

# JONATHAN AGNEW



The sacking of Kevin Pietersen from the England team has divided loyalties like never before in the cricket world. KP, as he is known, has had that effect wherever he has played, splitting opinion between those who

see no need to look beyond his rare talent, and others who view him as a selfish one-man band. Given KP's history, even his most ardent supporter would surely concede that his career was unlikely to end quietly.

But the rancour and hostility of this past week has been astonishing and not helped by the atrocious England performances in Australia. There is an urgent need to rebuild the team and the mindset of the players who are lucky enough to represent their country. A new managing director, former Test cricketer Paul Downton, has to oversee the reconstruction from scratch and his starting point is the view that it is best done without Pietersen.

When Pietersen was reintroduced to the team in 2012 after sending text messages to the South African opposition thought to be derogatory about his captain, Andrew Strauss, he did so on strict condition that he would never again attempt to undermine the authority of the England team. A joint statement from the Board and Professional Cricketers' Association makes clear KP has lost the players' trust once more, and particular-

ly that of the captain Alastair Cook, who had fought hard to bring KP back into the fold.

The details of when or how this happened does not concern me. I am not privy to that information, nor should I be. The roar of indignation from some demanding that all the facts be publicly laid bare is absurd and unrealistic, and displays a lack of understanding of how a modern sporting team is supposed to operate – its code and ethics.

Besides, statistics indicate that this stellar batsman is on the wane and his manner of dismissal in Australia was too often irresponsible. Since he returned to the Test team he averaged fewer than Cook, Ian Bell and Jonathan

Trott, and managing his chronic knee problem has restricted his one-day appearances to just 13 out of England's last 44 matches.

But while KP will no doubt continue to entertain us on the free-lance T20 circuit, England's emergence from this deep hole is likely to be slow and painful, and that will not be lost on KP's many supporters.

***'England's emergence is likely to be slow and painful'***