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We hear a great deal in the sporting world about character; that crucial ingredient in the overall make up of every sportsman and woman that can make the difference between success and failure. By showing character we mean bravery, stamina and resourcefulness rather than skill or flair, and character

is most necessary when confronted by defeat. It is clear that unless England's cricketers show character this week in Perth, they will lose the Ashes.

Vince Lombardi, the American Football coach, defined character by saying: 'It does not matter how many times you get knocked down, but how many times you get up', and having been dealt two hammer blows in Brisbane and Adelaide, England – who came to Australia as favourites after all – are flat on their backs on the canvas.

Ironically, the man who put them there is the cricketer who has shown the greatest character of everyone playing in this series:

the Australian fast bowler Mitchell Johnson. He is the 32-year-old fast bowler who was psychologically destroyed three years ago by the travelling English supporters who composed a wicked but humorous chant that mocked his wayward bowling: 'He bowls to the left, he bowls to the right...', you probably know the rest.

Yet despite losing his place in the team and apparently unlikely ever to win it back again, John-

son has returned and through two devastating spells of sheer pace has won Man of the Match in both Tests so far. The speed and hostility he has generated is the result of all that anger and pain, and try as hard as they can to taunt him this time, the Barmy Army simply cannot make an impact. In fact, they are probably making it worse.

It is a brilliant sporting success story, and much as they will hate

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to acknowledge it, Johnson's astonishing comeback must be an example to England who now face him on his home ground.

There is a hunger about the Australians that has shaken England to the core.

I have no doubt that it is

easier to pump yourself up when you are trying to win something back, as Australia are, rather than to retain possession – no matter how precious. But unless England can somehow halt the juggernaut that is Mitchell Johnson this week, we will witness the beginning of the end for the most successful team in generations.

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