

Jonathan Agnew



Readers know me well enough by now to understand that I am essentially a traditional old-so-and-so who tries to respect the values and traditions of sport, one of which is that the umpire's decision is final. There is nothing worse than watching a Premiership manager's post-match rant towards a defenceless football referee, for example. But

not even cricket umpires are beyond reproach and when England's captain, Stuart Broad, was fined in Chittagong this week for criticising the decision to remain on the field as lightning flashed threateningly all around the stadium, the authorities got it wrong.

Broad's comments were regarding a safety issue – not an umpiring decision as such – and he was speaking on behalf of his teammates. One of those, Michael Lumb, was brought up in Johannesburg and has had first-hand experience of the dangers of lightning strikes, including a school trip during which five girls died. Golf would already have been suspended in Chittagong, and the blazing floodlights under a dark, night sky made it a particularly dangerous place to be. Broad was fined 15% of his match fee, which does not sound much, but that is just 5% less than the punishment the Australian coach, Darren Lehmann, picked up last summer for calling Broad a 'blatant cheat'.

It is the captain's duty to be honest. We are all sick and tired of the plain and boring press conferences in which every word has been censored.

Frankly, they are a waste of time. It is true that England narrowly lost the game, and it is also the case that umpires are often criticised for taking the players too quickly from the field in the case of bad light or gentle drizzle. But Broad's remark was not merely a valid one, it was an appropriate reminder that there are rather more important things to take into account than merely getting a game of cricket finished.

Besides, the umpires and referee should be exerting their energy on one of their basic duties, which is to see the matches are completed on schedule. Already this tournament's been marred by slow play, resulting in games running well over time, when Twenty20 cricket is

supposed to be all about non-stop action. So where are the fines and the suspensions that the regulations stipulate? Nowhere, because the longer the match, the more ads can be crammed into the coverage by the all-governing television companies. Let's have some consistency.

'There are more important things than getting a game of cricket finished'