

# JONATHAN AGNEW



And so to The Oval – the cricket ground in South London where England’s defeat to Australia 143 years ago produced the famous satirical obituary to English cricket in the *Sporting Times*: ‘The body will be cremated’, it read, ‘and the ashes taken to Australia.’

There, two years later, the England captain Ivo Bligh was pre-

sented with a small terracotta urn containing the ashes of a burned bail, and while the original sits in a sealed glass case in the Lord’s museum, a replica urn will be presented to Alastair Cook at the conclusion of this Test match to mark the close of another Ashes series.

As a sign of the times, Cook will also be presented with a much larger Waterford Crystal trophy which he will show off for the cameras. Let’s face it, waving a tiny six inch urn about hardly makes for the most dramatic photograph of a moment of cricket history.

When it comes to drama, we have become spoiled at The Oval. This is traditionally the venue for the final Test of the summer, and is where many Ashes campaigns have been won and lost. It was here, in 1948, that the great Sir Donald Bradman walked out to bat for the last time needing to score only four runs to finish his career with a batting average of 100 (no one else averages more than 65). Whether he was overcome by emotion, or cricket de-

cidied to prove that no one is greater than the game, we will never know, but the Don was bowled second ball for a duck, leaving him with an average of 99.94. He simply turned on his heel and walked off again to a standing ovation. Bradman’s record will never be beaten.

It was at The Oval in 2005 that England finally won the Ashes after 16 long years of trying.

It was the eighth series I had reported on and I had hardly seen England win a match in that time, let alone a series. The excruciating tension, and the sight of hundreds of people leaning out of the windows and clinging to the chimney pots of the

houses outside the ground on that final afternoon is a memory I will always cherish.

This series has already been won by England, but they will be keen to record the first ever 4-0 defeat of Australia – and I suspect they almost certainly will.

***‘When it comes to drama, we are spoiled at The Oval’***

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