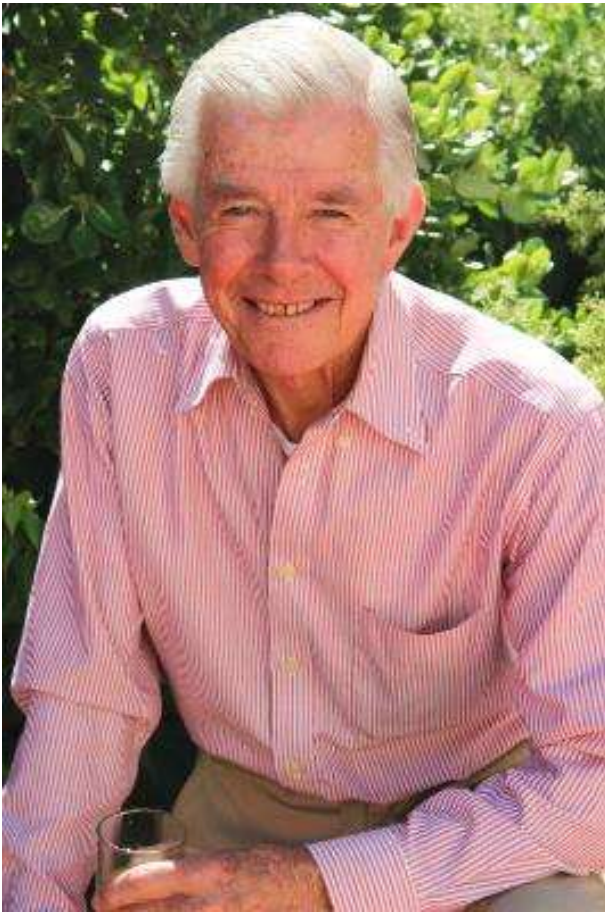


## Heart-warming results and heartbreak

by Jolyon Nuttall



Why does one skilled trout fisherman come home with a creel full of fish while another, equally skilled, doesn't have a touch all day? I have been musing on this question ruefully following a Christmas weekend at Underberg during which my fishing companion wiped, as the saying goes, my eye.

It is a difficult question to answer and, in trying to do so, I have sought comparisons in other focus of sporting art. I don't suppose there is any more accurate comparison than the difference between a batsman who is in form in cricket and another, of no less talent, who isn't (e. g. Graeme Pollock and Colin Bland in the First Test against the Australians.)

I have seen it happen time and again. Mr. X and Mr. Y, fishing companions of equal vintage and equal skill, set out for a day's fishing and, when they meet again in the evening, Mr. X has five trout from a pound and three quarters down. But, as far as Mr. Y is concerned, the river might just as well have been stocked with duck platypuses as trout.

They compare notes and both find that they have been using a Black Pennell on the tail and a Professor on the dropper, sizes 10 and 12 respectively. They have floated their flies and sunk them.

They have both worn khaki clothes and kept their shadows off the water.

Why the discrepancy between heartwarming results on the one hand and heartbreak on the other? And why, two weeks later, can the same thing happen in reverse?

Anyone who poses questions of this sort is pretty well bound to try to answer them, and I shall now expound my theories on the subject. But I do not think I know the full answer.

Firstly, in the same way as Pollock can play an exquisite cover drive, full of effortless timing, while Bland, who in the past has played equally effortless shots, merely snicks the ball past third slip, so one angler has his day and drops his fly as light as a thistle-down on the water while another, searching for his rhythm, fails to disguise the fact that he is artificially simulating the real thing.

For the second angler, the Black Pennell, instead of becoming one of a hatch of dark flies with a yellow tail, reverts instead to what it is: a man lure with a shiny barb that any intelligent trout would laugh to scorn.

Secondly, there can be little doubt that, on some days, one applies greater powers of concentration than on others. It follows that one angler, because of a hangover or an argument with his wife or because the septic tank was blocked, fishes with a poor degree of concentration, whereas another, after a good night's sleep and a trouble-free mind, is razor sharp in his application to the objective of catching trout.

By the same token, one angler is able to apply, almost subconsciously, Hardy's three great rules of trout fishing -- Keep out of sight, Keep out of sight, and Keep out of sight -- while another stands out like the Statue of Liberty because he is not concentrating (even though he thinks he is).

Thirdly, I resort to the super- natural. I haven't the faintest doubt that Dame Fortune is as fickle as men claim and that, on some days, she smiles on Jones while she frowns on Smith. Dame Fortune, Lady Luck. Madame Chance, they are all of the feminine gender, and they are all fancy free.

There will be days when they will be on your side, and you will stride home with a bulging creel ... and, in fishing circles, you will be hailed as the maestro.

But: be warned. Wear your triumph with care. For, on the very next occasion, you may have an empty bag and you will face a very real test: the test of a dethroned champion who can say, without rancor in his heart, to his successful companion. "Well done, you've wiped my eye."

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