

# JONATHAN AGNEW



**W**ith England cricket at its lowest ebb for years, Stuart Broad might consider that he has been handed a hospital pass rather than a golden opportunity when he leads the one-day team

onto the fields of Antigua and Barbados over the next fortnight. However, he has the perfect chance to impress his credentials as a serious alternative to Alastair Cook.

Cook's reputation as a captain took a battering during the Ashes in Australia, and he is taking a breather until the English season starts again. This enables Broad to lead the team not only in the Caribbean, but also in Bangladesh for the World Twenty20, which starts in March.

England has a problem in that there are no serious candidates to replace Cook. Matt Prior, the vice-captain, was dropped from the team in Australia while Broad, who shrugged off the most venomous and personal hostility from the crowds there, revealed an impressively robust character.

To be taken seriously as England's full-time captain, Broad has to cut out his hot-headed moments on the field and instil within the team a healthy understanding of the traditions of the game, and the importance of them. Most pressing of all, he has to get England winning matches again.

There is no question that you need strong leadership as you start that long and painful climb out of the

abyss. Nasser Hussain was a volatile and passionate captain who took over when England were ranked bottom of the Test table in 1999. There were plenty of sharp words and not many laughs as he insisted on absolute focus from his players, who did not like him very much but respected his approach. Importantly, they all believed that if it came to the crunch, Hussain would back them and that created a strong sense

of team spirit.

That must be the starting point for Broad. The West Indies trip is of no real significance but the T20 in Bangladesh represents a chance for England to pull off a surprise in the instant form of the game, which is by its very nature unpredictable.

Anyone can win, and should Broad return with a resurgent team then history might repeat itself – Hussain resigned the Test captaincy when Michael Vaughan's one-day unit defeated South Africa by playing exciting and expressive cricket. 'I knew I had lost the team,' Hussain reflected honestly. Two years later England regained the Ashes.

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