

Born in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1991, Ben Stokes moved to Cumbria with his family at the age of 11. He made his debut for Durham CCC in 2009, and just two years later pulled on an England shirt for the first time.

He has scored the fastest Test century at Lord's and England's fastest Test double-century. His bowling spell of 6-36 at Trent Bridge in August 2015 helped England to regain the Ashes.

In July 2019 Stokes received the Player of the Match accolade in the ICC Cricket World Cup final as England won the tournament for the first time. In the summer's Ashes series, he scored 441 runs at an average of more than 55, including two centuries and two fifties. His 135 not out in the second innings at Headingley will be remembered as one of the greatest innings in Test history.

Stokes has played for the Melbourne Renegades in Australia's Big Bash League, and Rising Pune Supergiant and the Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League.

He is married with two young children.

Praise for Ben Stokes:

‘He is the Special One, and I intend to call him that for the rest of his career’ Sir Ian Botham, *Daily Telegraph*

‘There are not enough superlatives to describe Ben Stokes’ Nasser Hussain, *Daily Mail*

‘The undisputed hero of English cricket’ *The Times*

‘Stokes is unstoppable now, a colossal superman’ Michael Vaughan, *Daily Telegraph*

‘He was a giant, spinning the planet with his foot, his bat producing mighty claps of thunder’ Martin Samuel, *Daily Mail*

Also by Ben Stokes and available from Headline

Firestarter

BEN STOKES ON FIRE

**My Story of England's
Summer to Remember**

with Richard Gibson



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To Clare, Layton, Libby, Mam, Dad, Jane and all those
involved with the England cricket team.
For all your love and support.

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Years like this do not come around very often. For the few England players like me who are members of both the Test and one-day international set-ups, a fixture list that included a World Cup and an Ashes series on home soil offered a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Quite simply, these events represent the two biggest prizes in cricket, and just to be involved in matches of this magnitude is an unbelievable thrill. Justifiably, however, we were not just looking at participating but winning. We knew we were as prepared as we could be for double success.

To be crowned a world champion is a highlight in any professional athlete's career. People associate such triumphs with great planning in the build-up, but I view things slightly differently. It is not as though you get to the start of a tournament and begin formulating a strategy that is going to make you successful, embark on the kind of physical work required to get you through a schedule of up to 11 matches in seven weeks, or talk about the challenges that conditions will throw up.

The seeds of success for this England team had not been planted overnight but in 2015, when the ECB's director of cricket Andrew Strauss made a couple of key appointments:

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Eoin Morgan as captain and Trevor Bayliss as coach. The pair of them created a no-limits environment in which players were able to work out for themselves what they needed to do to thrive at the top level: how to react in certain match situations, the fitness levels necessary, and the development of mental resilience. These facets are all acquired through experience and that experience comes through consistency of selection. The planning for the on-field success was only possible once the foundation stones were put in place.

We were able to achieve our long-term goal of winning the World Cup because the team was allowed to develop over time. The best learning is done on the job and the lessons, good and bad, were delivered over a four-year cycle.

Naturally, there was disappointment that we were unable to win the Ashes, but I think if we had been offered the summer we have had back at the turn of 2019, we would have taken it. It has provided some unforgettable drama.

Nowadays, thanks to social media, it's very hard not to be aware of how the country is affected by big sports events, and so it was nice to see the videos of fans at football grounds, people at local cricket clubs, in pubs and in their front rooms, and the crowds gathered in Trafalgar Square watching the big moments of the summer – the nail-biting Super Over victory against New Zealand at Lord's on 14 July and the one-wicket thriller at Headingley on 25 August – and indeed their reactions.

We heard countless stories of people who did not previously like cricket being glued to their television sets. To discover that over eight million people were engrossed in the latter stages of the World Cup final was absolutely mint. To know that we are reaching that far out, and are not just limited to the established

cricket community, is one of the most pleasing aspects of our success. This summer has made cricket in this country feel so much bigger.

And it's the reach to the next generation that is so important. We want to inspire them to take up the game themselves. We want to be their heroes and role models.

One recent episode highlighted for me how our on-field feats have made us more recognisable figures. I was at the Metro Centre in Newcastle when my six-year-old son Layton clocked that three lads had stopped and were chatting among themselves nearby. Layton has recently developed an awareness of the attention that playing for England can draw. He just went up to them and said: 'Do you want a picture of my daddy?' I was a bit embarrassed but, yes, they wanted a photo. So many more people have wanted similar things this year. We are accustomed to the regular groups of autograph hunters outside our hotels, but even that has gone to a different level with young children now joining the queues with their mums and dads. It actually gave me goosebumps to see how many kids had turned out when we paraded the World Cup silverware at the Oval on the morning of 15 July.

Let's face it, we all play cricket for the love of the game. It's why we all fell for it when we were eight-, nine- and ten-year-olds ourselves. For the moments of sheer joy it can deliver. The indescribable feeling of achievement. The times when you literally celebrate like schoolkids. That's what it felt like when we ran about the Lord's outfield after Jos Buttler had removed the bails to run out New Zealand's Martin Guptill.

The double-tie that saw England claim a maiden 50-overs trophy, 44 years after first trying, followed by the narrowest of

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victories over Australia at Headingley, 42 days later – those were amazing games to be part of. And amazing games in which to be able to contribute meaningfully to the end result.

The unbeaten innings of 84 and 135, I realise, will be talked about for years to come. I am proud that is the case. I enjoyed being the person out there trying to get England over the finishing line. I want to win games for this team. For my country. For my teammates. We are not only teammates, we are mates.

Stuart Broad said he had been travelling on the Underground while in London and there was someone across from him in the carriage holding a newspaper with a picture of me on the front page and another picture of me on the back page. He said he wanted to shout out: ‘I know him, I know him!’

But as I said to him: ‘I bet you weren’t saying that two years ago when I was on the front page, were you?’

In all seriousness, one of my biggest disappointments was to miss the Ashes series of 2017–18 through events that happened away from a cricket field. To be caught up in something that I should not have been. I want to be known as a cricketer that wins matches for England, not misses them.

The tight nature of these two wins made for the greatest drama possible. Hopefully, as great as it was to be part of, I will never be involved in the like again. To be honest, it all got a bit too close for comfort at times.

People have asked me how I coped with the expectation. How I managed to keep calm and collected when the odds were stacked against us in both scenarios.

My answer is: that it is what I have trained to do. Batting at number five for a long period of time in a career presents repeatable scenarios. It’s usually one thing or the other when

you arrive at the crease. It's either dig in, work hard and build an innings because the team needs to rebuild, or give yourself a quick look for a quarter of an hour before launching into an attack. Being exposed to those two contrasting situations so many times over the last four years has helped me to avoid putting pressure on myself when I'm batting for England.

Not that preparation makes you infallible. Pressure situations in games can really alter what human beings do. Take Jason Roy fumbling the ball late on during New Zealand's Super Over. He is a superb fielder and it shows you even the best can err when the game is on the line. Then there was Nathan Lyon's fluffed run out late on at Headingley. These were moments that contributed to the theatre.

When Jack Leach charged down the pitch for a single in Leeds, clearly doing his best impression of Monty Panesar from Cardiff in 2009, I could have had a conversation with him, he was that close. In just a couple of seconds, the Ashes were gone and then alive again. It must have been gripping viewing.

When Mark Wood joined me in the middle for the final delivery of our 242-run chase at Lord's, I wanted to ensure that we got a minimum of one run. 'Get your running boots on and if you have to bring your imaginary horse out and jump on it then do it,' I told him. He knew what he had to do, but unfortunately I couldn't quite get the ball where I wanted it.

At Headingley, I got my pitching-wedge distance just right at the right times in hitting some of those eight sixes. Some will tell you it's because of the amount of golf I played between matches.

Not everything was perfect in terms of my stroke play, but the main thing was that I delivered on my pledge to be there at

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the end by calculating my way through situations. Earlier in my career, there was a time when I didn't think, I just did. I played the ball as I saw it. These days, there is a lot more thought that goes into what I am here to do – to perform, to contribute to England winning.

And I have an overwhelming respect and gratitude for those who have performed alongside me with the three lions on their chest. When Jack Leach walked out at number 11 on that stupendous Sunday, we required 73 runs to win. Whatever he goes on to achieve, those are likely to be the most important balls he will ever face in his Test career. His single off his 17th and last one, the most important run. Remember, it takes two to tango.

Yes, I am so glad that my individual displays appear to have caught the mood of the nation but this is a team sport. We win together, we lose together.

You can take a lot of personal pride when you receive man of the match awards as I have done, but arguably the most is taken from putting in the effort for those sat alongside you in the dressing room. Such accolades can't be compared to collective success.

I only found myself in the positions I did because of what other guys in the England squad have achieved as well. What we have done as a team in 2019 is phenomenal: to win the World Cup and draw the Ashes has been a fantastic summer and something I am proud of personally and as a team. This is my story of how it came together.