

# was all we needed...



Odd Andersen

On top of the world: England's jubilant players and coaches celebrate in style with the Webb Ellis trophy after their thrilling, nerve-jangling three-point triumph over the defending champions Australia, which went into extra time in Sydney yesterday

Land of hope and glory. England are the champions of the world. They did it. By the gritted-teeth memory of all the heart-stopping sporting occasions ever played, they did it. It was easily the finest of the World Cup finals, with a biting intensity on the field and around the amphitheatre of Telstra stadium. In terms of drama alone, it will stand tall in English sporting history.

England made hard work of it in the sense that they were vastly superior, by as many as 20 points. But they won it only by three points, drop-kicked sensationally by Jonny Wilkinson with only 28 seconds of the second period of extra time left on the clock. This after Australia had come level in the last two minutes.

What would have been a practically unwatchable period of golden-point extra time had beckoned and, after that, a ping-pong panto of drop kicks.

I bet Jason Leonard was dying for that. Australia had levelled the match only in the last five seconds of normal time. Theatrical passions, England's glory.

The trophy was lifted into the Australian night sky, safe in the giant Midland mitts of Martin Johnson, visibly emotional in the post-match interview after playing a match that almost defied belief. About 35,000 white-jerseyed English support-

## White knight Wilkinson reigns as it pours

Where were you when Jonny scored?



Jonny Wilkinson's mum, Philippa

I was at Tesco's in Newcastle and the lady on the vegetable counter heard it. I also had a text from my husband.

I remember Jonny saying that all the practice he put in was so that if he had a kick in the World Cup final, he wanted to be in a position where he wouldn't worry about it

<b>Australia</b>	<b>17</b>
Try: Tuqiri Penalties: Flatley (4)	
<b>England</b>	<b>20</b>
Try: Robinson Penalties: Wilkinson (4). Drop Goal: Wilkinson	

Referee: A Watson (South Africa). Attendance: 82,957

Stephen Jones at Telstra stadium

ers went nuts, roared as the team went on a lap of honour and dispersed for all-night reveling to celebrate the end of Australian sporting hegemony. And in the grand manner. Feeble taunts about England's so-called boring style were stuffed down Aussie throats. England played all the exciting rugby. Australia plodded in straight lines. Indeed, England erred tactically by playing too much rugby when they should have kicked. Australia, harried by a brutal England defence, never looked like scoring a second try. They were comprehensively shut down and, eventually, clueless.

Johnson was stunning. His dexterity alone was worth the money. He poached Australia lineouts, he stormed around the field, carried the ball heroically. His pack were vastly superior.

Matt Dawson blossomed to play with courage and wit,

Wilkinson was magnificent, cucumber-cool. Will Greenwood had his finest match of the tournament, Jason Robinson was, again, dazzling, while Mike Catt came on and broke the Australian line at will.

It could have been a massacre, but England failed to make the scores that their first-half dominance demanded; and, in the second half, they began to meander. They tried to force the ball when they should have hoisted it, especially in the rain. They should have used Mike Tindall to hammer into the fallible home midfield, and they should have tested the Australian back three with high kicks and slippery kicks. Every Australian must have had his heart in his mouth whenever Matt Rogers, Wendell Sailor and Lote Tuqiri had to defend.

There was another element in

England's failure to dominate.

Andre Watson, the South African referee, had an appalling match. He incensed England almost beyond words, and they privately fumed into the night. Australia's scrum was in desperate straits. Al Baxter, the tight-head, lunged to the ground in the first scrum and England proceeded to drive Australia back at will. Yet Watson, scarily, awarded six penalties against England's scrum. Why in God's name would they want to infringe? It was distasteful and, had England lost, it would have been the primary scandal of the English sporting year.

"We went through the whole

tournament without giving away a scrum penalty, and then we conceded six," Clive Woodward said afterwards.

Australia's brightest moment came after four minutes. Baxter had already escaped punishment for collapsing a scrum when Australia won a decent ball and Stephen Larkham chipped high to the far corner. Tuqiri leapt above Robinson for the try. The conversion failed, but, for a few minutes, the Australian chants drowned out the eternal "Swing Low".

However, England came stronger and stronger. Wilkinson kicked two penalties to give them the lead, and they should have pulled clear. But Tuqiri managed to scramble back to meadow, and then came a horrendous England moment. Johnson and Richard Hill drove the ball on as Australia quailed under pressure. Lewis and Dawson moved it right and Ben Kay dropped a scoring pass with the Wallaby line yawning in front of him.

Yet Wilkinson kicked his third penalty and England cut Australia to pieces for their try. Dawson and Lawrence Dallaglio attacked, Dallaglio went speeding through, flipped a clever inside pass to Wilkinson and the No 10 sent Robinson flying over in the corner. Deadly execution. England went in 14-5 ahead, and one score soon after that would have done it.

Then the meandering, and the slide. Watson took another head soon afterwards. Kay was having attention, but Watson refused to halt play. The denuded England lineout coughed up the ball, gave away a penalty and Elton Flatley kicked it.

Oddly, there was no reversal in the momentum of the match whatsoever. But England were still playing too much rugby,

wasting their possession and territory. Flatley kicked another

penalty and, inside the last few dramatic minutes, Australia staged a series of desperate attacks. They were awarded a scrum, looked to have been shunted off the ball, but Watson wanted it reset. Inside the last minute, the scrum went down again and Watson concluded that Trevor Woodman had failed to engage properly — this against a nation which, to cover weakness, almost always

fails to engage properly. Flatley kicked a nerveless goal, the final whistle blew.

The extra periods were concerned far more with heart than technique, and they saw the older team (England) easily going the better. Wilkinson kicked a brilliant goal from near 50m in the opening stages of the first extra period, and for the vast England contingent, it was clock-watching time again.

Two minutes remained of the second period when Watson, who had penalised not a single Australia forward off his feet, nor a single Australian back offside, found another England offence. Flatley kicked another heart-stopping goal.

Jonny time. England kicked off and Rogers made a poor touch. Lewis Moody, who had replaced Hill, won the lineout and Catt drove hard at the defence. Greenwood, Neil Back and Johnson made inroads but it was a clever break by Dawson that took England within range. The ball came back and Wilkinson took aim with his right foot. One small drop for Jonny, one giant communal leap for the whole of merry England.

England: J Lewsey (1 Balshe 85min); J Robinson, M Tindall (M Catt 88min); W Greenwood, B Cohen, J Wilkinson, M Dawson, T Woodman, S Thompson, P Vickery (J Leonard 80min); M Johnson (capt), B Kay, R Hill (L Moody 93min), N Back, L Dallaglio

Australia: M Rogers, W Sailor (J Roff 70min), S Montock, E Flatley, L Tuqiri, S Larkham (M Giteau 19-30min, 55-63min, 85min), G Gregan (capt); B Young (M Dunning 92min), B Cannan (J Paul 56min), A Baxter, J Harrison, N Sharp (D Griffin 48min), G Smith, D Lyons (M Cockburn 56min), P Waugh



this was their

# finest hour

and forty minutes

Congratulations to the 2003 World Champions.

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Proud sponsor of the England Rugby Team.

Jones, Stephen. "How the World Cup was won." Sport. Sunday Times, 23 Nov. 2003, p. 4[S]. The Sunday Times Historical Archive, link.gale.com%2Fapps%2Fdoc%2FFP1803007571%2FSTHA%3Fu%3Dtimes%26sid%3Dbookmark-STHA. Accessed 10 Dec. 2025.