

Steve Smith has thrown Cameron Bancroft under a bus and his position is untenable

By Offsiders columnist [Richard Hinds](#)

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VIDEO: "The leadership group knew about it," Steve Smith says (ABC News)

I spent Saturday evening in the club rooms of a local cricket team that had finally won a first XI premiership after enduring a series of heartbreaking grand final defeats.

This was everything that is good about Australian cricket; a group of committed players at a community club celebrating a long-awaited victory in a game that had been played — yes — "hard but fair".

The way we like to think Australian cricket is played from top to bottom; robust, intense, sometimes creeping toward the margins but always, we told ourselves — sometimes in the face of damning evidence — in a manner that maintained respect for the opposition, the officials and the game itself.

But after [the disgraceful events in Cape Town](#), who can now honestly say Australia plays its cricket "hard but fair" with a straight face?

Who can even utter the word "honestly" without cringing?

Surely even those who have [defended the sledging, stairwell feuding and line-shifting antics of this Australian team during the current tour](#) cannot watch the damning footage of Cameron Bancroft concealing the sticky piece of tape used to tamper with the ball in his undies and think anything other than the obvious: Our team — and, by extension, our cricketing nation — are blatant cheats.

Inevitably the punishment, humiliation and reputational damage suffered by Bancroft, his captain Steve Smith, coach Darren Lehmann and others implicated in this scandal will attract the boldest headlines.

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How ball-tampering incident unfolded



Australian cricket team captain Steve Smith and senior players planned the ball-tampering plot during a lunch break. This is how it played out.

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VIDEO: 'It's blatant cheating, it's disgraceful,' Former Australian captain Michael Clarke on ball-tampering scandal (ABC News)

Bancroft could well be on the next flight home while Smith's leadership is, at the very least, imperilled.

Not merely because losing the captaincy seems a punishment fitting of this sporting crime, but because his position is untenable.

To lead a national sports team, particularly one as heavily scrutinised as the Australian cricket team, requires a degree of moral authority.

How can Smith speak on behalf of Australian cricket without the ball-tampering issue drowning out his every syllable?

How can he be trusted to provide wise counsel to the young players in his charge when he has thrown Bancroft under a bus?

The Australians had retained only a tentative toehold on the moral high ground during a series in which their provocative sledging had been rightly condemned by Cricket Australia.

The crass behaviour of some South African fans and the staggering exoneration of Kagiso Rabada by the ICC provided some counterweight to Australia's own behavioural issues.

But there remained an uneasy feeling about the team's leadership and its ability to make wise and rational decisions in heated situations.

Steve Smith 'embarrassed' again



The Australian cricket captain has admitted he is embarrassed about ball tampering, but it's not the first time he's said those words, writes Geoff Lemon.

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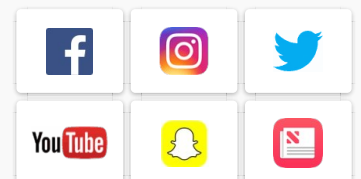


VIDEO: Cameron Bancroft is seen holding a yellow object. (ABC News)

That leadership vacuum is now starkly exposed, both in the abject lunch time ball-tampering plot and the ham-fisted attempt to cover up Bancroft's actions even after they had been exposed by the TV cameras.

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Thus Smith, Lehmann and their team have not merely let themselves down, they have angered and humiliated those they represent.

Australian cricket as a whole now wears the cheating label they have applied.

This includes the juniors to whom the team is portrayed as role models in promotional and advertising campaigns, the club cricketers who form a vital part of the game's eco-system and the viewing public which is constantly sold the message that the Australian team represents the very best of what we are.

Over the years, Australian cricket has endured humiliating defeats, embarrassing behavioural episodes and Shane Warne's various social media accounts.

But not since the infamous underarm bowling incident in 1981 has the Australian public betrayed such a sense of outrage and despair about their team, although there is strong case to say this incident is far worse.

Greg Chappell did not break the rules when he insisted brother Trevor roll the ball to the Kiwi batsman Brian McKechnie. He merely tap-danced all over the spirit of the game.

However, in its premeditation, hopelessly naive execution, bungled cover-up and shame-faced apologies, this Australian team has not merely invited scorn and ridicule.

It has left a sense of utter despair.

History of ball tampering



[How Australia's ball tampering scandal stacks up against other cases around the world.](#)



VIDEO: 'The captain has to step down': Catherine McGregor furious over cricket scandal (ABC News)

So how does Australian cricket begin to restore its reputation?

The self-serving course would be for Australian cricket to adopt the "everyone does it, we just got caught" approach and invoke the recent tampering charge against South Africa in Australia, or even the case of England's mint chewing in 2005.

This, of course, would not only be a convenient cop-out, it would betray the constituents Cricket Australia (CA) is beholden to represent.

CA chief executive James Sutherland spoke strongly, and rightly, against Australia's provocative sledging in South Africa. They were mere words, now is clearly a time for action.

Some will be impatient that CA is undertaking an investigation before acting.

But Sutherland's words did not bode well for the offending players and officials when he said: "I feel like Australian cricket fans feel right now."

The club cricketers with whom I celebrated on Saturday evening will, no doubt, have woken with sore heads on Sunday morning.

But nothing like the hangover suffered by Australian cricket.





VIDEO: Cricket Australia boss James Sutherland admits the scandal is 'a very sad day for Australian cricket' (ABC News)

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Former cricketers slam Australian captain Steve Smith and senior players for hatching a plan to tamper with the ball during the third Test against South Africa.



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