

# JONATHAN AGNEW



When Sir Ian Botham announced that England's cricketers would whitewash Australia 10-0 over the coming months, I dismissed him as being typically belligerent. Now I am not so sure. For while England enjoy a break this week, basking in their 2-0 lead, Australia are in Sussex desperately seeking a solution to their shambolic efforts so far in which they have been

comprehensively out-gunned and out-maneuvred.

It is almost getting to the point where I feel sorry for them – although I cannot really think why. After all, many were the times in the 1990's that Australia would bully England into submission, almost to the point of the game's destruction here – and there was definitely no sympathy forthcoming from Australia then.

Perhaps it is simply that as a nation we are less brash and, I think, find gloating rather more impolite than our friends from Down Under.

The Lord's Test last week ended a day early. A full house of 30,000 people was denied the chance to see what was supposed to have been the climax to the match. The occasion itself had been brilliant with hot sunshine throughout, and further evidence could be found in the hospitality boxes of a cricket match being both the place to be, and to be seen.

There was the unlikely snapshot of pop star Lily Allen chatting to the recently retired Governor of the Bank of England, the owlish Sir Mervyn King;

'My new album will make even you dance, Mervyn', she teased. Jude Law, Russell Crowe and Hugh Jackman added the Hollywood interest, while the Prime Minister, David Cameron, delivered a cake to the Test Match Special box where Heston Blumenthal advised us on the perfect barbecue.

Of course, cricket is not dependant on a celebrity following – and I suspect the roving eye of the television camera will struggle to pick out many well-known faces in the crowds at Manchester and Chester-le-Street – but they do raise cricket's profile and help the game reach out to new audiences who discover the appeal of the Ashes for themselves.

But the Ashes needs to be hard fought to remain special. And while radio phone-ins are currently full of callers urging England to beat the Aussies into submission at home and then away this winter, I am not sure that really is in the best interests of cricket's greatest rivalry.

***'The PM delivered a cake to Test Match Special'***

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