

JONATHAN AGNEW



As we return home from Australia, battered and bruised, the scale and speed of the England team's decline must be urgently investigated. It is one thing to have lost the Ashes, but to be thrashed 5-0 is quite another. The manner in which England were swept away in just three days in Sydney revealed the extent to which the players have lost their

confidence and, I'm sad to say, their stomach for a fight.

Inevitably there are demands for the captain, Alastair Cook, and the coaching staff to be sacked but while I believe that Cook remains the right man for now, there must come a massive change in the mindset of his team and their attitude to the game.

Nothing illustrated more graphically the arrogance of the players who won the Ashes last summer than their urinating on the Oval pitch while celebrating after the final match. It said everything about their lack of respect for the game's great traditions (the Oval is where the Ashes began way back in 1882)

and their attitude to those who proudly represented England before them. The 82-page menu that was sent in advance to the Australian cricket grounds specifying what and when England's players should eat revealed how cosseted the team has become. It has been said before in many different walks of life, but before anything else, the England cricket team must get back to basics.

Preparing pitches to suit your

own team is rightly frowned upon in most cricketing circles as unethical and if you load the conditions to suit you, how do you know how well your team is really performing?

England did that last summer and their batsmen were then blown away by the extra pace and bounce they encountered in Australia. Time-wasting by deliberately slowing the match down when things are not going their way has become

***'The
England
team must
get back
to basics'***

an infuriating component to England's game. And the verbal abuse of the opposition is juvenile, unedifying and gives a dreadful example to the youngsters who are coming into the game.

So there is a lot of

work to do off the field

before England carefully construct a team with the aim of defeating Australia in 2015, but the final word must go to the fast bowler, Mitchell Johnson. It was an exhilarating privilege to watch him release his thunderbolts as once again we observed how batting against genuine pace separates the men from the boys.

jonathanagnew.com
[@Aggerscricket](https://twitter.com/Aggerscricket)