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## Don Bradman: Cricket's Great Tragedy

### NARRATOR:

Sir Donald George Bradman, born in Cootamundra, New South Wales, Australia on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1908. Apart from playing for 'The Invincibles', the only team never to lose a game on a tour of England, his batting average, of 99.94:

"is often cited as statistically the greatest achievement by any sportsman in any major sport."

So why, still, does cricket claim his achievement, because of his unorthodox technique, is down to genius and natural talent, without taking notice of the batting technique that still stands head, shoulders, knees and toes above any other batsman, ever?

He needed 4 runs, a fluent pull through mid wicket or a flick off his pads down to fine leg, a smashing drive through cover point or a scything cut shot. His repertoire was full, his ability unquestioned. He needed 4 runs. To average a 100, in every innings of his international career, in fact, all he needed was an inside edge down to fine leg. How many runs, over the history of this great game, have been unjustified? If ever Lady Luck, based on ability and achievement, could have applied her magic touch, this was the moment. The Don, who walked to crease to be received by rapturous applause, a cricketing rarity. This tribute usually the other way around, when you've scored the hundred. He scored 0. He still got a standing ovation walking off, despite the collective state of shock.

While the relative difference between 100 and 99.94 is statistically irrelevant, it has become a totem of impossibility.

What makes his achievement even more incredible, is that no-one, none of the thousands of batsman who have tried to match or even challenge his batting average, have come anywhere near.

Why didn't cricket say, "Don, how did you do it?"

Well, some did.

In 'Bradman Revisited', written by Englishman Tony Shillinglaw, he explores the basic bio-mechanical structures of Bradman's technique, how his method was formed, how it differs from the orthodox methods and who most closely resembles The Don in the modern game.

In one of the most important coaching manuals of the modern game, Bob Woolmer's 'The Art and Science of Cricket' he mentions the questions that arise from Shillinglaw's research.

*"Why has recognized orthodoxy survived in the modern coaching manuals whereas no mention is made of Bradman's technique and how it fails to conform to this orthodoxy? It is imperative that we investigate why one individual was able to have a 'Test' average 30% better than the next best average in the history of the game. Biological factors alone cannot explain this significant a difference - they do not differ by 30% between the very best and the next best human in any particular activity.*

*"In fact, a fundamental teaching in science is that it is*

*dangerous to presume a cause unless it has been proven. Since we have no evidence that Bradman was biologically superior, we must entertain the possibility that Bradman's brilliance might have been the result of his superior and unorthodox batting technique."*

Shillinglaw himself argues that Bradman possessed a series of qualities:

A different stance - IMAGE  
An unusual pick up - IMAGE  
Dancing Feet - IMAGE  
Lightening Reflex - IMAGE  
Exceptional Balance- IMAGE  
Shot Certainty - IMAGE  
Concentration - IMAGE

How many of those qualities apply to many of cricket's great batsman? Brian Lara, Sachin Tendulkar, Barry Richards, Inzamam Ul-Haq, George Headley or, dare I say it, Kevin Pieterston.

But what was about Bradman's technique that set him apart, by some considerable distance, from the rest of the sports batting elite?

Shillinglaw believed:

*"the way Bradman held his bat, lifted it and prepared for each stroke. Shillinglaw believes this gave Bradman an important advantage in terms of balance and ensured he was always ideally positioned to play his shot. In other words, it was what Bradman did before a shot that set him apart, not the stroke itself."*

This wasn't a whim from Shillinglaw, he'd been studying The Don for over thirty years. When he took the findings from his study to the relevant bodies, namely the MCC and other English coaches. Even then, in 2003, he found the old coaching manual was still being enforced.

Still being taught. The pendulum bat, lifting the bat back straight over the stumps, and making sure the bat travelled on a straight plane as it comes into contact with the ball.

During Shillinglaw and Hale's research they struck up a correspondence Professor Noakes from (South African Sports Science University?) and he added further evidence, suggesting:

*"I looked at 6 of Bradman's major shots very carefully."*

*"The key point was that when he lifted his bat out to second slip, when the bat comes down, it followed the path that is determined by the nature of the delivery."*

This is crucial. Instead of programming people to bring the bat down the same straight line, shot after shot, Bradman was reactive to each ball.

Whereas a large proportion of players are now encouraged to stick to their favourite shots. Some players might have a cut, a drive, a leg glance and, don't forget, a forward defensive. Bradman had all the shots, not only that, his technique allowed him the freedom to play whichever one he wanted, depending on the delivery.

Noakes concluded:

*"that Bradman had decided where he was going to intersect the ball and when he'd made that decision, then his bat started moving down the shortest possible way."*

His examples included two shots: The cross-batted pull shot and the drive.

Before we move onto a comparison of Bradman's technique with some of the other great players of the modern game, it is imperative to understand HOW Bradman developed his unique technique.

"At the back of our home was an 800 gallon water tank set on a round brick stand. From the tank to the laundry door was a distance of about 8 feet. Armed with a small cricket stump (which I used as a bat) I would throw a golf ball at this brick stand and try to hit the ball on the rebound. The golf ball came back at great speed and to hit it at all with the round stump was no easy task."

Yes, Bradman, also a master of the understatement. A golf ball and a cricket stump, mixed with 8 feet of distance, that's how to learn cricket. Might not pass some of the health and safety tests for the school playground, however.

Bradman continues:

*"To make my game interesting I would organize two sides consisting of well known international names and would bat for Taylor, Gregory, Collins and so on, in turn. The door behind me was the wicket, and I devised a system of ways to get caught out and of boundaries. Many a time I incurred mother's displeasure because I just had to finish some important 'Test Match' at the very moment she wanted me for a meal. The open side of my playing area corresponded to the on side of a cricket field, and therefore I did not have to chase the ball for any shots on the off side."*

So while Bradman may have missed the odd meal, he was constantly reinforcing the most effective way to bat. The most effective way to hit a moving ball. But, no one else wanted to copy.

Bradman confirms:

*"This rather extraordinary and primitive idea was purely a matter of amusement, but looking back over the years I can understand how it must have developed the co-ordination of brain, eye and muscle which was to serve me so well in important matches later on."*