

# RICHIE BENAUD

## AUSTRALIAN ALLROUNDER AND CAPTAIN TURNED COMMENTATOR PAR EXCELLENCE

WORDS BY **SIMON HUGHES**

IF IMITATION is the sincerest form of flattery then Richie Benaud was the most revered sportsman on the planet. His expressions, his words, his lilting 'Strine' were highlighted and repeated and utilised the cricket world over. "Mervellus", "shuperb deliverer", "shotofthedaay", "the best catch you'll ever see", "into the confectionary stall and out again". These were some of the many sayings and phrases delivered by the silver-haired oracle in the cream blazer that will live on indefinitely at cricket around the world. His voice, his personality, his manner are immortalised by daily impersonation. The third day of the New Year's Test at the SCG is 'Richie Day' and more than 300 turn up in cream jacket with foam Channel 9 microphones to pay homage.

Why was he so loved? Simply because he was so lovely. Polite, charming, decent, complimentary, humorous, perceptive and perpetually interested. He always had a good word to say about everyone and everything. His abiding philosophy – "don't take yourself too seriously" – always shone through. Once when I botched some drawing on the screen during a Test and apologised for my cack-handedness as I handed back to him, he said on air, "That was a very instructive piece of analysis, and don't worry about the drawing Simon, Picasso often used to struggle on Sundays."

He had no trace of ego. He expected nothing. He always put the game first. It was his lifelong passion. Despite his 60-plus years as player

and commentator he never lost his enthusiasm and fascination for it. No matter how early you turned up to the commentary box he would be there first. He would already have created his little nest in the corner, with his laptop – train screensaver chugging across the screen – his well-thumbed Laws of cricket and his banana sandwiches.

Before play he was always checking facts and researching details and answering cricketing emails, breaking off briefly to scan the *Racing Post*, while still watching the players warm up and the crowd file in. Then, at 10.50, he would slide across to his commentary position and check the mic. "This is on the lazy, 1,2,3," he would say briefly holding down a button that connected him to the director, "And this is to the world." Behind the scenes everything was often in chaos. But as soon as the director said "Cue Richie" to shots of the players walking out, and he uttered his immortal words "Morning everyone", everything was all right with the world. He was absorbed in the match. And when the day was finished he would be back in his favourite hotel – the Montcalm in Marble Arch (he always asked for the same room) – reviewing the day on the highlights.


He was excited by new players, different approaches and televisual innovations. He loved the Snickometer and Hawk-Eye when other people of his vintage might be sniffy about them. He was not bothered if you had not played 100 Tests, he was still interested in what

you had to say. He gave me (0 Tests) continual encouragement to delve into the finer points of the game and try to explain it to the viewers. He kept a frayed old article I had written on reverse swing in his briefcase and would often get it out and refer to it.

One tends to overlook Benaud's excellence as a player – a clever and successful captain, and the first player to score 2,000 Test runs and take 200 Test wickets –

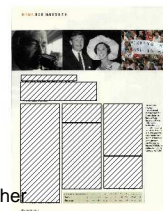
because he was such a wonderful and omnipresent commentator. Watch footage of him bowling and you see verve and enthusiasm. He brought that same spirit to the commentary box.

His great, pared-down commentary moments continued even when he was saying goodbye to English viewers. It was at The Oval Test in 2005, on that last amazing day of that amazing Ashes series. "I'd just like to say thank you for having me and it's been a privilege to be with you these last 42 years," he said between overs. "And what's more important it's been a great deal of fun ..." At that point Kevin Pietersen was bowled by Glenn McGrath. "... but not for the batsman!" he continued without missing a beat, and went on to describe it before handing the mic to Mark Nicholas and Tony Greig. There was a private ripple of applause at the back of the box, echoed among the comprehending crowd.

We all applaud Richie. He had a unique ability to make everyone feel valued and important, a fantastic appreciation of the game and he was the master of understatement. He was the voice of cricket. 

*Richard Benaud was born on October 6 1930, and died on April 10 2015*

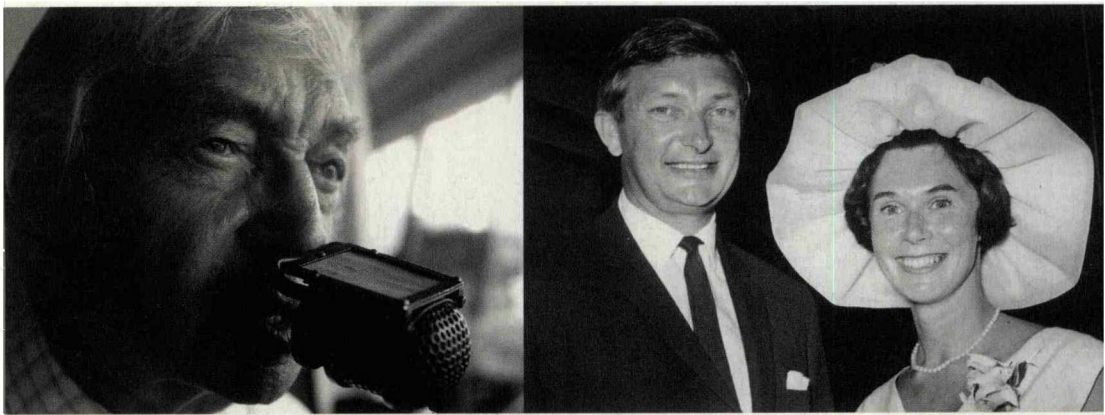
*Simon Hughes tweets @theanalyst*





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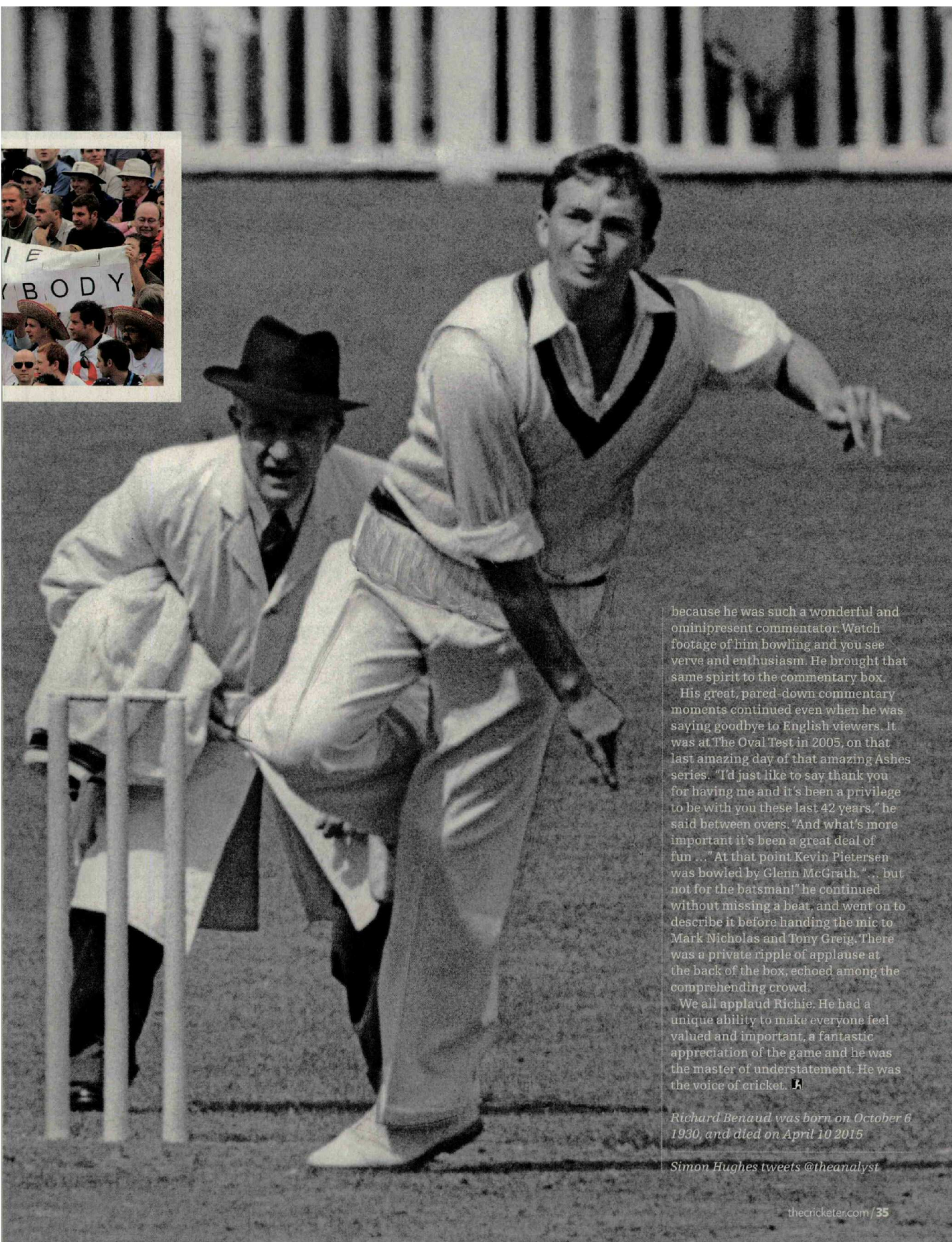


| CAREER RECORD 1948/49-1963/64 |     |       |     |       |     |    |     |      |       |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|----|-----|------|-------|-----|
|                               | M   | R     | HS  | AV    | 100 | 50 | W   | BB   | AV    | C   |
| <b>Tests</b>                  | 63  | 2201  | 122 | 24.45 | 3   | 9  | 248 | 7-72 | 27.03 | 65  |
| <b>First-class</b>            | 259 | 11719 | 187 | 27.03 | 23  | 61 | 945 | 7-18 | 24.73 | 254 |

International treasure:  
Richie Benaud commentates for Channel 4 in the Test between England and West Indies at Old Trafford in 2004 (top left); marrying his beloved Daphne in 1967 (top middle); A Benaud banner at The Oval in 2005 (top right); and bowling against England in Brisbane during the 1958-59 Ashes series (right)



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