

**Maggie Dent** (00:00.462)

For many Aussies, the sound of summer includes the thwack of a cricket ball on a bat, either on the telly or the cricket field under the blazing sun or occasional rain. Sean Abbott has spent most of his life on that field, a phenomenal bowler who's taken out some of the best batters in the game. He started playing professionally at just 18. Since then, he's become one of the top performers in Australia's domestic competitions and was part of the Aussie team that won the 2023 World Cup. And although Sean's famous for his bowling, he's also pretty good with the bat, including hitting a century in just 41 balls. What the heck? And that is fast. He's also the all-time leading wicket taker in Australia's Big Bash League.

Sean is married to Brier Neal and last year in December, they welcomed their son Arlo. During the 2021 Ashes series, Sean chose to miss his potential test debut to be at the birth of his first child, Ella, who's now three. Hey Sean, welcome to the Good Enough Dad.

**Sean Abbott**

Good morning, thanks for having me on. I'm really, really stoked to be on the pod.

**Maggie Dent**

Oh my god, you gave up the opportunity? Holy hell, what sort of a good dad were you already?

**Sean Abbott** (01:35.79)

Yeah, I mean, it just didn't feel like much at the time to be honest, but obviously, one being that we have, there's a lot of talent in that squad. In the end, I ended up delivering Ella. And, you know, that was, that was the most magical thing that I could have ever experienced. So, yeah, we had a magic birth and I was really proud of the way Brier, you know.

**Maggie Dent**

Got me right in the feels.

**Sean Abbott** (02:05.19)

The way she handled herself through all that and you know I just didn't even feel like a big decision to make really I'm really you know I don't look back at that as a missed opportunity like it was just a magic thing to have done.

**Maggie Dent**

So you've got two little ones at the moment. So how was morning this morning? And how much sleep are you getting? Let's be honest.

**Sean Abbott**

The kids actually sleep pretty well. I mean Arlo, he's feeding quite a lot, but he tends to go back down to sleep pretty well. Also, Brier tells me, I sleep with Ella. But this morning, you know, I got called up late again to a squad, so I'm flying to the West Indies tomorrow. So I had to sneak in a session this morning just before going. So unfortunately, I missed the school drop off for Ella today, which is something that I'll try and do a lot because I've missed quite a lot of that. But that means an early pick up today for her so she can help me make her favourite dinner, which is burritos.

**Maggie Dent**

I love it. A little assistant cook. That's amazing. So Sean, did you have siblings? And can you paint me bit of that childhood growing up?

**Sean Abbott** (03:14.542)

I'm one of five I've got three older sisters and a younger brother. Wow. Mum actually, I didn't realise you don't realise til you become a parent but she raised us for a number of years by herself so solo and then our stepfather Nathan came in pretty quick. Yeah, I never really took a step back.

But I was pretty lucky in a way that that happened pretty quickly because Nathan's one of my closest mates and he's been a great father figure for me and yeah, pretty fortunate to have as many siblings as I do because it meant we didn't harass Mum as much.

**Maggie Dent**

So I bet you probably had the same question for your mum a little is how did you do it? How did you do it with all that many? But if it's my response when my boys say that, you are outside a lot. So I guarantee it would be similar for that little pack you had. You probably spent a lot more time outside than today's kids. Is that right?

**Sean Abbott**

Yeah, we were very active. Me and my brother played a lot of football, cricket in the backyard, but even my sisters loved playing cricket as well and just harassing the neighbours, a lot of neighbours around and a lot of kids around as well. But we pretty fortunate that, you know, mum was obviously solo for a bit and there was always love and support from her, but we also had a bit of a village from her family friends who had kids and we've got, she's one of four and we had lots of cousins, so quite a number of days where me and Ben especially would go to our cousins' straight from school. So there was always people to play with outside.

**Maggie Dent** (04:59.054)

So that's the magic of the village that, yeah, definitely. And I sort of had the same thing. I've just had a 70th birthday and all of my nieces and nephews came with their kids because they'd spent so much time in a childhood. So it's a really sad thing that now we're, well, A not breeding as much. So you don't have as many cousins, but we are further away and it's harder to do, isn't it? We're all busier. So, my gosh, that sounds like, I'm not gonna ask you worst things you got up to just in case your mum hears this.

**Sean Abbott**

That's a good question.

**Maggie Dent**

Now, when did cricket become even more important than footy? Or did you just play them evenly and then eventually worked it out?

**Sean Abbott**

Well, I come from a pretty, you know, football focused family, especially from my grandfather. But it just sort of, you know, me and my brother were playing cricket. You know, I ended up being captain of an under 16s grade side and rep side. So it just sort of naturally went in that direction. But I do miss playing football and that sort of thing. But it's very different. Cricketers and football is very different. And I'm pretty happy with where I ended up.

**Maggie Dent**

Yeah, so I have a really fond memories of Jeff Marshall Swampy who was always on a farm not far from me and my god, I don't think I ever saw him without a cricket bat in his hand. He was just besotted from the get-go but I don't even know if he played footy. So I love the fact that once that love happens and then some opportunity and the support, we never know where it can go, we?

You have described your stepdad Nathan as being one of your greatest supporters. What do you think you learnt from him about being a dad?

**Sean Abbott**

Well, early on, I just think I always remember him being there. He was incredibly reliable. I think one of his greatest traits is his honesty, but I think one of his things is that he's always there. I think his family matters most to him and he'll do anything to be there for them. But he was always there. He always took me to cricket and he's... one of the most honest people I've ever met, but he delivers his honesty in such a way that's not ... Like one of my sisters, for instance, loves baking and he's not afraid to tell her that she's not done a very good job, but he always delivers it in a way where she's like, okay, I'm going to do better. It was the same as when I was growing up playing cricket, whereas his father was whenever I'd go around after scoring a hundred or something as a young guy, he was, well, only 1% make it, got to do better. Whereas Nathan, sort of delivered it in another way. And it's the same with my grandfather as well. Their strongest traits are they were always there, they were reliable and they just showed up day in and day out.

**Maggie Dent**

So he was a pretty brave man taking on that pack.

**Sean Abbott (08:05.326)**

It was a fair old pack as well. We were pretty crazy young kids, I must admit. I think the girls were worse. I hope they don't see this, but the girls were a lot harder work than Ben and I.

**Maggie Dent (08:18.412)**

Okay, so if you look back on how he was a dad for you as a father figure, have you consciously chosen something different to do as a dad or just add more to it?

**Sean Abbott**

Honestly, I haven't really, there's not been too many conscious decisions since becoming a father besides, like from, as soon as we found out we having Ella, Brier just had a direction to go in. So it was easy to follow her lead. And sometimes I fall into the trap of, you know, I'll just follow Brier and not really bring too much else in. So I'm trying to go away and learn a bit more when I have the time and the mental capacity away on tour because that's one thing that I have is a lot of time on tour that's sort of dead time. Whereas her thing is completely opposite. She's got no time. So when we chat, there's like a little bit of resentment there, but we navigate that pretty well. I think not chosen anything differently than Nathan, but I just think I've sort of focused on always probably being more emotionally available and holding space for the kids and their emotions. And not to say if Ella is telling me she's feeling a certain way, I'm not going to say feel this way. I'll try and have a conversation with her about that, which is hard for me because I'm not the default parent. So doesn't always want to listen, but I figure if I can at least try and have that conversation, maybe one day it just clicks and we're we can start heading into that position where it's not just Brier that's the default parent.

**Maggie Dent (10:08.472)**

What have you found most challenging as a young dad?

**Sean Abbott**

Ella's three and half and I've basically been away for three years. Brier and Ella have come away on tours and things, but this last four weeks, I've really had the chance to experience some of the things that Brier's had to endure while I've been away. And I've had the, like, if she can step in, she's been able to step in, so I've had the partner, but she's basically been by herself.

So it's been good from a sense to sort of be in the trenches and experience exactly what it's like. So for instance, two weekends ago, Brea had dinner with her friends up the road, 200 meter walk. I'll walked the kids home and tried to do bedtime and get the kids to sleep. They will let me read books and stuff, but she doesn't let me brush her teeth. My mother does it, has to fall asleep next to mum, but Arlo has never had a bottle. So she pumped a bottle for me.

And it came time to get into bed and Ella's reading beautifully and doing the thing. I'm like, okay, yes, this is going well. Gave Arlo the bottle and he scoffed it in two seconds. And I'm like, oh no, this is not enough. Then he realised that the hard bottle isn't mummy's boobie. That was the first time I'd experienced that babies can cry like that. And the noise doesn't bother me. It's the, I don't have the tools. Yeah, I just felt a little bit, or very helpless and so I had to call Brier and I was like, hey look.

**Maggie Dent** (11:47.278)

Sorry love, come home.

**Sean Abbott**

It's time, he's got that cry going. Yeah, she got two hours with her friends and I was really chuffed to be able to do that. Yeah, I think it's the moments where I don't feel like I have the tools to, or if I'm looking after one well and the other one is, I feel like I'm neglecting one. I'm not doing really well with that at the minute but it's been a process which I'm really enjoying and I think it's been good for Brier to see me not struggle a little bit but just experience the things that she talks about because I can't understand what really what she's talking about besides being an ear.

**Maggie Dent**

And now you have new respect for solo parents, don't you?

You are away a lot. How do you stay, you know even just staying connected to Brier. How do you do that?

**Sean Abbott**

I don't put any pressure on her to make sure the kids are in a space to be able to FaceTime me at a certain time. Yeah. So we tried voice notes for a while, which were great. Like, so I could hear what she, cause sometimes you've read it on a text and you're like, okay, well it's tough, but then you hear it in her voice and it's like, okay, she's really in the trenches now. And there's probably been one or two times over the last couple of years where it's like, okay, I think I need to come home now. There was a week when Ella was six months old, where I was in India and she, she had mastitis on and off for a week and they both had gastro and I was literally about to ring the coach after she got off the phone and she rang me back straight away. And she goes, like, I'm really sorry I didn't even ask you how you were going. And I was like, Brier, like you're in the thick of it right now. It's okay. Like I can come home. She's like, no, it's okay. I'll be fine. Yeah. So I'd say we try not to go more than a couple of days without at least a phone call, a FaceTime or voice notes. Cause the texts, if we don't get the chance to speak how we're feeling, it's just not nice.

**Maggie Dent** (14:21.966)

All right, so I'm going to give you just a couple of little tips before you go next time. Can you read some of Ella's favourite picture books onto Brier's phone so that they're already there or you can actually record yourself reading them because it's the sound of your voice that makes her feel also more connected to you from a distance. It's the voice or the smell. I know it sounds dodgy, but a smelly t-shirt of daddy's on a teddy bear can also do the same thing. And it's so often that we think you have to be in the physical space, but those little things, my gosh, and I know that there are times, you know, when I was working with FIFO dads, they would put a bedtime ritual on mum's phone and a little one would just do it over and over again till they fell asleep. So it's, you know, the distance can be navigated, but it's also, it's great to hear how hard it is for you, because I think people think, they don't feel it and they're not worried.

Yes. Absolutely. Good dads do really feel it and do worry.

What's your biggest fail so far?

**Sean Abbott** (15:58.19)

Probably the biggest one was, you know, obviously, like when I'm 18 or whatever it was, and you're chasing a dream of playing or being professional cricketer, you don't think about what life's going to be like when you're 30, you get your first kid. So for me, the biggest fail is probably just the time away because Ella is extremely aware and emotionally intelligent.

You can really notice it with her, even if I have to go up to Brisbane, say, for a camp for two days, I come back, I'm like, oh, her vocabulary's even changed a little bit. She's talking to me in a different way, or she's picked up some new words or whatever. That's probably the biggest one, but who's gonna make that decision at 18 before you even get a partner?

Yeah, one that really annoyed me because I didn't notice it at first because I thought everything was so important was being so accessible when I'm home. So had an Apple Watch and I had my phone and I've just been picked on the tour and I need to get logistics sorted. And I'm like at the phone in front of the kids and Brier is like, Sean, I understand this is really important, but you're actually not on call to perform surgery for anyone ... like they'll organise it and you'll be fine you're going to get on the plane. I was like okay so I ripped off the Apple watch and I'll try as much as I can... the Apple watch goes in the cupboard at the front door and the phone. There are still some days where it's not great but as much as I can, I just sort of disconnect yeah.

### **Maggie Dent**

Yeah, well done. And it's so hard because we need it to navigate all sorts of things, don't we? OK, so I want to know what do you think you can just say honestly is one of your brag moments that you absolutely nailed it with Ella?

### **Sean Abbott (18:01.262)**

The first thing that comes to mind is the way she runs at me and says daddy when I come home, it makes me feel like we've kept the connection or I did something or I was just a present dad before I left. The way she says dad when I arrive home, it's an extra special moment. And the same with Arlo. Like I feel like Arlo recognises me when I come home and I feel like that was a win. And gives a big smile. But I think just adventuring with Ella, she really loves being outside. It's like a win all the time. Cause I'm giving, like I'm giving Brier some space when she's had literally zero space and I'm getting to, I'm giving Ella the space to show me the world and everything that she's learnt. Because like I said, she's really emotionally intelligent and she'll have moments where she'll just put her arm around me and say, I love you dad. And I'm like, sorry I didn't know, I'm not obviously a very experienced dad, but I didn't know you knew could say those things at the age you're at.

### **Maggie Dent**

So what do you like at pretend play? Cause little girls are very good at pretend play.

### **Sean Abbott**

Yeah, was that night I mentioned the other night when Brier was at dinner, I was downstairs because I was anticipating a hectic, you know, couple of hours coming up. I was like, all right, scoffs and dinner with our clean up. And then I came upstairs and Ella had all her dress-ups that were donated from her cousins. And she's got about like 11 cousins, bit like me and my siblings. So a lot of donations from friends and she was being dress-up spin and I get upstairs and from her bedroom end on end perfectly lined up all the way into the other bedroom and into the bathroom. She's like, look what I did daddy and I was like, I'm thinking I'm gonna have to clean this up. I'm just like, I'm really impressed with how neat this is and but my pretend play with her at the moment is she likes playing rough with me. Love it. Oh good. Yeah, she loves, she loves, yeah, being thrown on the bed. I'd say one of my wins of light has been we put a jungle gym up in her room, which sounds a bit extra. But you know, the other night after we had a shower, I was like, okay, she was being a little bit loud and singing and stuff. And I was just, Hey, I love your singing. But can we just the volume come down a little bit just because Arlo is looking like he's going to go to sleep. Me and Brier spoke after and she said, maybe we just need to let her get that energy out after because she struggled to go to...

She was bit restless. Now after we just let her jump on the bed a little bit or run up and down the hallway and just get that energy out. And I felt like that was a big win to your point last point.

### **Maggie Dent**

I think that's one of the things that you know you get people saying your bedtime routine should be really calming and everything but we know that some of our kids when they have too much energy or tension in their body before bed can't go to sleep so if she has those days and then you're able to discharge that she is going to find it easier to go to sleep, so sometimes when dad wants to do crazy games after bath time it might actually be a plus not necessarily the oh stop winding them up right?

I know so many dads have said they really struggle with the big meltdowns, particularly from girls because they can last a while. Are you holding that space with deep breathing and getting better at it because it's completely developmentally normal.

### **Sean Abbott**

Like I mentioned before, I feel like I don't have the tools to negotiate with her because I'm not the default parent or I just try and just keep chatting and having a conversation and then sometimes like the other night, Brier and Arlo were in the bed and she was putting Arlo to sleep and I was like this she cannot, so sorry, Ella had been asleep for a few hours already. She'd woken up and Brier goes, oh, you need to come and please just get Ella down before she wakes up. And I was like, all right, Ella, what are we gonna do? And she was in that stage where there was just no negotiation. Sometimes there's no negotiation happening. I'm going in because I wanna be next to Mum. And I was like, okay. I didn't really know what to say at all. So just tried to keep chatting with her and then I quickly realised there was no way that she wasn't going in there and I pulled Bluey out on the phone. I was like, all right, okay, Ella we've got one episode of Bluey and as soon as she started watching in bed, I'm gonna have to, this is gonna be another negotiation for the next week every time we get into bed. Watched a couple of episodes, maybe 10 minutes worth and she wasn't asleep. I tried to put the phone down and she stormed off in the bed and went and woke Brier and Ella up and I was just, you know. It's in those moments when there's no negotiation, I feel completely helpless.

### **Maggie Dent**

Yeah, and of course you've got a toddler with a developing brain who's not capable of logic and there are times that we've just got to forgive ourselves that it's unfixable and that sometimes when they're melting down we just need all that stuff to come out and we're just going to hold them safe and it is yeah it is hard work. Yeah a big question coming so you have two beautiful children what is your your biggest fear about being a dad for these two beautiful kids and raising them in today's world.

### **Sean Abbott**

I think, well I said, Brier asked me a similar question not long ago and I said, well, with, I hate to bring it up again, but it's the time away and I don't want them to be sitting around the campfire later in life when they're teenagers and say, oh, why were you never around dad? And missing things or, know, mum and the kids did this and where was dad? Oh, he was away with work or whatever. So that's probably the main one, them feeling like I wasn't there, I didn't show up. But then, Brier started, well, what about, you know, when they get their first phone or TikTok or, Ella starts bringing, you know, partners home and says, it's my boyfriend or whatever. I was like, no, I don't really fear that all that much. I feel like if I'm present with them and I show up, they're going to be okay. And maybe that's a bit naive of me, but I think that I went into having kids with Brier are a little bit naive as to how tough things might be. When we went on tour, I was a bit naive as to how tough things might be. And I think it might be the same with this. My biggest fear is them feeling like I wasn't there when they were growing up.

**Maggie Dent**

Okay, so even though you're not there as much at the moment, Sean, do they know that they're loved? Do they know that you love them? That is the bit. It's not how far apart you are. And I'm pretty sure that she wouldn't be running at you 100 miles an hour and throwing herself at you if she didn't feel that love. So that's your number one target, nothing else.

So if you could wind back the clock, it's not that far I know, but if you could wind back the clock to before you had your beautiful children, what one piece of advice might you give young Sean?

**Sean Abbott**

I would definitely open my eyes to how tough it's going to be. And it's maybe my biggest bit of advice myself, maybe not be about parenting, about communicating and connecting with Brier because I think that helps us both show up a little bit better and sort of...I've had trouble articulating to Brier, articulating validation for what she's had to go through as basically a single parent. When we moved to where we moved to now, was before we considered having kids. Our closest family is about an hour away. So we've had to sort of find our own little village here. So it's been, we made it a little bit tough for ourselves from that respect. So I would say make sure you connect with Brier, validate what she's going through and just remind myself of like how hard raising two kids is going to be and being a good dad is going to be because I saw a good quote the other day which I reminded my brother of a few weeks ago. Parenting is a lot harder for the good parents. Sometimes I'll go around and catch up with my brother and he's flicked the TV on and he's having a chat with me for an hour and I was like, mate, let's look after the kids. Let's be with the kids and take them down the farm.

**Maggie Dent (27:39.8)**

So it is, it's about team parenting is quite different to what previous generations were doing. And therefore it can be tricky to know what to do. If there's one thing that you want your two beautiful kids to learn from you because you are their dad, what might that one thing be?

**Sean Abbott**

I think presence would be, it's probably a lived experience for me, but I'd say just presence. I think they can be strong, competitive and ambitious, but still, yeah, still be, yeah, still be present. In my journey of being a parent, which is, yeah, we've been through a bit already, but I've learned, I learn way quicker when I'm present with Brier and the kids and living that experience straight away when you know I've let the phone or something else get the best of me that day because I feel like work's important.

**Maggie Dent**

Yeah, so one of the common things we hear is parents say, what do I do instead of how do I be? And you can be in the room, but not really there. And that's what you're honouring. And I think you're doing a pretty good job of that, Sean, when you're there.

Thank you so much and all the best.

**Sean Abbott (30:04.184)**

Thanks so much for having me on and lovely to meet you.

Sean Abbott, amongst everything he said, there are some new points that I think we should throw into our good enough dad checklist.

Firstly, for Sean, having a father figure who was consistently reliable and honest and predictable, that is a key thing that made him feel safer as a child.

Secondly, that reminder again, what are we doing with our phones and watches? I love the way that Sean had a safe place for it as he came into the house. It's a good reminder for us all.

And thirdly, prioritise communication and connection with our co-parent. It's not always our kids. Because that will help with effective team parenting when we're closer and we're safer and we're calmer.

I'm Maggie Dent and this is The Good Enough Dad. Please subscribe and rate this podcast and share it with other parents. Seriously, it helps more people to find it.