



Glenn McGrath

Straight shooter

by Adam Leto

Glenn McGrath struts his stuff at the Gabba in Qld. Photo: Newspix

Three men are sitting around a campfire in northern NSW swapping tales on hunting and cricket, surrounded by little more than the scent of ash and the thousands of stars smiling from above.

The mates could be any one of the thousands of Australian blokes who enjoy the spirit and camaraderie that is the essence of any hunting trip, but on this occasion, the three men are Australia's leading fast-bowlers Glenn McGrath, Brett Lee and Jason Gillespie.

The trio are on Glenn's 34,000-acre property about 160km north-west of Bourke in NSW, and at the end of their day-long adventure they're bonding over a beer. This, according to Australia's most successful fast-bowler, is what hunting "is all about".

"Brett enjoys [hunting], while Gillespie is still a bit of a novice when it comes to firearms," Glenn explains.

"It didn't matter if we shot or saw anything; we had a good time just sitting around the campfire telling a few yarns, having a few beers.

"Hunting is as much about mateship as anything else. Some of the best friends that I have are hunters; they're not a bunch of rednecks that go around shooting anything that moves.

"These are responsible, community-based people - some of the best people you could ever wish to meet."

Glenn is comfortable in the bush but concedes that with his cricketering and family commitments it is difficult these days to reconnect with his adolescent years spent on his parents' 1200-acre property in Narromine, in central NSW.

His earliest hunting memory was as a teenager camped firmly on the back of a Holden ute, spotlighting with his brother and neighbour as his father picked off foxes during lambing season.

"Dad didn't have much to do with firearms except when it came to controlling feral animals," Glenn recalls.

"I remember one time we knocked over about 99 foxes in three nights. I look back on my childhood and I'm so glad that I was brought up in the bush. I loved the country life and I still try to get out to my property at least once a year.

"I was more sports-oriented than my brother, who loved the farming side of things, while I would get into town to play basketball or golf or some sport."

While Glenn will probably go down as one of the world's greatest fast-bowlers

- he has taken 542 wickets, the most by any fast-bowler - his trek to the top had its fair share of speed humps. Indeed, his passion for sport wasn't always matched by ability while growing up, with the rangy speedster struggling to get a run for the Narromine XI.

His rise from bowling outcast to number one in the world could have easily gone to his head, but for the down-to-earth 36-year-old, it is clear that success, wealth and fame have not altered his outlook on life.

Adding to his perspective has been the struggle he and wife Jane have faced in her battle with cancer. Jane was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 1997 at the age of 31. She underwent a mastectomy and six months of chemotherapy and radiotherapy before being given a clean bill of health. Six years on, she was diagnosed with a secondary cancer in her hip bone but recovered after treatment.

Earlier this year, Glenn pulled out of the Australian tour of South Africa after Jane was diagnosed with cancer for the third time but the couple now look to have come out the other side.

"Jane's going really well. I think that with everything we've been through it has made us better people," says Glenn.

"How we live and what we do for a living is really insignificant when it comes to your family; what we've been through has put things into perspective."

The break may also have helped

lengthen the fast-bowler's career, with Glenn admitting he still has a fair way to go before he hangs up the baggy green. He plans to tour India later in the year, before having another crack at the Poms, and remains confident he can capture 1000 international wickets in his one-day and Test competitions.

"When I returned last time - after a lengthy lay-off - I came back a lot stronger and fitter. I think this time off will only lengthen my career.

"I still think I've got a few years left in me."

There can be quite a few similarities drawn between Glenn's actions on the pitch and his approach to shooting, most notably, what he describes as "the thrill of the hunt". By this he is referring to tracking down your opponent/prey, studying it, monitoring its actions and then finally making your move. It's a careful, precise and well drawn out process.

Those who have watched Glenn's surgeon-like precision with the new ball for the past decade and seen him capture the 'big-trophy' wickets such as Brian Lara and Sachin Tendulkar will know where he's coming from.

"A large part of my game is based on accuracy, repeating the same thing ball after ball; it's about precision, you just repeat the same process over and over," says Glenn.

"For me playing test cricket, from an individual perspective, the goal is to take



Glenn McGrath on his property near Bourke, NSW.

GLENN McGRATH

Glenn McGrath biography

Born: February 9, 1970

Place of origin: Born in Dubbo, NSW, and grew up in Narromine, NSW

Education: Narromine Primary, Narromine High School

Height: 1.98m

Marital status: Married to Jane, whom he met during a cricket tour of Hong Kong in 1995

Children: Holly and James

Bowler: Right-hand, fast-medium bowler (RFM)

Batsman: Right-handed batsman (RHB)

Test debut: November 12, 1993

One day international (ODI) debut: December 9, 1993

Test cap number: 258

ODI cap number: 113

Cricketing achievements: Glenn has more World Cup wickets than any other Australia bowler - 45 from 28 matches. He claimed 18 wickets at 13.77 in the 1999/2000 Ansett Australia series against India, and 17 wickets at 15.35 on the Kelvinator tour of India, topping the averages in both series

Cricketing awards: Wisden Cricketer of the Year 1998, Wisden Australia Cricketer of the Year 1999, Allan Border Medal 2000, Wisden Australia Cricketer of the Year 2005/06

Other achievements: Setting up the McGrath Breast Cancer Foundation with Jane to raise money to fund breast-care nurses

Trivia: In an ODI against New Zealand on December 8, 2004, Glenn wore a jersey sporting a misspelling of his name- 'MCGARTH'. The fault was an error of a clothing supplier

A popular war cry made by supporters when McGrath is playing is "Ooh! Ahh! Glenn McGrath!"

Glenn's nickname is Pigeon. The nickname came from NSW teammate Brad McNamara who, upon first laying eyes on his lily-white pins said, "You've stolen a pigeon's legs, McGrath." Glenn has also been nicknamed Rhino, Ninger, Nuff Nuff and Millard.



Glenn McGrath (centre) with Barry Warwick and Mark Worrada at the SSAA Silverdale range.

wickets, so it's probably the same thing as claiming a trophy when hunting.

"Knocking over the best guy in the opposition team is what it's all about, that's the big trophy you aim for.

"When I'm hunting if something is 400m away, I'd rather stalk it, stay in close and use my skills. Get into about 50m and be sure of the shot. With [a single-shot action firearm], it's one shot that matters, and if I'm not comfortable with the shot, I won't take it."

Glenn, who is also a SSAA NSW life member, has been inspired by books he has read on hunting in Africa at the turn of the 20th century, where stories are drawn from 'the chase' as much as 'the shot'. It is this back-to-basics approach to hunting, which most appeals to Glenn.

"I've been looking back at the turn of the century in Africa, how they hunted over there. If I had a time machine I'd love to go back to those times and hunt like they did," he says.

"I'm keen to get into trophy hunting, no animal in particular, but a big safari in Africa would be great.

"I'd prefer to do the safari on foot, like they did in the old days and just take the camp with you, not driving around in 4WDs.

"That to me would be perfect. It's not about the quantity of trophies; although quality is important, it's not everything. Just being out there in that environment would be amazing."

After Glenn took his 500th test wicket, Jane bought him an S-2 Blaser .500 Nitro Express with an interchangeable .375 barrel and walnut stock, and had it personally engraved. Currently, he has been shooting a Blaser K-95 single-shot, with interchangeable barrels, a variety of scopes and 300-year-old walnut stock. Blaser, manufactured in Germany, are renowned for producing lightweight, easy-handling, powerful firearms, with their market geared towards the 'archetypical hunter', which suits Glenn fine.

He admits that although Jane is "not that keen on hunting", she understands and accepts his passion, which, Glenn adds, he will explore further once his cricketering days are over.

"This is what I enjoy doing," he says.

"I don't expect people to feel the same way about [shooting], and at the same time, I don't expect others to force their opinions on me.

"I do have a passion for hunting and it is something I do want to continue once I've finished with cricket. I hope to stay involved with the game and contribute in that way also, but I can see myself taking the kids out and getting them to experience the country life too."

And no doubt that will also include more than a few yarns around the campfire. ●