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Oxford Word of the Month – October: baggy green

noun: (also **baggy green cap**) 1. the cap worn by an Australian Test cricketer. 2. this cap as a symbol of selection in an Australian Test cricket team. 3. an Australian Test cricketer.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

*The **baggy green cap** is an emblem of this nation. (Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 2003)*

The cap worn by Australian Test cricketers, the **baggy green**, is now a national sporting icon. Originally it was not called the **baggy green** and nor was it baggy (the baggy cap replaced a more fitted cap in 1921). The veneration of the **baggy green** is relatively recent, as confirmed by the recollections of former Test players in an article by sports journalist Russell Jackson:

Former Australian fast bowler Frank Misson told Fahey and Coward that in the early 1960s it was still known simply as ‘the cap’ and that its ‘flouncy’ aesthetic qualities were deemed a little outdated by his team-mates of that era. Ian Chappell maintains that it was rarely spoken of by he or his 1970s team-mates. (Guardian Australia, 23 December 2015)

Evidence for the term appears late in the written record. Apart from the odd mention of the **baggy green cap** in the 1950s, it is not until the 1980s that the cap becomes a commonplace in reports on the Australian Test cricket team:

*The Aussies went out hell bent on enjoying their cricket. Enthusiasm was high, pride at a premium and **baggy greens** firmly fixed on heads held high. (Brisbane Courier-Mail, 11 April 1984)*

The association of the cap with the pinnacle of cricketing success was well established by the late 1980s: ‘There are still too many willing to die to wear the **baggy green cap.**’ (Hobart Mercury, 25 March 1989)

During the 1990s the awarding of the cap became a ritual. In solemn pre-match ceremonies new players received their **baggy green** from the hands of the captain or a former Test great, and for players it became a tangible link to their predecessors in a long tradition of Australian Test cricket. Its elevation to mythical

status in Australian sporting history occurred especially under the stewardship of Test captains Mark Taylor, Steve Waugh, and Ricky Ponting.

Although the cap looks somewhat antediluvian in the modern era of international cricket, and offers very little protection from the sun, it is now an object of reverence: 'Stars sing an ode to the **baggy green**.' (Hobart *Mercury*, 17 November 1999) The cap has become such a potent symbol that in recent years even the players are sometimes called **baggy greens**:

*With any luck the **baggy greens** are in a position to wipe the smugness from the Barmy Army's faces.* (Melbourne *Age*, 23 November 2013)

Baggy green is included in the recently released second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* (2016).

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