

'Optimist' McCullum can work magic with England's white-ball teams, says Pope

AFP – Stand-in Test captain Ollie Pope said Brendon McCullum can transform the fortunes of England's limited-overs teams in the same way he has reinvigorated the red-ball side.

England cricket chiefs on Tuesday announced the New Zealander would take charge of all formats from January and that he has extended his contract until the end of 2027.

"We've seen the impact he's had on us as a Test team and as individuals, which I think he can then transfer into the white-ball stuff as well," said Pope, speaking ahead of the third Test against Sri Lanka, starting on Friday.

"He brings the best out of each other. He's a real optimist and I think that's really good in the cricket world. So, very exciting for English cricket overall."

McCullum, 42, inherits white-ball teams that have surrendered titles in the 50-over and 20-over world cups in the past 12 months.

When the former New Zealand captain took charge of England's Test side in May 2022 they were at a low ebb, with just one win in 17 games.

But under his leadership they have won 19 of their 28 Tests, playing an exciting attacking game that has been labelled "Bazball".

Pope, who has struggled with the bat in recent matches, said McCullum had given him confidence and freedom in his personal game.

“He’s got a great outlook on the game in general and just being able to kind of draw a line under your best and your worst weeks as well,” said the batter, who is deputising as skipper for the injured Ben Stokes.

“I think that’s probably one of his biggest skills as a player, but now he’s sort of got that into his coaching as well. He’s a massive optimist.”

England, 2-0 up in the three-match series against Sri Lanka, have brought in left-arm seamer Josh Hull for the final Test at The Oval.

The two-metre tall 20-year-old, who only made his first-class debut last year, replaces Matthew Potts.

England are just one win away from completing a clean sweep of home Test triumphs for the first time since 2004, having moved on emphatically from a disappointing 4-1 defeat by India in the winter.

Before the Sri Lanka series they beat West Indies 3-0.

“It’d be special to win 6-0 this summer,” said Pope. “And I think winning’s a habit, isn’t it? So I think going forward it’ll put us in good stead. And obviously we’ve got a lot more cricket to come.”

Pope was asked whether taking on the captaincy was affecting his batting – he has mustered just 30 runs in four innings against Sri Lanka so far.

“To be honest, I don’t know,” he said. “I think last week I played a pretty average shot in the first dig (innings), which could happen. But that’s nothing to do with the captaincy.”