

## BRETT LEE

extremely well – the way they knocked over our top order was amazing. We didn't counter that, or play the best we could have, hence the loss.

"We – a few of the bowlers – were actually taking about it last night: ways we can improve our reverse swing. But there are that many theories involved." Lee enthusiastically spends several minutes talking about wind tunnels, sweat, wind, humidity, cloud, conditions, sticky tape and air pressure. Eventually even he is forced to admit no one really knows why it works. "We've had days where it's gone massively – it's really swung around a fair bit – and days when it looks like it's going to swing and it just hasn't; it's been dead straight." He also thinks the ball used in Australia – the Kookaburra, which has less lacquer than the English Duke – will be more predictable. But, such was the wild nature of the last series, there's not too much you'd want to predict with this one anyway. Pressed for a big English performer this summer, he picks the captain.

"The person who is capable of making people sit up and take notice is Andrew Flintoff. He's done it for the last couple of seasons for England, and he did it during the Ashes. There will be a lot of responsibility on him, so it will be interesting to see how he handles that. I'm sure he'll handle it well, because he's a really good bloke with a level head."

If you're looking for an Aussie surprise package, reckons Lee, try Shane Watson. "Cricket's a funny game – it's a lot to do with confidence. If you've got a few runs on the board and you're scoring at a decent rate and taking wickets as well, it's a massive confidence boost. [Watson's] got a great technique, he's a great listener and he's super-fit, so those are in his favour. It's just a matter of going out there – if he gets his opportunity – and taking it with two hands.

"There's no secret about the No.6 spot, whether it goes to a Michael Clark, Andrew Symonds or Shane Watson – three guys that in any other Test team would be a second or third pick [to go] straight in the side. Australia's batting line-up is so strong, it's hard to get into. So out of those three guys it'll be interesting to see who they go for."

**S**INCE THAT EDGBASTON TEST, LEE and Flintoff have struggled to avoid each other, even 20,000km apart. The media and the public have paired them like Butch and Sundance: symbols of everything great about a series played hard, but in a (generally) good spirit. Other voices said the whole thing was a bit too matey.

"I treat a person the way that they treat me," says Lee. "Cricket's such a tough, competitive game. You're playing for your country, [so] if you can't enjoy yourself and show true sportsmanship, you shouldn't be playing. And he's the guy who has all those attributes. I always say he's a great bloke, because he is.

"If anyone has seen the way I play, including my Ashes series over there, there's no friendliness about it. But there's nothing wrong with catching up with a person after the game. I don't want to be the type of person who goes on tour and doesn't even look at

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- Take on the Poms' reverse swing at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/cricket/england/4155734.stm>
- Have a crack at Binda: [www.cricket.com.au/default.aspx?s=brettleesbackyardcricket](http://www.cricket.com.au/default.aspx?s=brettleesbackyardcricket)
- Hire Brett Lee, fastest dog in the world: [www.greyhoundsires.com.au/brettle/index.shtml](http://www.greyhoundsires.com.au/brettle/index.shtml)

### AUSTRALIA XI, First Ashes Test 2006, (possible)



**JUSTIN LANGER, 36**  
L/H BAT  
MATCHES: 100  
INNINGS: 173  
AVE: 45.35



**MATT HAYDEN, 35**  
L/H BAT  
MATCHES: 84  
INNINGS: 150  
AVE: 53.08



**RICKY PONTING, (CAP) 31**  
R/H BAT  
MATCHES: 105  
INNINGS: 175  
AVE: 58.22



**DAMIEN MARTYN, 35**  
R/H BAT  
MATCHES: 65  
INNINGS: 106  
AVE: 47.40



**MICHAEL HUSSEY, 31**  
L/H BAT  
MATCHES: 11  
INNINGS: 19  
AVE: 75.93



**SHANE WATSON, 25**  
R/H BAT; R/H FAST-MEDIUM BOWLER  
MATCHES: 3  
INNINGS: 4  
AVE: 20.25  
WKTS: 2; AVE: 61.5



**ADAM GILCHRIST, (WKPR) 35**  
L/H BAT  
MATCHES: 85  
INNINGS: 123  
AVE: 48.80



**BRETT LEE, 30**  
R/H BAT;  
R/H FAST BOWLER  
MATCHES: 54  
INNINGS: 60  
AVE: 21.08  
WKTS: 21; AVE: 31.45



**SHANE WARNE, 37**  
R/H BAT;  
R/H LEG-SPINNER  
MATCHES: 140  
INNINGS: 194  
AVE: 16.61  
WKTS: 685; AVE: 25.25



**STUART CLARK, 31**  
R/H BAT; R/H FAST-MEDIUM BOWLER  
MATCHES: 4  
INNINGS: 5  
AVE: 10.33  
WKTS: 21; AVE: 18.76



**GLENN MCGRATH, 36**  
R/H BAT; R/H FAST-MEDIUM BOWLER  
MATCHES: 119  
INNINGS: 133  
AVE: 7.51  
WKTS: 542; AVE: 21.55

the opposition or speak to them. Because that's part of playing sport, too. You have to make friends – well I do – [to] appreciate other people and get to know them. I do not have a problem with the way we played our cricket last year, as far as being too friendly."

Whatever the reasons, there's no doubt cricket's biggest series has been given a thorough polish, after more than a decade of predictable mismatches. Like the best rivalries, Lee admits that "when [England] play against us, it's like this new surge of energy.

"I wouldn't read too much into what's happened between the last Ashes and this series. It's irrelevant. When it comes to the first Test, if their bowlers and batsmen are fit, it's going to be game on."

But even as straightforward a guy as Lee can't resist seeing smoke and mirrors regarding England's many supposedly unfit players. "I'm not convinced [Simon Jones] won't play any part. I know they've said he won't make it and Michael Vaughan won't

make it, but there's even talk now that Vaughan might play the Boxing Day Test.

"But I'm not convinced their bowlers won't be 100 per cent fit. I reckon their bowlers are doing a lot of work behind the scenes, and they probably don't want to talk it up in case it doesn't happen. I'm actually hoping their bowlers are fit. It's important, and it's only fair for the Australian public, to see the best team out there."

But those are just words and theories, and it's high time for the cricket to take over. As Lee disappears into a Mumbai afternoon to prepare for Australia's first match, typically he will only leave me with what will happen, not what might. "It's going to be a great series, it's going to be played in the right spirit of the game and there's going to be a massive crowd... If I'm playing, I'm going to have a lot of fun. As far as a scoreline? I'm not going to say. I don't predict that. Ring Nostradamus, mate." **A**