

Graham Gooch says the "Samson effect" of his hair transplant makes absolutely no difference to his ability on the pitch. Photograph: ALLSPORT

# NEW-LOOK GOOCH IS KNOCKING 'EM

**T**HE present image of an England cricketer is of somebody suffering an embarrassing kick to the backside — most recently by the South Africans. Fortunately, on his latest jaunt to Australia and New Zealand Graham Gooch has managed to divert attention to another part of a batsman's anatomy — the top of his head.

Last summer, realising the recession was affecting his pate, he opted to take positive action. In the Aussie vernacular, rug is the word for Gooch's addition, although hair replacement therapy is the preferred description used by the former England captain and the Advanced Hair Studio which supplemented his scalp.

Consequently, the man who for more than two decades saw the media as a necessary evil, has this month been jetting between Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Auckland at 12-hour intervals putting his best follicle forward for anyone who cares to look. The trip has included a stint on the Australian television show Question Of Sport against his old adversary Merv Hughes.

Gooch isn't the only one whose hairline is declining. "David Gower is another who is losing a bit under all those curls," he says, "and Mike Gatting is going a bit at the front, although the first thing you still notice about Gatting is how fat he is."

If this is what happens to all great cricketers, Mike Atherton will be considering hair replacement in a few years time, particularly on the strength of England's humiliating results in the Test series against South Africa.

With the World Cup beginning on Wednesday, Gooch is not greatly optimistic about England's chances, but says, "We are good enough, it's just that we have got to start getting our act together. By that I mean consistency. It's no good doing well in one Test match or one day and then sitting back. We have got to do it two or three times in a row. It's not the end of the world for us for the next couple of weeks in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, but we have dropped down the odds a bit after what happened in South Africa."

Returning to the hair theme, Gooch declines to reveal how much he is paid for lending his name to the product, although he did forego paying the £2,000 to £4,000 it would cost. He admits: "I had initial reservations because I was not sure what the procedure was and how it would look. I had never been that concerned about losing my hair and if I thought it would end up just looking like a wig, then

I would not have had it done. But everyone says you wouldn't know any difference. I think it looks great."

Even in that fierce den of merciless sarcasm, the sporting dressing room? "Yes, amazingly," Gooch says. "I was worried about it because the mickey-taking can be vicious. The day after I had it done last August, I drove to Cardiff and then I met up with the Essex team for dinner and there they were, 10 other blokes standing on the table, trying to see where the new hair had been put in. Nobody could spot anything."

Not that the Essex team had any reason to complain. Gooch scored a century the next day and his batting average with the added hair rose by more than 50.

"I'm not going to say anything stupid like it gave me added confidence," he says. "I've always been convinced of my ability at the crease. But I got a fax from the England captain Mike Atherton saying something like, 'Glad to see your powers of scoring hundreds are still with you now you have the Samson effect.'"

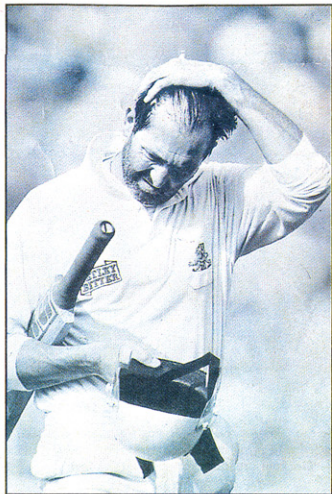
Former Australian test players Greg Matthews and Richard Yallop preceded Gooch in reinstating lost follicles with a little help from the Advanced Hair Studio's sport-loving owner Carl Howell, who saw the macho cricketing stars as the perfect people to tempt the balding masses of men Down Under.

Matthews' TV advert, extolling his luxuriant new growth, is now regularly screened and mimicked in Australia and this summer Gooch will hit the British advert screens with the slogan "Howzat".

Gooch believes a few of his contemporaries could become customers. "It must be something to do with the pressures of being England captain, but a few of us are going a bit thin," he says.

However, Gooch returns to a familiar theme when he says: "A lot more thought has got to be put into physical and mental fitness. It showed up in South Africa when they were so superior and it's the reason why Australia have been such a dominant force for years now. It's no good taking the attitude of 30 years ago and thinking you get sufficient practice in the nets. Players have the technique — if they haven't they wouldn't be in the England team. We have got to devote time to the mental side."

The top of Graham Gooch's head hasn't looked so good for years. He is hoping the backsides of the men who have succeeded him in the England team don't get another, all too familiar, pounding.



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