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**ALAN DAVID McGILVRAY, AM, MBE
(1909 - 1996)**

Alan McGillvray was, simply, the most famous cricket broadcaster in the world.

In a tribute to him sports journalist Norman Tasker said that:

'McGilvray's voice was as much a part of Australian summers as the sound of cicadas and screen doors banging in the wind.' ¹

Alan McGillvray, who was always a trifle reticent about his age, was born on 6 December 1909. ² He attended Sydney Grammar School where he captained the first eleven in 1925. His team defeated Melbourne Grammar for the first time in ten years and young 'Mac' was the school hero after scoring 129 not out and taking seven wickets for 32. ³

He went on to play Sheffield Shield cricket and to captain New South Wales and was credited with planning a trip which dismissed Bro. Don Bradman for a duck.

It was not the most popular thing he did as an irate spectator accosted him with:

'You've spoilt my day. I came here to see Bradman make a hundred. I'll never come to the Sydney Cricket Ground again.' ⁴

A team mate, Bro. Ken Gulliver said of McGillvray that he was always a very serious, very studious type of cricketer. ⁵

They were qualities he took to radio when he gave his first description of a Sheffield Shield match in Brisbane in 1934.

In 1938, he broadcast the test matches from England using cablegrams from the ground and the tap of a pencil to produce the sound of bat on ball.

Even allowing for the technology of the time, his voice sounded tinny and monotone and it was only by hard work and training that he developed the style of later years.



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It was Bro. Sir Robert Menzies who advised him to open the commentary window so that listeners would hear the roar of the crowd.

Philip Derriman wrote:

'It was the voice, of course, which set Alan McGilvray apart from other sports broadcasters. None sounded as rich or resonant as McGilvray, no matter how hard they tried, which in the final analysis was probably the secret of his appeal.' ⁶



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Not everyone agreed. There were critics who said that he lacked humour and his frequently used comment about a batsman being 'in two minds about how to play' was utter nonsense.

The famous English commentator, Arlett said, rather disparagingly, when he met McGilvray for the first time during the 1948 Australian's tour of England; 'Where did you find him?'

His work improved to such an extent that Arlett became one of his greatest admirers.

Alan McGilvray broadcast over 100 test matches for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

His work was almost entirely on radio. He did a little television but said he didn't like it because he believed he was being dictated to by the camera and that it was more impersonal. ⁷

He tried very hard to avoid publicity. He wrote:

'It always seemed to me that cricket down the ages might have survived very well without headlines. The charm of a quiet summer afternoon, with a gentle breeze to assist the bowler and a nice fast outfield for the batsman, offered pleasure enough. Headlines and controversies were things that hovered around the edges of the game.' ⁸

McGilvray helped many young broadcasters but was also quick to tear a strip off them if they were out of line.

He intensely disliked one day, World Series cricket and even refused to acknowledge prominent players, particularly when they used bad language.

After the game it was different and 'Mac' enjoyed a glass of whisky and was excellent and convivial company.

When he retired in 1986, Bro. Sir Donald Bradman said:

'That one man could have a successful and honourable career at the microphone extending over fifty years is quite astonishing. It happened mainly because Alan stuck rigidly to those essential qualities of integrity and impartiality which brought him goodwill and acclamation from all cricket-playing countries.' ⁹

In 1987, he published a book entitled 'The Game is not the Same' which led to the adaptation of a popular song to 'The Game is not the Same without McGilvray'

When Alan McGilvray died in Sydney on 16 July 1996, tributes poured in from around the world.



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Cricket greats, past and present, attended a memorial service and the Premier's office requested that the city's flags be flown at half-mast. ¹⁰.

There were many tributes to the man who had given cricket lovers so much enjoyment.

The Prime Minister, the Right Hon. John Howard described him as one of the most knowledgeable commentators in the history of international cricket.

Bro. Bill Lawry said: 'Everyone knew him from the big cities to the back of New South Wales' and Keith Miller perhaps summed it up when he said: 'Mac knew more about cricket than anyone else'.

Alan McGilvray's wife, Gwen, died in 1972. They had a son, Ross, and a daughter, Carolyn.

Bro. Alan David McGilvray was made a mason on 7 July 1949 in Lodge Eastern, No.423 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales. The lodge met at Bondi.

Curiously, he gave his occupation as warehouseman, probably because of his family business as footwear manufacturers.

On 20 August 1957, he affiliated with his school lodge, Old Sydneians No.639.

NOTES

1. Philip Derriman, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday, July 23, 1996, p.4.
2. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday, 18 July 1996, p.4.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Ray Robinson, *On top Down Under*, Cassell Australia Limited, Sydney, 1975, p.186.
5. Philip Derriman, *op.cit.*
6. Philip Derriman, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday, July 18, 1996, p.1.
7. *Ibid.* p.4.
8. Alan McGilvray (with Norman Tasker), *Backpage of Cricket*, Lester-Townsend Publishing Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1989.
9. Philip Derriman, *loc.cit.* p.4.
10. Column 8, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday, July 23, 1996, p.1.