

Jonathan Agnew



It is hardly surprising that a high profile career as a professional sportsman is looked upon with such envy. What could be better than playing your favourite sport at the highest level every day, and being paid for it? It is true that many in that privileged position do not appreciate how lucky they are.

But increasingly we are becoming aware of a dark side to what should be the ideal life. Depression and stress-related illness is taking its toll and while it would be an exaggeration to describe it as widespread within sport, the number of cricketers to be affected, in particular, is worrying.

Jonathan Trott became the latest example of an England player to have his career interrupted when he pulled out of last winter's Ashes after just one Test match. It is a very difficult subject to report because there is no tangible sign of depression to an outsider. At least if Trott had broken his finger it would have been more straightforward, particularly for some unsympathetic, some would say, ignorant, observers who decided that Trott had simply bottled out of a tough situation.

Marcus Trescothick, Graeme Fowler, Mike Yardy and Iain O'Brien have all suffered from depression with Trescothick's international career ruined as a result. There have been examples from other sports such as Frank Bruno, Ian Thorpe and Ronnie O'Sullivan, but why is cricket so susceptible?

Cricket is a demanding sport.

Months are spent away from families – often those with very young children – and it is a short, uncertain career with the matter of what to do afterwards a constant worry. There are clearly other factors, too, and to dismiss it with the usual comment about a 'dream job' is to be unrealistic. Is it possible that the environment around cricketers is such that they feel more comfortable opening up in the first place? I remember when the

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Surrey and England batsman Steven Davies revealed that he is gay, I questioned the interest from all the radio stations that contacted me for my reaction. 'What's the problem?' I said. 'Cricket is a grown up sport and this won't shock anyone or change anything.' I am not sure they believed me, but it is true.

Happily, Trott is returning to the top flight once more with an England tour this winter and we wish him well. Depression within sport is something most of us do not understand, but every high profile example increases our awareness.

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