

JONATHAN AGNEW



Some of cricket's greatest and most outspoken characters have hailed from Yorkshire, and this week Headingley will stage its 72nd Test match while the famous old club celebrates its 150th anniversary.

Yorkshire is still producing fine young talent today – Joe Root, who has made such an impression in his first five matches, being an obvious example. And he will be aiming to achieve the same legendary status as Fred Trueman, Ray Illingworth, Dickie Bird and the club's current president, Geoffrey Boycott.

There is no doubt that Geoffrey – my sidekick on *Test Match*

Special – will be in his element as he hosts the great and the good in his private box. He remains the shrewdest and also the most forthright critic in the business and although he and I are the most unlikely of bedfellows, I really cherish our combative on-air relationship.

Dickie Bird retired nearly 20 years ago, but he is still the most famous umpire in the world. For such a very manic, nervous and apparently completely disorganised character, old Dickie was remarkably calm and assertive on the pitch, earning him the respect of even the most hostile and grumpy of fast bowlers. He recently celebrated his 80th birthday and has released his second autobiography; the first sold more than a million copies and remains one of the best-selling sports books around the world.

Sadly Fred Trueman, who died in 2006, will not be there this week but it is impossible to

go to Headingley and not be reminded of the finest fast bowler ever produced by England and a radio critic every bit as cutting as Boycott – but also genuinely funny, too.

True, he really enjoyed reminding the listener how good a bowler he used to be – and especially how fast he was in his pomp. One day, while he was doing just that, some old television footage in glorious black and white appeared on the screen behind him in which the West Indian batsman, Conrad Hunte, hit the first three balls of a test – all delivered by

Fred himself – for four. Turning just in time to catch sight of what was making me laugh, he watched the third ball race to the boundary before delivering the immortal line: 'Ain't it funny how much slower you look in black and white!'

jonathanagnew.com
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Ones to watch

CRICKET England v New Zealand at Headingley

24-28 May
England look for further success at their final Test match before the Ashes.

FOOTBALL Championship play-off final Crystal Palace v Watford

27 May
A place in the Premiership is up for grabs.

TENNIS Roland-Garros French Open

26 May-9 June
Spaniard Rafael Nadal knuckles down in Paris as he aims for a record eighth win.



TESTING TIMES England captain Alastair Cook



RECORD BREAKER? Rafael Nadal has high hopes