



Taking The Mickey

Mickey Arthur, Neil Manthorp

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Mickey Arthur was one of SA's longest-serving and most successful coaches. In 2008, along with the national team, he created history when the Proteas beat both England and Australia on their own turf. Beating Pakistan away from home the year before, set in motion an unprecedented journey to the number one ranking in both ODI and Test cricket. Since the world ranking system was introduced to international cricket, Australia has been the only other team to achieve this feat. In 12 tours 'down under' spanning almost a century, South Africa has never managed to win a Test series in Australia. But Arthur, captain Graeme Smith and the rest of the team overcame incredible odds to chase a total over 400 in the first Test in Perth. They faced what seemed certain defeat in Melbourne to win again and take an unbeatable 2-0 series lead. South Africa became the top ranked team in Test cricket, finally unseating the mighty Australians who dominated for years. Soon after, they repeated this feat when they became the top ranked ODI team. But behind the scenes, things weren't always progressing smoothly. Whereas Arthur would do anything for the team, his uncompromising approach to administrators and refusal to be dictated to by men he believed were 'out of touch', was beginning to count against him. Not surprisingly, the Proteas failed to live up to the heights of 2008. They suffered the ignominy of a first round exit from the Champions Trophy at the beginning of the 2009 season. Soon after, they had to win the final Test of a four-match series against England to salvage a draw. But there was nothing ominous about the players' collective form and spirits were high as the squad prepared for a tour to India. The tour was to all intents and purposes a Test match 'world championship' between the two nations ranked first and second in the world. A week before the team's departure, Arthur 'resigned'. He was given no choice. A press conference was hastily called in his home town of East London and Smith flew from Cape Town to appear alongside him and quash rumours of deterioration in their personal relationship. Arthur never elaborated on the reasons for his untimely dismissal. Until now...

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