

2017/2018 Ashes

Nov 23-27 1st Test, Brisbane (12am)

Dec 2-6 2nd Test, Adelaide (d/n, 4am)

Dec 14-18 3rd Test, Perth (02:30am)

Dec 26-30 4th Test, Melbourne (Dec 25, 11.30pm)

Jan 4-8 5th Test, Sydney (Jan 3, 11.30pm)

Australia 1.44

England 4.33

Draw 9.0

After a remarkable spell of dominance from the Aussies in the nineties through the mid-2000's, England have won four of the last five Ashes series, easing to a 3-0 triumph back in 2015. However, only one of those victories came in Australia, back in 2010/11, whilst they were humiliated 5-0 on their last visit Down Under. To begin with we're going to look at how the current England side stacks up against the last two visiting teams and then examine how their hosts are looking in comparison to the one that was beaten in 2010 and the all-conquering one of 2013.

England

2010/11: Strauss, Cook, Trott, Pietersen, Collingwood, Bell, Prior, Broad, Swann, Anderson, Finn

2013/14: Cook, Carberry, Trott, Pietersen, Bell, Root, Prior, Broad, Swann, Tremlett, Anderson

2017/18: Cook, Stoneman, Vince, Root, Malan, Bairstow, Ali, Woakes, Overton, Broad, Anderson

What stands out most about the current side in comparison with the 2010 side is that the batting looks significantly weaker. Stoneman is nowhere near as accomplished as Strauss, who ended his career with 21 centuries and an average over 40, whilst neither Vince nor Ballance, should either be given the number three spot, come close to Jonathan Trott, who averaged in the mid-forties and added a great deal of stability to that line up. Root and Pietersen are both excellent players with the former more consistent and the latter perhaps more enigmatic and capable of taking the game away from the opposition but other than the skipper, this England top order looks significantly weaker.

Indeed, even Alastair Cook, who scored a remarkable 766 runs in the 2010/11 series is experiencing a prolonged dip. He's managed just three hundreds in his last 52 innings (one every 17.3 innings) having made 28 in his first 214 innings (7.6). While he remains an excellent player of spin, his struggles against the moving ball have rarely seen him in long enough to play the tweekers in recent times. In the three Ashes series following his monumental 2010 haul, he's averaged 27.7, 24.6 and 36.7 without a hundred and as a result we'd be keen to take him on in the [top England batsman](#)

[market and side with Joe Root](#), whilst with the [former skipper's run line set at around 390, we'd certainly be backing 'unders'](#).

With the exception of Root, England's batting strength undoubtedly lies with their all-rounders and we could well see Bairstow, Ali and Woakes digging them out of trouble after being four down for not many. Of the three we'd be more confident of Bairstow and Woakes performing as Ali's had his problems against the short ball and those will be accentuated in Australia. He's unlikely to pose the same threat as Swann with the ball and there are question marks over the rest of England's attack too. Anderson averages more against Australia than he does against any other test playing nation and is a very different bowler on the flat decks here than he is in England when the Duke ball's moving around. Broad appears to have lost the ability to move the ball away from the right hander and since his remarkable spell of 17-6 against the South Africans at the Wanderers in January 2016, he's without a five wicket haul in 19 games, having managed 15 in his first 90.

Ball and Overton are fighting for the final seam bowling spot and both are unproven at this level and probably wouldn't have played had Stokes been fit and so [Chris Woakes is the one who interests us most to be Top England Bowler](#). He was hampered by a side strain over the summer but having returned to full fitness he'll hope to return to the level he reached in the summer of 2016 when he picked up 34 wickets in six Tests against Sri Lanka and Pakistan and averaged 40 with the bat. His natural length should be perfect for Australian conditions, as should his ability to extract reverse swing.

[Australia](#)

2010/11: Watson, Katich, Ponting, Clarke, Hussey, North, Haddin, Johnson, Doherty, Siddle, Hilfenhaus

2013/14: Rogers, Warner, Watson, Clarke, Smith, Bailey, Haddin, Johnson, Siddle, Harris, Lyon

2017/18: Renshaw, Warner, Khawaja, Smith, Handscomb, Maxwell, Nevill, Starc, Cummins, Lyon, Hazlewood

The 2010/11 middle order of Ponting, Clarke and Hussey probably looks the strongest of any of these three sides which highlights the importance of the bowlers as their attack of Hilfenhaus, Siddle, Johnson (who was bereft of the confidence that he had three years later) and Doherty must surely have been one of the poorest ever fielded by the Aussies in an Ashes series. In contrast, in 2013/14 the raw pace and aggression of Johnson supported by the wily Harris and the metronomic Siddle, with the underrated Nathan Lyon providing the spin option, proved far too much for England to handle. The 2017 crop certainly looks closer to the 2013 vintage rather than the 2010 one and the batting also looks of a similar quality too.

Warner and Smith are undoubtedly the standouts, especially in home conditions. In 23 innings in Australia since 2015, Warner has 1515 runs at an average of 68.9 with seven centuries. Steve Smith averages 68.7 over his entire career in Australia and if we only go back to 2015 then the skipper has 1336 runs in 22 innings at an average of 74.2 with five hundreds. As a result there isn't much between them in the top Australian batsman stakes but with Warner scoring more runs in that time,

coming off an excellent series in Bangladesh in conditions where he's historically struggled and batting higher in the order than Smith, we'll side with [the vice-captain to be top run scorer](#).

Warner has an outstanding record at Perth where's he made 803 runs in nine innings with three hundreds and a highest score of 253 off 286 balls against New Zealand so it's worth bearing that in mind come the 3rd Test. Smith has an impressive record almost everywhere but in particular at the MCG where he has 575 runs in five innings since 2014 with three centuries at an average of 287.5 as he hasn't been dismissed in any of his last three innings there. Indeed, with these two proving so prolific, [2.05 about there being a Double Century in the series looks excellent value](#). There's been one in three of the last four Australian Ashes series Down Under and also in three of Australia's last four home series, despite the fact that each of these were three-match series.

The support crew aren't too shabby as Handscomb's taken to Test cricket impressively, averaging over 50 in his 10 games to date and whilst Khawaja struggles against the turning ball, he averages 63.7 in 13 matches on home soil. Matt Renshaw's been identified as Warner's long-term opening partner after impressing in his short career but he's not in the best form at the moment having managed just 53 runs in his last four first class innings at the time of writing so he may be one that England have some joy against. Number six continues to be a problem for the Aussies with the likes of Maxwell, Stoinis and Marsh all in with a chance of being given the nod and Nevill's nowhere near the threat that Haddin and Gilchrist before him were with the bat.

Starc and Cummins are both capable with the bat and certainly provide the x-factor with the ball, something that the England side that appears to be missing. Starc took two hat-tricks in a first-class game ahead of the series ([it's 14/1 that there's a hat-trick in the series and given there's been one in three of the last six Ashes series in Australia that looks worth a punt here, particularly with Broad and Ali both picking up Test hat-tricks relatively recently](#)) and he's likely to be a massive threat with the pink ball in the day/night Test at the Adelaide Oval, the ground where he has the best strike rate and average in Australia as it is. If he can remain fit throughout then that'll be a massive bonus for the Aussies. The same can be said of Cummins, who's had numerous injury concerns over the years to the extent that he hasn't played a home test but he impressed in the recent Test series in Bangladesh and ODI series in India, playing all seven games in challenging conditions, and Australian pitches are likely to bring out the best in him with the bounce that he gets.

6'4 Josh Hazlewood is another that benefits from the bounce on offer in his home conditions and is much more reliable when it comes to staying fit. In the last Australian summer he picked up 32 wickets in six games at an average of 20.9 and so [at the prices in the top Australian bowler market, we'd prefer him](#), though Cummins does look overpriced relative to Starc. Nathan Lyon provides the spin option and now has 269 wickets at an average of 31.8 as he's performed admirably when faced with the unenviable task of following Shane Warne as Australia's number one spinner. He's certainly a better bowler than Ali and will come into play at Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne, all grounds where he averages 30 or better.

[Verdict](#)

If the quicks stay fit then the Australian attack looks vastly superior to that of England and there also looks to be enough runs in their line-up, particularly with Warner, Smith, Handscomb and Khawaja. In the last four Australian Ashes series wins, the scoreline's been either 4-1 or 5-0 and as a result we wouldn't put anyone off [either of those correct scores at 13/2 and 9/1 respectively](#) but we're instead going to back the [Aussies to cover the -2 handicap, whilst they look bankers at 2.1 to win by more than one](#). The importance of Ben Stokes's absence cannot be overstated as he's arguably the best cricketer playing the game at the moment and were he part of England's touring party then we'd have to revise our outlook as he's capable of matching the fiery spells that Starc and Cummins will no doubt produce, whilst he was also making batting look very simple before his night out in Bristol. In his absence and given the question marks we've highlighted over the rest of the side, it's hard to envisage anything other than a comfortable Australian win.

Recommendations

5pts Australia -1 Handicap at 2.1, Paddy Power

2pts Australia -2 Handicap at 3.5, Paddy Power

4pts Joe Root Top England Batsman at 2.75, Various

5pts Alastair Cook Under 385.5 Runs at 1.85, 888 Sport

1pt Chris Woakes Top England Bowler at 6.0, Paddy Power & Betfair Sports

3pts David Warner Top Australian Batsman at 3.0, Stan James (2.88, Various)

2pts Josh Hazlewood Top Australian Bowler at 3.25, Various

5pts Double Century to be Scored at 2.05, 888 Sport & Unibet

0.5pt Hat-Trick to be Bowled at 15.0, Paddy Power