

England seek pride after Ashes blow

After 3-0 series defeat, McCullum says England got their warm-up strategy wrong

● **McCullum concedes England's preparation was flawed**

● **Ashes lost in just 11 days**

● **McCullum rejects seeking outside squad replacements**

AFP | Melbourne

Coach Brendon McCullum concedes England got their preparations wrong heading into the Ashes, but believes they can salvage some pride in the final two Tests at Melbourne and Sydney.

The tourists arrived in Australia bullish that they could win a series in the country for the first time since 2010-11.

But their hopes imploded with heavy defeats in Perth and Brisbane before a closer contest at Adelaide, leaving the ultra-aggressive “Bazball” style of cricket McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes pioneered in tatters.

Their Ashes demise in just 11 days was the joint-second quickest in more than a century.

England had just one warm-up fixture in Australia, against



England coach Brendon McCullum (C) kicks a football before play (file photo)

their second-tier Lions side, and lost the opening Test in Perth inside two days.

Former captains Ian Botham, Michael Vaughan and Graham Gooch all criticised the limited preparation, with disgruntled skipper Ben Stokes sparking a backlash after calling them “has beens”.

They then opted to skip a pink-ball opportunity in Canberra before the day-night second Test at the Gabba, instead spending five

days in the Brisbane nets.

Like Perth, that Test was lost by eight wickets and McCullum bizarrely claimed they had “overprepared”.

“What did we get right? What did we get wrong? Probably we go back to the preparation, that’ll be something that gets questioned,” McCullum told TNT Sports after the 82-run Adelaide defeat.

“And when you’ve lost 3-0, you need to put your hand up

and say ‘maybe I didn’t get that preparation right’.

“It’s not just leading into the first game. It’s could we have done more leading into game one and could we have done less leading into game two?”

“I didn’t get that right because we lost 3-0. Lots to digest, look through and be better next time.”

The fourth Test starts in Melbourne on December 26 and England could freshen up the side.



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BRENDON MCCULLUM

‘Great opportunity’

An under-performing Ollie Pope is facing the axe with Jacob Bethell waiting in the wings, but their options are limited and McCullum said they would not be looking outside the squad they have.

“We’ll have a look a look at the conditions (in Melbourne) and, as we always do, we’ll try and work out what we think will give us the best chance in that game,” he said.

“If that’s changes, it’s changes. If it’s not, it’s not. We’ll assess that when we get to Melbourne.”

England at least showed more fight in Adelaide as they chased what would have been a world record 435 to win.

McCullum admitted they had been outplayed across all three



After losing the first Test quickly, England spent five days in the nets before the second—a move McCullum later bizarrely called “overpreparing” as they lost that match by eight wickets as well

Tests, but said he saw encouraging signs in Adelaide and “we do have a great opportunity in the next two Tests”.

“We need to find something out of this tour, salvage some pride and play for all the people who have come to Australia to support this team and all the people back in England who have supported this team as well,” he said.

“If we get into that state where we just play the game and immerse yourself in the state of what needs to be done and allow your talent to come out in pressure situations, then you’ve got every opportunity.”

Key to probe England’s ‘stag-do’ drinking on Ashes beach break

AFP | Melbourne

England managing director Rob Key pledged yesterday to investigate whether players’ drinking on a mid-Ashes beach break went too far, after reports said it had been like a “stag-do.”

The England team headed to Queensland tourist playground Noosa after heavily losing the first two Tests in Perth and Brisbane.

They spent several days on the sand and around restaurants and bars, followed by TV crews, photographers and reporters before travelling to Adelaide where they lost the third Test and the Ashes.

Britain’s Daily Telegraph reported that “after drowning their sorrows after the Brisbane Test, it is no exaggeration to say some, certainly not all, players drank for five or six days”.

It added that players “did nothing outrageous in Noosa” but there was concern over the level of drinking, with England’s professionalism already under question after their limited preparations.

“If there’s things where people are saying that our players went out and drank excessively, then of course we’ll be looking into that,” Key told English media in Melbourne ahead of the Boxing Day Test.

“Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol for an international cricket team is not



Rob Key said he supports beach breaks for players to “throw the phone away,” but warned that any hint of a stag-do atmosphere would be completely unacceptable for an international team

something that I’d expect to see at any stage.

“It would be a fault not to look into what happened there,” added Key, who did not travel with the team to Noosa.

“From everything that I’ve heard so far, they actually were pretty well behaved. Very well behaved.”

He admitted that he did not mind players having the occasional drink, but “if it goes past that, then that’s an issue as far as I’m concerned.

“I have no issue with the Noosa trip if it was to get away and just throw your phone away, down tools, go on the beach, all of that stuff.

“If it goes into where they’re drinking lots and it’s a stag-do, all of that type of stuff, that’s completely unacceptable.”

Salah, Foster take Egypt and South Africa to AFCON Group B summit

AFP | Rabat

Premier League pair Mohamed Salah and Lyle Foster were match-winners as Egypt and South Africa began their Africa Cup of Nations Group B campaigns with victories in Morocco on Monday.

Unsettled Liverpool star Salah struck in the first minute of added time to snatch a 2-1 win for record seven-time champions Egypt over gallant Zimbabwe in Agadir.

Earlier, second-half dominance by one-time title-holders South Africa paid off when Burnley striker Foster netted on 79 minutes to deliver a 2-1 victory over Angola in Marrakesh.

The stage is now set for a top-of-the-table showdown between the Pharaohs and Bafana Bafana in Agadir on Friday. They have met three times in AFCON tournaments, with Egypt winning twice.

Salah, whose unhappiness at being a substitute recently at Liverpool led to an outburst against manager Arne Slot, worked tirelessly for an Egyptian team rattled at falling behind.

Prince Dube scored on 20 minutes and one of the title favourites had to wait until the 63rd minute for Omar Marmoush from Manchester City to equalise.

Relentless pressure from the Pharaohs paid off in the first of five additional minutes when the perseverance of Salah grabbed them all three points.



Egypt’s forward #10 Mohamed Salah scores the team’s second goal

Earlier, South Africa dominated the second half against Angola in Marrakesh and Foster scored in 79 minutes to deliver a 2-1 victory in the same mini-league.

The winner came after Tshepang Moremi had a goal ruled offside and Mbekezeli Mbokazi rattled the crossbar with a shot that rebounded into play.

Oswin Appollis put 2024 AFCON bronze medallists South Africa ahead on 21 minutes and, as Angola took control, they levelled through Show after 35 minutes.

Victory ended a six-match winless run in their opening

AFCON match since 2006 by South Africa. The win also confirmed their dominance over Angola with three victories and two draw in five AFCON meetings.

Belgian coach Hugo Broos, who guided Cameroon to the AFCON tilte in 2017, admitted he was unhappy with the first-half Bafana performance.

“We had to avoid losing tonight because next up for us are Egypt. We led in the opening half and then we fell asleep,” said Broos.

“We let Angola back into the game so we put something right during half-time. In the second half we applied more pressure,

there is more movement and we had chances.

‘Very painful’

“Tshepang (Moremi) was wonderful when he came on, suddenly there was speed in our team, we were dangerous. He was a threat and he did it very well in the second 45 minutes.”

Mali coach Tom Saintfiet admitted that conceding a late equaliser in a 1-1 Group A draw with Zambia in Casablanca was “very painful”.

After El Bilal Toure had a first-half penalty saved by Willard Mwanza, Mali took the lead on 61 minutes through Lassina Sinayoko.