

# I feel the energy of his personality, and then I smile

## Nick Compton

Former team-mate at Middlesex



Phillip Hughes lived his dreams to the full, and the vivid memory of that is the legacy he leaves to us all

I was sitting with a distraught Neil D'Costa, Phil Hughes's batting coach and mentor, recently in Sydney to ask what made Phil so special both as a player and as a person. "I have coached a few talented cricketers over the years, but in Phil I found a combination of attributes almost too good to be true," he said. "When I first set eyes on him – this feisty 16-year old – I knew I had come across something very special."

As well as Hughes, D'Costa has been a mentor to the Australia captain Michael Clarke and now the rising bowling star Mitchell Starc. "I remember how small he [Hughes] was – how diminutive – and yet he had incredible power and a sense of balance that was soon to make him the most exciting prospect in Sydney," D'Costa said.

He recalled an early conversation, sitting with Phil and his parents Greg and Virginia, when he first met him in the country town of Macksville. "I asked him what his dreams were. But before he could answer I added the rider, 'Don't say to play for Australia. I want to know when you want to play for Australia'."

"I remember Phil looking at his dad. Greg looked back at him saying nothing. I continued, 'Replacing [Matthew] Hayden should be your goal'. The pair of them laughed. But I didn't. Greg said, 'Are you serious? That's not far away.' 'I know,' I replied. "We'd better get cracking..."

And that was the start of both a relationship and a story that made Phil into a batting sensation almost overnight. Phil moved down to Sydney almost immediately to play for Western Suburbs. This was the team I represented back in 2009 and where I first met Phil.

D'Costa reminded me of the story about Phil's first match in Sydney. "I wanted Phillip to play in second grade to start with, but Wests expected to play him in first grade straight away, worried that he would be disappointed otherwise."

"In reality, he didn't care. He just wanted to get out there and play. At that first match I urged Phillip to just relax, and told him it

didn't matter if he scored zero or 100, he was just there to meet the boys. As he walked out to open the batting, chasing 250, an old-timer asked me, 'Who is that?' I said, 'Someone who is going to play for Australia'. The man nodded politely, as if to say, 'Yeah, right'."

"Hours later, when the final over began and the scores were tied, Phillip was on 140 not out. He hit the first five balls to fielders, putting everyone a little on edge. We need not have worried, though, because the final ball of the match he hit out of Pratten Park and he ran off like he had won the World Cup."

"It was just our fourth win of a long and not-so-good season, but Phillip did not know or care. He just ran around hugging everyone, celebrating a great win. I asked him why he was going so crazy and, in what was to become Phillip's trademark line with some of the world's legendary players, he said, 'That's how we roll, bruz!'"

That was Phil. No one ever told him what to do. He always knew what he wanted. The way that he deflected advice – and his unorthodoxy brought a lot of advice – was to find something more fun or

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less intense to grab his attention. I remember the first match I played with Phil for Middlesex, which was against Surrey at the Oval. Though I had an idea what to expect, to the majority here was a diminutive and relatively unknown Aussie larrikin facing Andre Nel, the snorting, spitting, angry South African.

I had an inkling of what to expect, but I had a quiet chuckle when the other Middlesex boys sat up and

took notice. It was quite extraordinary watching a new batting sensation unleashing every swat, slice and smash that an unorthodox country boy could think up: 180 runs later at a run a ball, Phil was on his phone checking up and reading every story on Cricinfo – a kid in a candy shop. You could see that raw, excited dazzle in his eye. It was refreshing.

Most of us dream of being carefree, fearless and living

each day as if it is your last. Yes, we dream, yes, we read this in books and on social media but here was a boy that epitomised this way of life. No apparent complications, just someone living his dream and doing it his own way.

Sharing a flat with him in north London, there were a few cheeky nights out. Whereas I would be concerned that I might not be at my best for the next day's training session, Phil did not even seem to know there was one. If he did, he would say: "Come on cuz, you just gotta relax yourself, cuz", and then walk off with a grin that suggested: "I know what I'm talking about, you just gotta do it like me, bro."

I smile while writing this because I can feel the cathartic energy it is giving me now, reminiscing over Phil's infectious personality. If he is doing that to me now I think you get an idea of what he did to those who played on the same field as him or shared time with him.

He was never threatening or moody – always fresh, young and excited. It was never complicated. I remember him living the moment after notching two centuries in only his second Test, against South Africa in Durban.

Australia had won the Test to go 2-0 up in the series and Hughes had scored 115 and 160. He chatted like an excited schoolboy as he skipped along the promenade of Durban's beachfront. "Cuz, I hit it pretty good today, hey cuz?"

Phil had a huge impact on all of us at Middlesex. But anyone who thinks he was this happy-go-lucky guy with not a care in the world would be mistaken.

Perhaps there was not a university degree behind it but, trust me, Phil was very self-aware and exuded a smartness that made it clear he knew what he was doing.

I will leave the last word to D'Costa. "As outstanding a talent as he was, my memories of him will always be about things closer to home. I always cherished our walks, talking about farming and how he loved to help his dad, Greg, his beloved mother Vinny – 'The Vin' – his beautiful little sister Megan and older brother Jason, a great player himself who always looked out for Phillip. What they are going to do without 'Boof', as Greg always called him, I simply do not know."

"Phillip's family raised, nurtured and loved a bloody champion. They lived his dream together. They hugged, cursed, partied and travelled around as one."

"In return for their support, there was nothing Phillip would not do for them. They had his total love and devotion. That's the Phillip I will always remember."

**PHILLIP HUGHES**  
Nov 30 1988  
Nov 27 2014



**Farewell friend: Phillip Hughes (above) was mourned by Michael Clarke (left) and the world of cricket**



AP & GETTY IMAGES

## CRICKET YEAR IN NUMBERS

### 2

Number of matches for which Andrew Gale was banned after calling Ashwell Prince a "f---ing Kolpak". He missed out on lifting the championship trophy with Yorkshire.

### 3

As in The Big Three, India has decided that it wants to radically alter the way cricket's spoils are divided up, and England and Australia have signed off on the deal that will choke the life out of the smaller countries.

### 13.97

Average of Mitchell Johnson for the brutal, thrilling series-defining 37 wickets he took in the Ashes.

### 55

Balls survived by James Anderson in a thrilling rearguard against Sri Lanka at Headingley. He fell to the penultimate ball of the day... for nought. Sri Lanka won the series.

### 56

Number of balls it took Misbah-ul-Haq to make a Test century against Australia, equalling Sir Viv Richards's record and contributing to an encouraging year for Pakistan.

### 63

Score Phillip Hughes was on before being fatally struck during a Sheffield Shield match, and number of seconds applause in his memory before Australia's next Test.

### 103

Age of South African cricketer Norman Gordon when he died in September. He was the last man who played in the 1939 Timeless Test to pass away.

### 264

India's Rohit Sharma – once mocked as 'No-hit' Sharma – smashed 264 not out in an ODI against Sri Lanka.

### 13,797

Number of England Test runs (a record) on which Kevin Pietersen will remain after getting the push.

### 844,000

Recreational cricketers in the country according to ECB survey, down from 908,000 in 2013.

By Alan Tyers

# Maybe, players will stop abusing one another now

Hughes's tragic death can have silver lining if cricket becomes a more caring game, writes **Scyld Berry**

The year was coloured like no other that cricket has seen, at least not since the 19th Century. When Phillip Hughes missed his hook at a short ball in Sydney in late November and suffered a fatal injury, the sport stopped. Everyone reflected and mourned. This was reality impacting on the world of escape that sport is, and cricket in particular because it lasts so much longer than other games.

Whether the bouncer should continue to be bowled was debated – the full-tossed beamer was once tolerated before being made illegal – but only briefly. Australian crowds roared their approval when the first bouncers were bowled in state and Test matches after the funeral. It was seen as a freak accident, a tragedy that happens once a century, although the number 63 will be forever hallowed in Australian cricket as Hughes's final score.

Crickets' initial reaction was to become a kinder, more caring sport. When Virat Kohli was hit on the head in Australia's first Test after the fatality, the Australians ran up to offer concern not abuse. Mitchell Johnson, the bowler, was visibly affected. This is how it should be when a player is hit on the head, or over the heart. To play the game hard, it is not necessary to be ugly.

Umpires should never have to step in literally. They should never have to come between opponents abusing and shouting at each other. This is the ugliness which should be stopped. And if there can ever be a silver lining to the death of a 25-year-old as friendly and fun-loving as Hughes, it will be this change in cricket's customs. The most horrifying incident of the year, of the last century, can be turned into the best thing to have happened to the sport worldwide.

Helmet manufacturers had vital research to do – to cover the parts of the neck hitherto uncovered. It might be foam or a leather flap attached to the bottom of the helmet, but something was essential. And if the International Cricket Council is still a governing body with global responsibility for the sport, it will orchestrate and, if needs be, help to finance this urgent research.

It was one of the few moments when bowlers had an impact. For the most part, the trend continued towards the bat becoming ever more dominant. At Calcutta, on a ground with a fastish outfield but that was not otherwise especially batsman-friendly, India's Rohit Sharma not only hit his second ODI double-century but carried on to 264. What would have been a highly acceptable total to be hit in a day a generation ago was now scored by one batsman in one session.

Sharma was not alone in dominating the bowling – in his case, the presentable attack of Sri Lanka. In the United Arab Emirates,

Misbah ul-Haq lashed out against Australia to set up a second-innings declaration. His second ball spiralled into the covers, to be dropped by Peter Siddle, not normally in such a specialist position. Misbah, reprieved, kept on blasting away until he equalled the world Test record of the fastest century from 56 balls. Viv Richards did not reach his landmark in 1986 against England with a thick edge through third man, but it was still due reward for Misbah, the captain who has kept Pakistan's head above water in exile.

England's year began disastrously, and got worse. The 5-0 Ashes defeat in Australia in early January led to self-immolation. What would have happened had England done what other countries do, such as India, when they are whitewashed in Australia: absolutely nothing, just accept you have been beaten by a better side, and carry on? We will never know: the fallout consumed the head coach, Andy Flower, and the star batsman, Kevin Pietersen.

Graeme Swann had retired in mid-series and Matt Prior was severely wounded, physically, and that was before Pietersen's book reopened the wounds in October.

England's new managing director Paul Downton installed Peter Moores as England's head coach, for a second time, and kept faith with Cook as both Test and one-day

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captain. If the vast majority supported Cook's Test captaincy, the support for him as one-day captain eroded as the year went on – he made only one ODI half-century – until the vitriol was flowing so fast by the end of England's tour of Sri Lanka that the selectors followed the public mood and fired him.

It was not only Pietersen's supporters who had kept on, and on, criticising Cook: above all, it was former England captains. There was more to it though than the failure to accept the modern reality that the runs of the England captain are going to dry up in any format, after an initial surge, because of the demands and criticisms. Cook seemed to be guilty of doing the opposite of capturing the zeitgeist: selfless decency and devotion to duty no longer exist in public life, and he was slated for being an anachronism. And the easiest person to fire is the man of selfless decency.

It was not the few remaining senior players who revived England but juniors such as Gary Ballance, Moeen Ali and Jos Buttler.

When James Anderson hit his straps – rather than India's left-arm spinner Ravi Jadeja, at Trent Bridge, or so it was alleged – England played some fine cricket to polish off India 3-1 in the Test series. But the trend of England's senior batsmen underperforming continued in one-day internationals, to Cook's cost.