

Sport Cricket



Heyhoe Flint, centre, poses with England team-mates before the first women's match at Lord's, in August 1976. She captained the hosts to victory against Australia

Life was never dull with Rachael – she could do anything, except cook

Cathy Harris recalls the irrepressible sense of fun, kindness and loyalty of the trailblazing former England captain

I know I'm not alone in finding it difficult to accept the news that Rachael Heyhoe Flint passed away yesterday. I will be forever grateful for her friendship and the hugely influential role she played in my sporting and professional life.

Those of us who knew she was gravely ill were under strict instructions not to feel sad — she wanted us to celebrate her life. But after a close friendship spanning 33 years it is impossible not to mourn her passing.

It's a great comfort to know that she went peacefully, supported by her family, and pain free. The chemotherapy regime she started at the end of last year to arrest her lymphoma failed and she accepted the outcome with typical stoicism.

I last spoke to her before Christmas when she rang from hospital at midnight. Her mind was still sharp and she was upbeat but the time of the call was worrying. She spoke candidly about the cancer but it was what she didn't say that concerned me.

Our friendship began in 1984 when I

first arrived in England from Cape Town and as luck would have it, my nearest cricket club was Wolverhampton, where she had been a member for years.

We often batted together at the top of the order for our club and the West Midlands, she taught me to play golf and helped to pave the way for me to secure my first assignment in journalism, the 1986 hockey World Cup in Amsterdam. I also enjoyed a few years working alongside her in public relations.

Life with Rachael was never dull and her terrific sense of humour and fund of jokes rescued us on many occasions. I admired her common touch and how easily she mixed with everyone whether it was a famous sportsman, the prime minister or even a member of the royal family. The Duke of Edinburgh once asked her, much to her amusement, if she wore coconuts in her bra as protection when she was batting.

She thrived in the spotlight and was a captivating public speaker but on more than one occasion her propensity to generate headlines landed her in hot water, not least after being controversially sacked as England captain in 1978.

Rather than slink away, she bounced back and, as long as I knew her, showed few signs of bitterness or that she bore a grudge, referring only to the establishment responsible as "my detractors". Of all her cricketing achievements, she viewed leading England to victory over Australia in the 1973 inaugural

How Heyhoe Flint led the way

- Hit first six in a women's Test, against Australia at the Oval in 1963
- Helped organise the first women's World Cup in 1973
- Captained England in first women's game at Lord's in 1976
- First woman elected on to MCC Committee in 2004
- First woman inducted into ICC Hall of Fame in 2010

World Cup as her crowning glory, not least because it was my brainchild.

She loved recalling how she and Enid Bakewell struggled to score in the final against a tight attack. Meeting in the middle of the pitch Bakewell said in a loud voice: "This bowling is a load of tripe," whereupon the Australians promptly lost their way as the pair put on 117 for the second wicket to lead England to an emphatic win.

Unsurprisingly for a world-class batsman she always took the view "batsmen win matches, never bowlers" and no amount of discussion would persuade her otherwise.

She had many attributes, but cooking was not one of them. She showed no interest whatsoever and boasted about never having made a cake in her life.

When the rest of us made sandwiches or cakes for home teas, Rachael would inevitably arrive and plonk two boxes

of Mr Kipling cakes on the table. Home teas were a great attraction through the years to the ever-present labradors in the Flint household, all of whom were failed guide-dog puppies. She couldn't resist the first one, which she described as very friendly, ill-disciplined and unable to concentrate. "She'll fit in perfectly," Rachael said.

She was good enough to represent England in goal at hockey, and Janet Ruff, one of the country's finest strikers, told the story of playing against her in a county match when her thunderous shot broke Rachael's stick just above the hook. Undeterred, she used her stick, now reduced to about six inches, scurrying around the circle to see off the threat. They laughed about it for years.

No matter how busy she was, and believe me she was always busy, it was never too much trouble for her to furnish me with anecdotes and memories for a particular story. She really was a raconteur par excellence.

I shall miss her irrepressible sense of fun, kindness, loyalty, wisdom and generosity. She was a wonderful, charismatic personality who blazed a trail in women's sport and I can only imagine her reaction if she knew her memorial service will be held at Molineux, home of her beloved Wolverhampton Wanderers.

It will be a fitting send-off for a lifelong supporter and the local heroine. Go well, my friend.

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Toss crucial to England's chances of hitting back

Richard Hobson
Deputy Cricket Correspondent, Cuttack

Jos Buttler described Eoin Morgan as a "revolutionary player for England" before the second game of the three-match one-day series against India, but the most important contribution the captain makes today may prove to be something as plain as winning the toss.

Morgan, who transformed batting with his improvisations at the turn of the decade, suggested after losing on Sunday that England are probably a better side chasing a target. Predictions of heavy dew this evening in Cuttack make batting second even more attractive and perhaps even critical.

The groundsman at the Barabati Stadium estimates that dew will start to settle at about 5.30pm local time (noon GMT). Transposing this on to the match timetable, the turf may be moist even before the second innings begins.

Damp balls impact particularly on spin bowlers. The England spinners have been short of their best as it is in both the warm-ups and the first ODI. Adil Rashid took big strides last year but is in danger of regressing as he struggles for length.

England have addressed the delay in acceleration at Pune, with Buttler identifying the period between the 30th and 40th over as crucial to their defeat.

Whatever is occupying India's thoughts it is not the England plan to try to unsettle Virat Kohli with more short-pitched balls, as revealed by Jake Ball. "Good luck," was the first response

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British sprinter suffers career-threatening injuries in head-on crash

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of KL Rahul, who could not help but smile at the intention.

As befits the status that he has in his homeland, Kohli occupied seat 1A on the charter flight from Pune yesterday, but a small problem with the delivery of luggage and kit from the airport to the team hotel meant that England's practice under lights was slightly delayed.

Not that this deflated the 15,000 or so locals who filled a stand merely to watch the touring side and a few of the Indians prepare.

All in all, this may prove an occasion when Morgan's ability to stay calm under pressure, lauded once again in the build-up by his deputy, Buttler, proves especially valuable. Both have stressed the value of their time in the Indian Premier League, Buttler suggesting that his stint with Mumbai Indians last year was "probably the best cricket experience I have had".

Given that he featured in the World Twenty20 final in Calcutta nine months ago and played in the Ashes-winning series in 2015 that is quite an endorsement, and one that will only raise the hopes of colleagues in the IPL auction next month.

India (from): Shikhar Dhawan, KL Rahul, Virat Kohli (capt), Yuvraj Singh, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Kedar Jadhav, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Jasprit Bumrah, Amit Mishra, Umesh Yadav.

England (from): Jason Roy, Alex Hales, Joe Root, Eoin Morgan (capt), Ben Stokes, Jos Buttler, Moeen Ali, Chris Woakes, Adil Rashid, Liam Plunkett, David Willey, Jake Ball.

Umpires: R Palliyaguruge (SL), C Shamshuddin (Ind). **Third umpire:** K Dharmasena (SL). **Match referee:** A Pycroft (Zim).

TV: Sky Sports 2, from 7.30am. 8am start.