and attended one day of the drawn 3rd Test in Karachi – unfortunately regarded as one of the slowest days in the history of Test cricket.

In India the Australians played five Tests and Davidson took 29 wickets for the series. His personal highlight of the series was his 12 wickets in the 2nd Test at Green Park Stadium in Kanpur, December 19-24, 1959. In his first 10+ wickets in a match haul, Davidson took 5/31 in the opening innings, then 7/91 in the second. Unfortunately, the Australians lost the match by 119 runs.
> *"On a wicket that was slow and unhelpful to pace, Davidson had proved his versatility by taking 12 wickets in the match, most of them with medium to fast medium leg-spinners. We knew now why Davidson has been called the successor to Keith Miller as Australia's foremost all-rounder."* (Dicky Rutnagur in *Indian Cricket-Field Annual 1959-60*).

Davidson next played in the series against Frank Worrell's visiting West Indies team for the summer of 1960/61. In the opening match of the famous tied Test at the Gabba December 9-14, 1960, Davidson became the first male cricketer to "do a Betty Wilson" take 10+ wickets and score over 100 runs in a Test match.[2]
> *"The man of the match was perhaps Davidson, with 11 wickets for 222 runs, and two grand innings of 44 and 80. This was his finest achievement in a Test match and surely it ranks with the outstanding feats of all time."* (A.G. Moyes in *With the West Indies in Australia 1960-61*). The 80 runs in the second innings was his highest Test score.

In the 2nd Test of the series at the MCG, Davidson took 6/53 in the West Indies first innings. He had Joe Solomon and Seymour Nurse both caught by Grout, for a duck and 70 respectively, then Rohan Kanhai caught by Harvey for 84, Gerry Alexander caught by Favell for 5, then Sonny Ramadhin for a duck, and Wes Hall for 5. Australia won by seven wickets. In the 3rd Test at the SCG Davidson took 5/80 in the first innings, however the West Indies won by 222 runs to level the series 1-1.

Due to a torn hamstring he missed the 4th Test in Adelaide, which resulted in a dramatic draw as the last Australian partnership survived the final 110 minutes of the match. Davidson returned for the final Test at the MCG, which, as Ray Webster wrote in *First-class Cricket in Australia*, volume 2, "produced another tense and exciting conclusion, as a fitting climax to a memorable series." In the second innings he took 5/84, trapping Cammy Smith LBW for 37, Conrad Hunte caught by Grout for 52, Gerry Alexander caught McKay for 73, then Frank Worrell and Wes Hall both caught by Grout, for 7 and 21 respectively. Webster noted that "Davidson's pace and movement netted him five wickets, to equal C.V. Grimmett's 1930/31 series record of 33". It would be the highest of his career.

Davidson's final tour was for the 1961 Ashes series. In the second Test at Lord's Cricket Ground he took 5/42 in the English first innings, to have his name recorded on the famous ground's honour boards. In the 3rd Test at Headingly he took 5/63 in the first innings, however it was not enough to stop England winning to level the series. In the 4th Test, England v Australia at Old Trafford, Manchester, July 27 - August 1, 1961, it was Davidson's batting that helped sway the match in Australia's favour, to go 2-1 up in the series and to retain the Ashes.

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[2] Although Davidson did not score a century, as Wilson had done in the 2nd Test of the women's 1957/58 Ashes series at St Kilda.

> *"Since he took Grout's wicket, Allen had bowled six overs – all but four balls of them to Davidson – when, just before midday (play began at 11) Davidson took a critical decision. He had been labouring as if in physical trouble, but now he advanced purposefully down the wicket and, in a single over, hit Allen through the arc between cover-point and the straight drive for 6, 4, 4, 6. These were not wild, slogger's swings, but superbly made, measured strokes of immense power and perfect timing…Davidson batted with the cold precision of a master Test cricketer in what proved to be a match-winning innings."*
> (*The Australian Challenge: John Arlott's Cricket Journal 4*).

Prior to the 1962/63 Ashes, Davidson announced it would be his last before retiring from Test cricket. The opening Test at the Gabba was a draw. In the 2nd Test, Davidson's last at the MCG, he took 6/75. He trapped Sheppard LBW for 0, bowled Pullar for 11, had Titmus caught by Jarman for 15, Trueman caught O'Neill for 6, bowled Statham for 1 and had Coldwell caught by Benaud for 1. Davidson's four 5+ wicket hauls at the MCG places him third on the all-time list behind the five by England's SF Barnes, and the great DK Lillee's seven. Davidson's last 5+ wicket haul took place in the 3rd Test at the SCG, where he took 5/25 in England's second innings to help Australia win the Test by eight wickets. In the 5th Test at the SCG, Davidson concluded his Test career with a wicket. "With the last ball of the last over before lunch, and inevitably his last ball in Test cricket, Davidson had Smith caught by Simpson at first slip." (Tom Goodman in *With the M.C.C. in Australia 1962-3*). Australia retained the Ashes 1-1 after the five Tests.

In his book on the 1962/63 Ashes series, *Australia 63,* Alan Ross paid tribute to Alan Davidson's career…
> *"Davidson, for long deprived of the new ball by Lindwall and Miller, both for New South Wales and Australia - for Australia Bill Johnston also got earlier use of it - emerged finally as the greatest exponent of fast left-arm bowling since the war. During his Test apprenticeship he fielded at leg slip so magnificently - his particular yen was for Hutton, whose leg glances he intercepted from positions that seemed in no way involved - and batted at number 8 with such dash that it seemed of little consequence whether he bowled or not. In fact, he was always primarily a bowler and once Lindwall and Miller were out of the way he quickly established himself. He learned from Johnston the angles at the disposal of the left-hander, the use of the crease and the way to slant the ball across the body or cut it off the seam. But where Johnston bowled with nagging accuracy at fast-medium, Davidson was able, over short periods, to produce bursts of real speed. He had a nasty bouncer, his in-swing was late and sharp, he got the ball to go with the arm outside the off stump and devastatingly. No more than [Neil] Harvey was he a flamboyant character. His manner was thoughtful, his behaviour introspective. He gave the appearance at times of hypochondria, so constant was his attention to muscular twinges, pains or malaises, revealed by flexings of the knee or rubbings of one kind or another. Fast bowlers tend to enjoy such focusings of concern, testimony as it were to the hazards of their occupation."*

In his post playing cricket career, Davidson gave back to the game in a number of ways. *The Cricketer* September 1970, noted that "A.K. Davidson, the former Australian all-rounder, now 41, is the new president of the New South Wales Cricket Association, in succession to E.G. Macmillan, who has retired through ill-health. Davidson is the youngest man ever to hold the position and the first Test player to do so." He would retain the position as President of the NSWCA until October 2003 – a record 33 years.

In *Wisden Cricket Monthly* November 1979, Peter McFarline recorded that "Two of Australia's best-known fast bowlers have won positions on the enlarged Test selection panel. Alan Davidson, 50, takes over from Neil Harvey as New South Wales' representative on the panel, while Ray Lindwall becomes Queensland's first representative for 25 years." Davidson remained on the selection panel until the end of the 1983/84 season.

Alan Davidson died on October 30, 2021, and was universally lauded by the international cricket media. In his tribute in the *Australian*, Gideon Haigh called him, "the acme of the Australian cricketer". Haigh concluded with advice from Davidson's headmaster, "'I feel sure you have enough balance in your make-up not to allow success to go to your head and turn you into that most hateful of beings – a sporting snob,' said the headmaster. 'He who bears his honours with modesty, and behaves himself as a good sportsman should, is the one whom we admire. Play the game, Alan, in the best traditions of sportsmanship.' And he did."

Vale "Davo".

MCG Test Career Batting and Fielding (1958/59-1962/63)

Matches	Inns	Not Out	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	Ct	St
5	7	0	169	40	24.14	0	0	5	0

MCG Test Career Bowling (1958/59-1962/63)

Balls	Mdns	Runs	Wkts	BB	Ave	5wI	10wM
1646	32	643	34	6-53	18.91	4	0

MCG First-class Career Batting and Fielding (1949/50-1962/63)

Matches	Inns	Not Out	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	Ct	St
14	21	1	454	122*	22.70	1	0	16-0	

MCG First-class Career Bowling (1949/50-1962/63)

Balls	Mdns	Runs	Wkts	BB	Ave	5wI	10wM
3310	65	1417	53	6-53	26.73	4	0