

# JONATHAN AGNEW



As the Kevin Pietersen debate rumbles on – with the player himself now £900,000 better off thanks to an extended contract with the Indian Premier League – the question of the role of coach has become a hot topic.

The great Australian cricketer, Shane Warne, once declared that the only practical use for a team coach is to transport you from the hotel to the ground. Meanwhile, Sir Clive Woodward, one of the most respected coaches in British sport, announced recently that by allowing a captain to hold sway over the opinion of the coach, cricket is living in a 'bygone age'. Interestingly, both Warne and Woodward reach the same conclusion – that England should have found a way of retaining Pietersen through better man management – but get to their verdicts through entirely different means.

I take issue with Woodward's comment and his view that there is no way he would be a national coach if he thought there would be interference from the team captain. Cricket is played entirely differently to rugby and football in that the captain is very much in charge of running the game on the field – and the sport is all the better for it. Cricket produces great captains such as Ray Illingworth, Mike Brearley and Michael Vaughan who contributed at least as much to their team's success by their leadership skills and tacti-

cal nous as by the runs they scored or the wickets they took.

I cannot imagine a game of cricket in which the decisions about field placings and bowling changes are taken by a tracksuited individual in the dressing room – although the pioneering South African coach Bob Woolmer once found himself in trouble for communicating with his captain, Hansie Cronje, via an earpiece.

On football and rugby fields, captains are motivational and respected figures rather than tacticians, and leave the coaches to pick up the credit for victory or the criticism for defeat. Football managers have to deal with young men paid so much that they cannot seriously have a grip on

reality and also a dressing room full of different languages and cultures. The best are supremely skilled at implementing discipline and moulding a team from an array of characters.

So as cricket reflects on this unhappy period and, importantly, retains the captain's role onfield, there is much it can learn from football's ability to manage its players off it.

***'Captains:  
respected  
figures  
rather than  
tacticians'***