

## Answering the question “Which Was The Best Ever Test Cricket Team”

### **Introduction**

In *Wisden* 2002, David Frith, commenting on Australia’s 4-1 victory over England in 2001, mused “It remained for us to assess whether or not we had been watching the best cricket team of all time”, then went on to mention the 1902, 1921, 1948 and 1975 Australians, the 1950s England side, South Africa 1969-70 and the West Indians of 1984.

I thought it would be interesting to try and answer this question objectively by retrospectively applying the ICC World Rankings points system, developed by David Kendix, from the beginning of the first multi-Test series in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Historical ICC World Rankings**

Rather than show all the rankings, which would obviously require a lot of space, I’ve highlighted the significant changes over the years in the table which accompanies this article (see Historical Analysis). This table includes the Test series results which precede each change in the rankings (or in some cases the following results, where this aids presentation), so for example in 1954-55 we can see that England’s 3-1 victory over Australia allowed England to leapfrog the Aussies to become number one in the rankings.

The rankings are shown from left to right so that we can track the development of teams over time; for example, we can trace England’s rise from third place in 1952-53 to first in 1954-55 following series wins over number one ranked Australia and a drawn series with number two ranked West Indies.

This table will also allow us to determine not only the best sides throughout the history of Test Cricket and the extent of their domination, but also answer the ultimate question – *which was the best ever?*

<b>1890</b> (Eng 2-0 over Aus)	<b>1902</b> (Aus 2-1 in Eng)	<b>1905</b> (Eng 2-0 over Aus)	<b>1909-10</b> (Safr 3-2 over Eng)	<b>1913-14</b> (Eng 4-0 over Safr)	<b>1924-25</b> (Aus 4-1 over Eng)
ENGLAND 127	AUSTRALIA 117	ENGLAND 105	SOUTH AFRICA 104	ENGLAND 115	AUSTRALIA 130
Australia 57	England 85	Australia 104	Australia 101	Australia 106	England 89
South Africa 53	South Africa 32	South Africa 30	England 74	South Africa 66	South Africa 71
<b>1926</b> (Eng 1-0 over Aus)	<b>1928-29</b> (Eng 4-1 in Aus)	<b>1930-1</b> (Safr 1-0 over Eng)	<b>1931-2</b> (Aus 5-0 Safr)	<b>1934</b> (Aus 2-1 in Eng)	<b>1935-6</b> (Aus 4-0 over Safr)
AUSTRALIA 113	ENGLAND 121	SOUTH AFRICA 106	AUSTRALIA 119	AUSTRALIA 114	AUSTRALIA 125
England 102	Australia 87	Australia 103 )	England 101	England 106	South Africa 96
South Africa 71	South Africa 85	England 103 )	South Africa 91	South Africa 91	England 95
	West Indies 56	West Indies 76	West Indies 81	New Zealand 80	West Indies 92
			New Zealand 76	West Indies 78	New Zealand 80
				India 55	India 55
<b>1938</b> (Eng 1-1 Aus)	<b>1946</b> (Eng over Ind 1-0)	<b>1946-7</b> (Aus over Eng 3-0)	<b>1948</b> (Aus 4-0 over Eng)	<b>1949-50</b> (Aus 4-0 over Safr)	<b>1951-2</b> (Aus 4-1 over Eng)
AUSTRALIA 112	AUSTRALIA 114	AUSTRALIA 126	AUSTRALIA 128	AUSTRALIA 129	AUSTRALIA 133
England 103	England 110	England 104	West Indies 121	West Indies 110	West Indies 108
South Africa 96	South Africa 94	South Africa 94	England 96	New Zealand 95	England 92
West Indies 92	West Indies 90	West Indies 90	New Zealand 78	England 93	India 90
New Zealand 72	New Zealand 68	New Zealand 68	South Africa 77	India 81	New Zealand 78
India 54	India 66	India 66	India 71	South Africa 73	South Africa 73
		(Wind 2-0 over Eng)		(Aus 4-1 over Wind)	
<b>1952-3</b> (Aus 2-2 Safr)	<b>1953</b> (Eng 2-2 Wind)	<b>1954-5</b> (Aus 3-0 over Wind)	<b>1954-5</b> (Eng 3-1 over Aus)	<b>1956</b> (Eng 2-1 over Aus)	<b>1957</b> (Eng 3-0 over Wind)
AUSTRALIA 124	AUSTRALIA 114	AUSTRALIA 115	ENGLAND 114	ENGLAND 122	ENGLAND 121
West Indies 106	England 109	England 107	Australia 109	Australia 103	South Africa 111
England 100	West Indies 106	South Africa 101	South Africa 101	South Africa 102	Australia 104
South Africa 84 )	South Africa 88	West Indies 99	West Indies 99	West Indies 95	Pakistan 92
India 84 )	India 84	Pakistan 86	Pakistan 86	Pakistan 90	West Indies 88
New Zealand 76	New Zealand 70 )	India 84	India 85	India 83	India 81
Pakistan 70	Pakistan 70 )	New Zealand 55	New Zealand 55	New Zealand 56	New Zealand 56
(Eng 1-0 over Aus)					

<b>1958</b> (Eng 4-0 over Nzl)	<b>1958-9</b> (Aus 4-0 over Eng)	<b>1959-60</b> (Aus 2-1 over Pak)	<b>1961-2</b> (Wind 5-0 over India)	<b>1963</b> (Wind 3-1 over Eng)	<b>1964-5</b> (Wind 2-1 over Aus)
ENGLAND 119	AUSTRALIA 130	AUSTRALIA 134	AUSTRALIA 129	WEST INDIES 130	WEST INDIES 131
Australia 118	England 114	England 113	West Indies 115	Australia 125	Australia 109
South Africa 97	South Africa 97	South Africa 97	England 94	England 108	England 102
West Indies 96	West Indies 96	West Indies 95	Pakistan 87 )	India 87	India 99
Pakistan 84	Pakistan 84	Pakistan 91	India 87 )	Pakistan 85	South Africa 85
India 81	India 81	India 65	New Zealand 69	New Zealand 68	Pakistan 80
New Zealand 56	New Zealand 56	New Zealand 57	South Africa 67	South Africa 67	New Zealand 75
<b>1966-7</b> (Safr 3-1 over Aus)	<b>1967-8</b> (Eng 1-0 Wind)	<b>1968</b> (Eng 1-1 Aus)	<b>1968-9</b> (Aus over Wind 3-1)	<b>1969</b> (Eng 2-0 Wind)	<b>1969-70</b> (Safr 4-0 Aus)
WEST INDIES 127	WEST INDIES 114	ENGLAND 115	ENGLAND 114	ENGLAND 115	SOUTH AFRICA 125
South Africa 111	England 111 )	West Indies 114	Australia 112	Australia 112	England 117
England 102	South Africa 111 )	South Africa 111	South Africa 111	South Africa 111	Australia 106
India 100	Australia 103	Australia 107	WEST INDIES 104	West Indies 91	West Indies 91
Australia 97	India 84	India 84	India 84	India 84	New Zealand 82
Pakistan 80	Pakistan 70 )	Pakistan 70 )	Pakistan 82	Pakistan 82	India 81
New Zealand 77	New Zealand 70 )	New Zealand 70 )	New Zealand 70	New Zealand 70	Pakistan 72
		(Pak 0-0 Eng)			
<b>1970-1</b> (Eng 2-0 Aus)	<b>1971</b> (Eng 1-0 over Pak)	<b>1972</b> (Eng 2-2 Aus)	<b>1972-3</b> (Ind 2-1 Eng)	<b>1974</b> (Eng 3-0 Ind)	<b>1974-5</b> (Wind 3-2 Ind)
ENGLAND 121	ENGLAND 122	ENGLAND 108	INDIA 114	INDIA 105	AUSTRALIA 103
Australia 103	Australia 103	Australia 107	Australia 106	Australia 103	West Indies 100
West Indies 91	India 88	India 96	England 102	England 100	England 99
New Zealand 82	New Zealand 85	New Zealand 86	New Zealand 86	West Indies 90	India 96
India 81	West Indies 81	West Indies 77	West Indies 77	Pakistan 85	Pakistan 93
Pakistan 72	Pakistan 70	Pakistan 70	Pakistan 70	New Zealand 78	New Zealand 78
<b>1974-5</b> (Aus 4-0 Eng)	<b>1975-6</b> (Aus 5-1 Wind)	<b>1976-7</b> (Aus 1-1 Pak)	<b>1977</b> (Eng 3-0 Aus)	<b>1977-8</b> (Aus 3-2 Ind)	<b>1977-8</b> (Wind 3-1 Aus)
AUSTRALIA 114	AUSTRALIA 124	AUSTRALIA 119	WEST INDIES 111	WEST INDIES 111	WEST INDIES 120
West Indies 100	West Indies 99	Pakistan 108	Australia 108	Australia 104 )	Pakistan 103
India 96	England 96 )	West Indies 106	England 105	England 104 )	Australia 101 )
Pakistan 93 )	India 96 )	England 86	Pakistan 102	Pakistan 109	England 101 )
England 93 )	Pakistan 94	India 80	India 75	India 87	India 80
New Zealand 78	New Zealand 72	New Zealand 68	New Zealand 69	New Zealand 73	New Zealand 69

<b>1978-9</b> (Ind 1-0 Wind)		<b>1978-9</b> (Eng 5-1 Aus)		<b>1979-80</b> (Aus 3-0 Eng)		<b>1980</b> (Eng 0-1 Wind)		<b>1980-1</b> (Wind 2-0 Eng)		<b>1981-2</b> (Pak 2-0 Sri)	
ENGLAND 109		ENGLAND 119		ENGLAND 109		ENGLAND 107		WEST INDIES 109		WEST INDIES 108	
West Indies 104		West Indies 104		West Indies 106 )		India 105		India 100		India 101	
Australia 101		Pakistan 97		India 106 )		West Indies 100		England 99		England 98	
Pakistan 97		India 95		Pakistan 94		Pakistan 97		New Zealand 94		Australia 96	
India 80		Australia 90		Australia 90		Australia 88		Australia 92		New Zealand 92	
New Zealand 67		New Zealand 67		New Zealand 73		New Zealand 81		Pakistan 91		Pakistan 84	
		(Aus 0-2 Ind, 0-2 Wind)								Sri Lanka 42	
<b>1982-3</b> (Aus 2-1 Eng)		<b>1983-4</b> (Wind 3-0 Aus)		<b>1984</b> (Wind 5-0 Eng)		<b>1985-6</b> (Wind 5-0 Eng)		<b>1987-8</b> (Wind 1-1 Ind)		<b>1988</b> (Wind 4-0 Eng)	
WEST INDIES 108		WEST INDIES 120		WEST INDIES 120		WEST INDIES 132		WEST INDIES 116		WEST INDIES 115	
England 97 )		Pakistan 101		Pakistan 101		New Zealand 103		Pakistan 104		Pakistan 106	
Australia 97 )		Australia 99		Australia 99		Pakistan 98		New Zealand 100		New Zealand 98	
India 97 )		England 95		New Zealand 92		England 94		India 96		India 96	
Pakistan 93		New Zealand 92		England 90		Australia 86		Australia 89		Australia 92	
New Zealand 92		India 83		India 83		Sri Lanka 76		England 85		England 86	
Sri Lanka 49		Sri Lanka 44		Sri Lanka 47		India 74		Sri Lanka 76		Sri Lanka 74	
										(Pak 1-0 Aus)	
<b>1988-9</b> (Wind 2-1 Aus)		<b>1989-90</b> (Wind 2-1 Eng)		<b>1990-1</b> (Aus 3-0 Eng)		<b>1990-1</b> (Wind 2-1 Aus)		<b>1991</b> (Eng 2-2 Wind)		<b>1992</b> (Pak 2-1 Eng)	
WEST INDIES 114		WEST INDIES 114		AUSTRALIA 117		WEST INDIES 117		AUSTRALIA 113 )		WEST INDIES 116	
Pakistan 111		Pakistan 105 )		West Indies 112		Australia 113		West Indies 113 )		Australia 114	
India 104		Australia 105 )		Pakistan 108		Pakistan 108		Pakistan 108		Pakistan 112	
Australia 92		New Zealand 101		India 89		India 89		England 96		England 99	
New Zealand 90		India 97		England 87		England 87		India 89		India 80	
England 87		England 79		New Zealand 83		New Zealand 80		New Zealand 80		New Zealand 73	
Sri Lanka 68		Sri Lanka 61		Sri Lanka 59		Sri Lanka 69		Sri Lanka 69		Sri Lanka 60	
(Aus 4-0 Eng)		(Pak 1-1 Wind)									
<b>1992</b> (Aus 1-0 Sri)		<b>1992-3</b> (Wind 2-0 Pak)		<b>1993-4</b> (Wind 3-1 Eng)		<b>1994-5</b> (Pak 1-0 Aus)		<b>1994-5</b> (Wind 1-0 over Nzl)		<b>1994-5</b> (Aus 2-1 over Wind)	
WEST INDIES 116		WEST INDIES 120		WEST INDIES 122		WEST INDIES 122		WEST INDIES 112		Australia 110	
Australia 112 )		Australia 110		Australia 107		Pakistan 108		Australia 106		WEST INDIES 108	
Pakistan 112 )		Pakistan 102		Pakistan 104		Australia 105		Pakistan 105		South Africa 104	
England 99		England 89		South Africa 99		South Africa 98		South Africa 104		Pakistan 103	
India 80		Sri Lanka 86		India 93		India 93		India 102		India 102	
Sri Lanka 75		India 81		England 88		England 86		England 89		England 89	
New Zealand 73		New Zealand 79		New Zealand 75		New Zealand 75		New Zealand 77		New Zealand 73	
		Zimbabwe 46		Sri Lanka 74		Sri Lanka 65		Sri Lanka 65		Sri Lanka 70	
				Zimbabwe 47		Zimbabwe 53		Zimbabwe 53		Zimbabwe 57	
<b>1996-7</b> (Saf 2-0 over Ind)		<b>1997</b> (Eng 2-2 Aus)		<b>1997-8</b> (Saf 1-0 over Pak)		<b>1997-8</b> (Aus 1-0 over Saf 1)		<b>1997-8</b> (Saf 2-0 over Sri)		<b>1998</b> (Eng 2-1 over Saf 1)	
Australia 115		Australia 111 )		South Africa 113		Australia 113		South Africa 111		Australia 109	
South Africa 111		South Africa 111 )		Australia 111		South Africa 109		Australia 109		South Africa 105	
WEST INDIES 103		WEST INDIES 104		WEST INDIES 104		Pakistan 102		Pakistan 102		Pakistan 102	
India 102		England 97		England 97		England 97 )		WEST INDIES 101		WEST INDIES 101	
Pakistan 95		India 96		India 96		WEST INDIES 97 )		India 96		England 99	
England 93		Pakistan 94		Pakistan 94		India 90		England 95		India 96	
Sri Lanka 85		Sri Lanka 80		Sri Lanka 80		Sri Lanka 84		Sri Lanka 82		Sri Lanka 85	
New Zealand 73		New Zealand 76		New Zealand 77		New Zealand 76		New Zealand 80		New Zealand 77	
Zimbabwe 59		Zimbabwe 59		Zimbabwe 64		Zimbabwe 59		Zimbabwe 55		Zimbabwe 55	
						(Ind 2-1 over Aus)				(Eng 1-2 Nzl)	
<b>1999</b> (Sri 1-0 over Aus)		<b>1999-2000</b> (Aus 3-0 over Ind)		<b>1999-2000</b> (Saf 2-0 over Ind)		<b>2000-1</b> (Aus 5-0 over Wind)		<b>2000-1</b> (Ind 2-1 over Aus)		<b>2001</b> (Aus 4-1 over Eng)	
South Africa 111		Australia 113		Australia 113 )		Australia 121		South Africa 117		Australia 122	
Australia 108		South Africa 111		South Africa 113 )		South Africa 115		Australia 115		South Africa 117	
Sri Lanka 98		Sri Lanka 102		Sri Lanka 102		England 100		England 102		England 99	
WEST INDIES 94		New Zealand 96		New Zealand 96		Sri Lanka 95		Sri Lanka 95		Sri Lanka 95	
Pakistan 93		England 90		England 91		New Zealand 93		New Zealand 93		New Zealand 93	
England 90		WEST INDIES 87		WEST INDIES 87		Pakistan 87		India 93		India 92	
New Zealand 88		India 85		Pakistan 84		India 84		Pakistan 87		Pakistan 89	
India 87		Pakistan 84		India 83		WEST INDIES 81		WEST INDIES 81		WEST INDIES 83	
Zimbabwe 66		Zimbabwe 71		Zimbabwe 71		Zimbabwe 60		Zimbabwe 60		Zimbabwe 62	
(Nzl 2-0 over Wind)				(Eng 3-1 over Wind)		Bangladesh 20		Bangladesh 20		Bangladesh 13	

2001-2 (Aus 0-0 Nzl)		2001-2 (Aus 3-0 over Safr)		2002/3 (Aus 3-0 over Pak)		2002/3 (Safr 2-0 over Pak)	
South Africa	117	Australia	122	Australia	129	Australia	129
Australia	116	South Africa	111	South Africa	109	South Africa	112
England	99	England	99	England	99	New Zealand	103
Sri Lanka	98	Sri Lanka	98	New Zealand	98	England	97 )
New Zealand	94	New Zealand	95	Sri Lanka	96	Sri Lanka	97 )
Pakistan	89	India	92	India	90 )	India	92 )
India	87	Pakistan	89	Pakistan	90 )	Pakistan	92 )
WEST INDIES	83	WEST INDIES	75	WEST INDIES	78	WEST INDIES	77
Zimbabwe	62	Zimbabwe	67	Zimbabwe	63	Zimbabwe	57
Bangladesh	13	Bangladesh	12	Bangladesh	8	Bangladesh	4
		(Aus 2-1 in Safr)					

Note: these rankings continue until the introduction of the official ICC World Rankings in 2003.

### Which Was The Best Ever Test Team?

So here, ladies and gentlemen, are the best ever Test cricket sides, in order of ICC World Ranking points at their peak:-

Points (Gap)	Team	Year	Tms Ranked
143 (+34)	Australia	2007-08	10
134 (+21)	Australia	1959-60	7
133 (+25)	Australia	1951-52	6
132 (+29)	West Indies	1985-86	7
131 (+22)	West Indies	1964-65	7
130 (+41)	Australia	1924-25	3
127 (+70)	England	1890	3
125 (+29)	Australia	1935-36	6
125 (+8)	South Africa	1969-70	7
125 (-5)	Australia	1962-63*	7
124 (+25)	Australia	1975-76	6
122 (+19)	England	1956	7
122 (+19)	England	1971	6
122 (+8)	West Indies	1993-95	9
121 (+34)	England	1928-29	4
121 (-7)	West Indies	1948*	6
120 (+17)	West Indies	1977-78	6

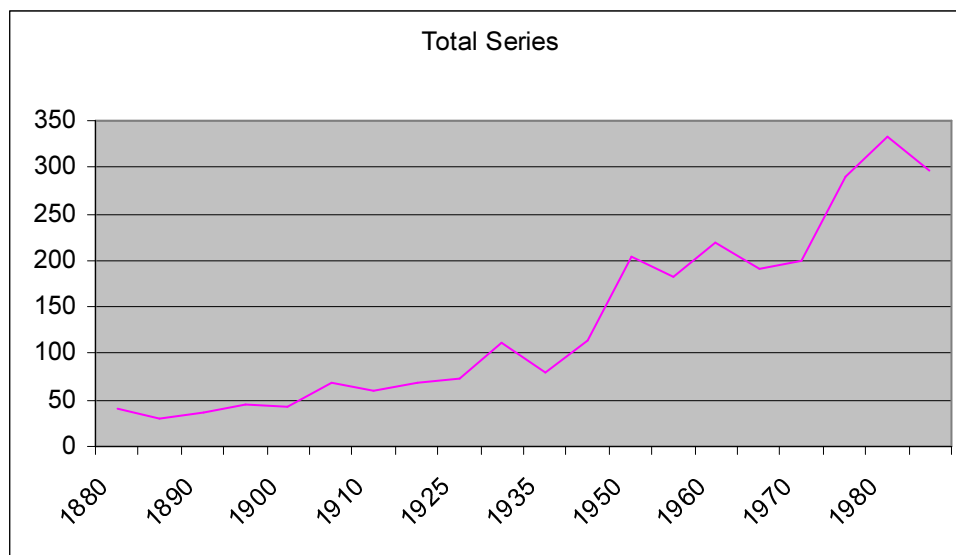
The above list shows the peak number of points in the rankings, the gap between first and second (relative dominance), the team, which year they peaked, and the total number of teams ranked.

\* Australia had the most points ever by a second-ranked team, behind the 1962-63 West Indians (130), who peaked in 1964-65. West Indies were second to the 1948 Australians.

So, assuming that we accept the ICC World Ranking system as being the most accurate and most widely accepted measure we have, we can say that *the best ever Test cricket team is the present Australian side*, and by a significant margin. In terms of points differential over second place, the most dominant teams come

from the era when only three or four teams were ranked (1890 and 1928-29 England and 1924-25 Australia, i.e. pre-WWII), at which times the lower number of Test matches played (see graph below) together with the relatively few teams ranked meant that large points swings were not uncommon. So discounting those earlier teams, we can say that the present Australian side is also the most dominant ever, followed by Clive Lloyd's West Indian side and the 1935-36 Australians (with the likes of Ponsford, Bradman, Oldfield, O'Reilly and Grimmett).

In support of the discounting of earlier teams from the discussion on which side was most dominant, the graph below shows the change in numbers of Test series in five-year periods over the years, showing a large change in the number of series played after the Second World War and also from around 1970:-



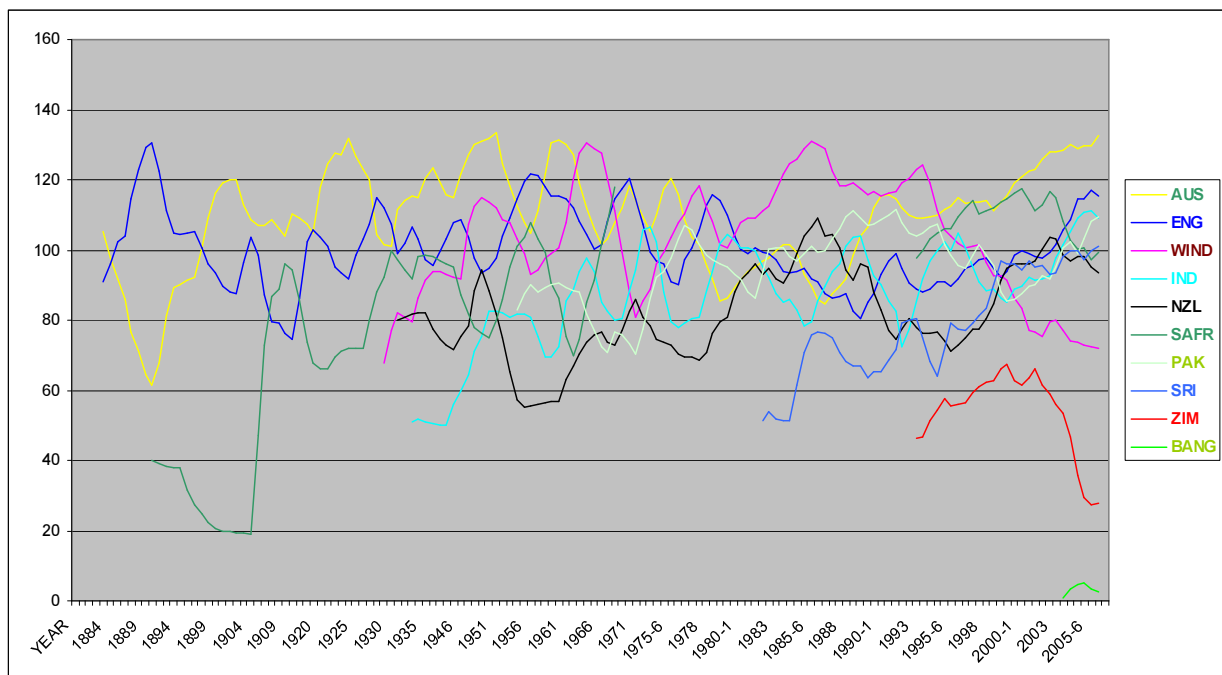
### Who's Missing, and Who Should Be Included?

Of the teams mentioned by David Frith in the introduction, only the 1902 Australian side do not feature on this all-time list—they were at that time ranked first with 117 points, 32 ahead of second-ranked England (see the discussion of Joe Darling's 1902 Australian touring side in the Comments section below).

Another interesting anomaly is that the 1959-60 Australian side, which turns out to be the second-highest ranked Test team ever, is almost never mentioned as being one of the greatest (players in that side included Neil Harvey, Richie Benaud, Alan Davidson, Wally Grout and Ray Lindwall).

A close inspection of the rankings table shows that Australia, with one or two exceptions in the mid-60s and following the many defections to the WSC, has consistently been ranked highly. This can be seen more readily if we look at the graphical representation of the rankings below, as can the dominance (and subsequent fall) of the 1980s West Indies sides. Interestingly, the affect of the

Packer years can be seen on the graphical representation with the very small differential between all of the ranked teams around 1980, as the strongest sides were decimated by WSC defections and hence their dominance over the weaker teams was reduced. We can also readily see the rise of the Hadlee-inspired New Zealanders in the 1980s, as well as Sri Lanka's rise to become a world power and England's problems in the 80s, which were exacerbated by the TCCB ban of the rebels who toured South Africa.



*Note: this graphical representation continues until the introduction of the official ICC World Rankings in 2003.*

## Comments

The following section discusses the historical rankings at various times in some detail.

### 1890:

England's score of 127 while under the captaincy of W.G. Grace remains their highest ever, as was their margin of superiority over the next highest-ranked team, Australia (57). As mentioned above, it should be borne in mind that this margin is probably enhanced by there being only three Test-playing nations at the time; also, the relatively low number of tests played means that large swings in the ratings were common (for example, South Africa's climb from 20 to 90 points in just a few years).

### 1902:

Joe Darling's Australians also had a significant margin over England (117-85), but again only three teams are ranked. While this Australian team has consistently

been put forward as one of the best ever (Don Bradman, among others—see *Wisden* 1986), this is based largely on their performances against the County sides; if we look solely at the results from the Test series this is not as clear-cut. In the first Test, Australia were bowled out for 36 chasing England's first innings total of 376-9 declared (although the match was subsequently drawn); the Second Test was washed out, with Australia not even going in to bat; Australia won the Third Test relatively easily by 143 runs; however the Fourth Test produced what remained the closest result ever in Tests until the 2006 Ashes series (Australia victorious by 3 runs), and in the dead rubber Test Australia lost by 1 wicket – hardly a dominant series victory!

1909-10:

South Africa, with a 3-2 series victory over England, leapfrogged Australia to gain their first-ever top spot.

1924-25:

What we tend to refer to as the 1920-21 Australians actually peaked in the rankings with their 4-1 series victory over England four years later, with what was then a record rating of 130, and with a significant margin (41) over second-placed England. However, the 1920-21 side was more dominant over England, with a series Runs Per Wicket (RPW) figure of 46.1 compared to England's 27.6.

1928-29:

A 4-1 series victory in Australia gave Hammond's men the number one position once again, with a healthy margin of 34 over second-placed Australia. Four teams were now ranked, with the addition of West Indies to the ranks of Test-playing nations. England were dominant in the series—discounting Australia's sole victory in the fifth test, England's RPW was 44.5 to Australia's 28.6.

1930-31:

South Africa's 1-0 series victory over England was enough to move them back to the top, though they were hardly dominant, both teams having identical series RPWs (South Africa were ranked first with 106 points, ahead of England and Australia tied on 103).

1931-32:

An emphatic 5-0 series victory (RPW of 40.2 versus 18.5) over number one ranked South Africa gave Australia top spot, which they would occupy uninterrupted for the next 23 years until 1954-55 (due in no small measure to Don Bradman's dominance with the bat).

1935-36:

Australia's convincing 4-0 series victory over South Africa (RPW of 45.3 compared to 21.7 for South Africa) moved them up to 125 points, 29 points ahead of their opponents.

1951-52:

What is essentially the 1948 Australian team actually peaked in the rankings with their 4-1 series win over England, with a then record points total of 133, a healthy 25 ahead of the West Indies. The 1948 series victory over England was more dominating, however, with an RPW of 47.3 to England's 29.1; Don Bradman considered this Australian side to be the best Test team ever (*Wisden* 1986).

1954-55:

England's 3-1 series victory over Australia was enough to reverse their previous standings, moving England back to the top. One of the best-ever England sides would stay at the top until 1958-59. The 1956 England team, with 122, achieved their highest points total since 1890, and did so with a 2-1 series victory over Australia which was much more dominating than it looked on paper—two drawn games were emphatically in England's favour as regards RPW (34.8 to 17.8).

1958-59:

Australia trounced top-ranked England (although there had been only one point between them) 4-0 and moved to an excellent 130 points, which they would increase to a record 134 after beating Pakistan 2-1. Their margin over second-ranked England was then 21 points.

1963:

For the first time, West Indies took top spot from Australia, although both of these sides were excellent, being rated at 130 and 125 points respectively. This West Indies side went on to achieve their highest points total (131) and greatest dominance (Australia was the next-ranked on 109) after defeating the Aussies 2-1 in 1964-65; these figures were subsequently overtaken by Lloyd's men in the '80s.

1966-67:

South Africa's 3-1 victory over Australia moved them to second place with 111, behind West Indies' total of 127, but more significantly pushed Australia down to a worst-ever 5<sup>th</sup> place in the standings, behind South Africa, England and India.

1968:

England took over the number one spot after their 1-1 draw with Australia, although only one point clear of the West Indies on 114 and only four ahead of South Africa. Australia's subsequent 3-1 victory over West Indies that winter meant that three countries were within three points, with England in first place.

1969-70:

Third-ranked South Africa beat Australia 4-0 (RPW 40.4 to 22.2) in what would be their farewell (at least for the time being) to the international stage. At that point they were number one with 125, with England in second place with 117.

1971:

England inherited the top spot by virtue of South Africa's exit, but this was a very good England side, ranking on a par with the 1956 England team with 122 points.



1972-73:

With successive series victories home and away over top-ranked England (including bringing to an end England's record run of 26 tests without defeat), India became the number one ranked side for the first time.

1975-76:

West Indies 3-2 defeat of India a year earlier had allowed Australia to move back to the top, and this Aussie team peaked with 124 points and a margin of 25 over the West Indies team they beat 5-1.

1977:

England's 3-0 series victory over previous number one Australia meant that West Indies regained the top spot from the Aussies, although it was a tight race with Australia, England and Pakistan all within nine points of top spot. This particular West Indies side peaked at 120 points.

1978-79:

West Indies were knocked off the top following a 1-0 defeat by India, allowing England to regain supremacy, going on to peak at 119 points following a 5-1 crushing of an Australian side weakened by WSC defections, and pushing Australia down to fifth once more, above only New Zealand.

In the 1980 edition of *Wisden*, Alex Bannister commented that Mike Brearley's critics considered this Australian team to be the weakest in 102 years of Ashes competition; actually the 1928-29 team ranked lower on ICC Ranking points with 87 (again following a 5-1 series defeat to England). Also, see the above discussion of 1977—Brearley was captain for that Ashes series too, against a pre-WSC Australian side.

1980-81:

West Indies' 2-0 series win over England gave them a top spot they would not relinquish for 10 years, becoming one of the most dominant teams in history.

[After New Zealand beat India 1-0, only 15 points separated the top team (England, with 106) from the last-placed team (Pakistan, 91). This is most likely a direct result of the WSC taking the best players from the top teams, and the weaker teams being less affected by defections, thus narrowing the gap somewhat.]

1984:

The gap between the West Indies (120) and England (95 points) was already huge, and widened to 30 points after the 5-0 humbling of England, with several notables banned for their part in the rebel tour of South Africa, at home.

1985:

*Wisden* commented on the Ashes series that England were felt to be the better side, and indeed Tests five and six were crushing innings victories; however, prior to the beginning of the series, Australia outranked England 111-104, and for the first four Tests the two teams were pretty evenly matched (RPW of 41.8 to 38.4 in favour of England).

1985-86:

The '80s Windies finest hour came after the 5-0 thrashing of England, at which point they enjoyed a huge lead of 29 over second-placed New Zealand with 132 points, and a massive 38 points ahead of fourth-placed England. Additionally, New Zealand's first ever series win against Australia meant that New Zealand enjoyed second place and Australia lounged in fifth, behind also Pakistan and England.

1986-87:

When India and Australia played only the second ever tied Test match, their ranking points were within a point of each other (86-85).

1987-88:

India held West Indies to a 1-1 draw, but *Wisden* commented that the West Indies were distinctly superior (128-88 in the rankings) and India's victory in the final test "was gained on a...pitch that made a mockery of Test cricket".

1988:

Many felt that West Indies 4-0 victory over England was England's nadir (they had gone 18 Tests without a win), and although the West Indies only rated slightly higher than the emergent Pakistan side (115-106), the gap between West Indies and England, who ranked above only Sri Lanka, was a yawning chasm.

1989:

Matthew Engel, commenting on the 1989 Ashes series, wrote in *Wisden* that "it is probably 28 years since the two teams met as the best cricket teams on earth"; Australia and England were ranked fifth and sixth at that time. In fact, according to the ICC Rankings points, they were ranked one and two when they met in 1972.

1990-91:

A resurgent Australian side beat England 3-0 to finally end the West Indies decade of dominance, although the two teams would shuffle around at the top until the West Indies again dominated from 1992 through the winter of 1994-95. Indeed, both teams shared pole position after West Indies drew 2-2 with England in 1991.

1992:

Pakistan's 2-1 victory over England showed they were indeed a world power:- West Indies 116, Australia 114, Pakistan 112.

1992-93:

When West Indies beat Australia by a single run, they were ranked at 114 and 113 points respectively.

1994-95:

Australia's 2-1 victory over West Indies knocked them off the top for the last time and signalled the start of their incredible decline.

1994-95 to 2001-02:

Australia and South Africa juggled for supremacy throughout this period, with neither team gaining true dominance. The two teams shared the top spot in 1997 and 1999-00. During the summer of 2000, Australia won all 15 internationals, both Test and ODI, and from 2002, Australia began to pull away from South Africa and the rest. At the end of this period, West Indies has fallen to eighth place, above only Zimbabwe and Bangladesh. The ascendancy of both New Zealand and Sri Lanka is also apparent during this period. The beginning of Australia's rise to become the highest rated team of all time began with their comprehensive 3-0 victory over South Africa (116 to 117 points beforehand) to take pole position for good.

1997:

Matthew Engel, writing as Editor of *Wisden* in 1997, noted "When Australia took the Frank Worrell Trophy in May 1995 for the first time in almost two decades, they were widely described as the new world champions." Indeed, according to the ICC Rankings points, Australia moved to number one ahead of West Indies, 110-108. Engel continues "But this judgement was complicated by the steady form of the South Africans [104 points], the spasmodic brilliance of Pakistan [103] and India's near invincibility at home [102]."

1998:

India (90 points, ranked 6<sup>th</sup>) beat #1 ranked Australia (114 points) 2-1, including an innings and 219 runs victory in the second Test, with a RPW of 126.6 to Australia's 20.7 – a factor of 6.12.

1999:

England's home defeat by New Zealand was enough to set them firmly at the bottom of the then Wisden World Championship. However, in the historical ICC Rankings points, England show up in fifth place, ahead of New Zealand, India, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe. Sri Lanka's success against first-placed Australia was enough to move them to third place, their highest ever ranking.

2000:

With their 3-1 victory over the West Indies, England moved back into the top three for the first time since 1984 after their loss to New Zealand.

2001:

Andrew Miller, writing in *Wisden* 2004, referred to England's series win over Sri Lanka in 2001 as "arguably their best performance of the past decade". However, given that according to the ICC Rankings, England were ahead of Sri Lanka 100-98 going into the series, their series victory over South Africa in 1998, prior to which they were outranked 111-95, was probably superior.

2002:

In 2001-02, the South Africans toured Australia and were soundly beaten in all three Tests. The ICC Rankings points show the South Africans as slightly ahead (117-116) prior to the start of the series, but Australia took over the mantle 122-111. The Editor of *Wisden*, Tim de Lisle, commented that the Australians were one of the best teams ever, whereas the South Africans were not even the best South African team ever ("By no stretch of the imagination were they the best team in the world. They went top...largely because they had the political will to play the minnows"); if we accept that the revised method takes this largely into account, then they were actually the world's best team at that time. In fact, only the 1969-70 team ranked higher of other South African teams, with 125 points just before their enforced exile.

A couple of months later, the Australians traveled to South Africa for a re-match. The Australians won the first Test by the second largest margin of victory in history, an innings and 360 runs (RPW of 93.1 to 14.6, a ratio of 6.38).

2003:

South Africa's victory over Pakistan by an innings and 142 runs took them to the top of the ICC Championship—however, in the ICC World Rankings Australia show as significantly ahead of South Africa (129-112).

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