

# Stuart Clark: the person

There's much more to life than the game, the University's best-known cricketer tells **John Shand**

**I**t could be the premise for a Hollywood movie: should the young hero pursue academic achievement and career, or chase sporting glory? Stuart Clark (MComm '09) took an option supposedly proscribed in the professional sport era: do both. In a feat akin to juggling multiple time bombs on a high wire he has excelled as a cricketer while completing one degree, beginning another and raising a family of two young children.

Clark ascribes the lack of a personal meltdown to his enjoying it all. "I find time to study at all hours of the night," he says. "When there's an exam coming up, like most students, I lock myself away and try and learn what I need to learn. I just get it done."

Those last five words could be his motto, whatever the task. Having met outside the Sydney Cricket Ground, he leads me through a labyrinth of offices, later explaining that this is easier than negotiating the security rigmarole. With mobile glued to ear, meanwhile, he organises insurance on a new car while settling us into the back of the hallowed Members' Stand.

For those who come from Mars, detest cricket, or both, Clark is a lanky fast bowler who made a stellar, if belated, test debut against South Africa in 2006. Despite several injuries rendering his career a stop-start affair, he has (at the time of writing) played 24 tests (taking 94 wickets at an average of 24), 39 One Day Internationals and nine T20 Internationals.

His parents, who were born in India, moved to England upon the demise of the Raj, and then fled the cold for Australia in 1972. Born three years later, Clark grew up in Caringbah, attending the local primary school and Woolooware High. At his parents' behest he enrolled in Engineering at Wollongong, "went for two weeks, hated it, and chucked it in." He fell into real estate for six years, and studied valuations at the University of Western Sydney. That too wore thin. "What I really liked was the legal side of things," he recalls, "and I shouldn't have been getting involved in that because I didn't know what I was doing." Ultimately the Saturday tug of war between cricket and real estate meant one had to go...

Pining for intellectual stimulation, Clark hatched a plan to do Law at Sydney, which had become his grade cricket club. A Sports Union contact suggested he go for another degree and then enrol as a post-graduate. Clark chose a Masters of Commerce, which allowed him to enter Law in 2009 (with much-appreciated flexibility from the University to accommodate the cricket). "I'm doing it backwards," he smiles. "I'm now doing an undergraduate degree after a post-graduate degree."

Reaching the top of anything is as much about application as aptitude, and asked if he thinks of himself as driven, Clark pauses, then replies: "I'm driven by what I

want to achieve. Most people thought I wouldn't finish my college degree, but I was always going to do that. Most people still think, 'what are you doing Law for?' But I'll get it done, because I said I was going to get it done. So from that point of view I'm driven. To play cricket for Australia, yeah, I think you have to be. If you want to achieve anything at the highest level, you have to be driven."

Cricket is a very finite career, however, and Clark disagrees with it being full-time. "I've arguably got two or three years of cricket left in me," he observes. "What am I going to do from 37 to 65? I never wanted to be a truck driver or a bus driver. There's nothing wrong with that, but I actually wanted to achieve something else in my life. People say, 'you have achieved: you're a test cricketer.' Well, so what? Cricket's a game I enjoy playing. Whether I achieve or not I'd still play. But I want to achieve other things as well."

Despite the game in question carrying high earning potential and even being front-page news, Clark keeps it in perspective. "When the fun goes out of it due to age, injury, mental tiredness, whatever, that's the day I'll stop playing," he says.

His family life – with wife Michelle and two children under five – is a massive part of the time juggling. On the three-month '09 Ashes tour of England, for instance, they joined him for just the middle third. "It's obviously hard for my wife and the children, because I'm not around and she's got to do everything," he says. "It's also hard for me, because I never see them. I've been lucky; I haven't missed anything as yet like first steps and talking. I may do, but I don't want to."

On tour, his evenings are often happily devoted to reading the likes of endless circumlocutory Privy Council judgements, which their Lordships would never have imagined might help a professional cricketer. "It gives me an out when I don't want to think about cricket any more, because it can consume you," he says. "It refreshes me in the sense that it's like I've had a break from cricket, and switched off completely."

Nonetheless the game remains the current priority. "There's a chance to play cricket for Australia!" he exclaims. "There are 20 million people in Australia and there's been 160 or 170 who have played one-day cricket and 410 who have played test cricket. So I'd jump at it. However, I can see why people retire, and as much as I want to play, I know there are other things in life."

Apparently spoilt for choice as to what to do next, he acknowledges the sport helps open doors. "But it doesn't keep the door open," he adds. "I need to build a relationship through that door, with whoever it is. If I don't, the door will shut again. When I speak to kids I say





*My name's  
Stuart Clark.  
I used to be  
a real estate  
agent.*

to them to try to be nice to the people you meet on the way up, because otherwise when you're on your way down they won't want to know you."

This should not be misconstrued as mercenary, he emphasises: "People think of opportunities as financial. Maybe it's just you've got a good friendship with someone." Team-mate Adam Gilchrist was a role model in this regard: "He was the nicest person you'll ever meet. You felt like his best mate after meeting him for one minute," says Clark, conceding his own younger self might have been lacking in the people skills area.

The same might well have been said of the young – and not so young! – Shane Warne, who is among the players Clark says, "have achieved far greater things than I'll ever achieve". He goes on, "Warnie's the first one to say he's probably made some bad decisions," Clark says, "but he's far and away the best cricketer I've ever played with. He was so far into the game, and he was so much better than everyone else... I had an opportunity to go and play country cricket when he was captain, and I just jumped at it, because it was another chance to play

cricket with arguably one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, cricketer ever. People will obviously say, 'What about Bradman?' Yeah, Bradman was obviously the greatest batter, but I think this guy is the greatest bowler ever to play the game, certainly in my lifetime."

Although years of TV close-ups have given him a famous face, he is unimpressed by his own celebrity. "I hate being made a fuss of," he says with evident distaste. "Occasionally people come up and want to say hello, and that's fine. Sometimes it's nice; sometimes it's annoying. Most of the time you just smile and say hello, and talk a bit of cricket. Maybe if it happened 24 hours a day, every day – someone like Mick Jagger – that might get annoying.

"In my first Law class we had to stand up and say who we were, and I said, 'my name's Stuart Clark. I used to be a real estate agent. I've just finished my Commerce degree and I want to study Law.' The next day a guy in my Law class said, 'You don't talk about cricket a lot, do you?' And I said, 'If you know I do it, that's fine. If you don't, I don't care.' It's not as though I want to be known as Stuart Clark the Cricketer. I'm Stuart Clark the person." **SAM**

Photo by Ted Sealey