

## **Debate over Mark Ramprakash exposes England selectors**

**Rejecting calls for the prolific batsman to return to  
the Test team highlight an unforgiving mindset that  
does players no favours**

The debate over whether Mark Ramprakash should have been selected for the final Ashes Test against Australia illustrated what I consider to be a rather stolid mindset among the England selectors.

Furthermore, I found the proliferation of articles and theories dissecting why Ramprakash 'never made it', so to speak, somewhat tedious. Of course, if they sell newspapers then I suppose you could say they are understandable. But one thing is beyond debate. For the past five years Mark Ramprakash has been the best batsman in English cricket, full stop.

The statistics tell the story. Since the start of the 2004 season, Ramprakash has averaged 82.2 in the County Championship, and he has averaged in excess of 100 in three of those seasons - 2006, 2007 and 2009.

The crux of the dilemma, it would appear, is that he played 50 Tests for England but to all intents and purposes failed to make his mark. I agree that this is a lengthy period in which not to produce what was expected. Two hundreds in that time is not good enough, but let's say, for argument's sake, that he had played in Australia; he wouldn't have been able to go that long in a team and not perform, therefore he would have spent more time away, and I would hazard a guess that his record after 50 Tests would be somewhat better. Top of Form

Significantly, Ramprakash last played a Test for England in April 2002. Since that time no one on the English circuit has come close to matching his accomplishments. Ramprakash went away after being dropped by England and worked his proverbial socks off to better himself. He achieved that beyond, I suspect, even his own expectations. A journey of self-improvement, maturity and, most importantly, self-awareness has clearly taken place yet, remarkably, he still exhibits a huge desire, too.

So what point are we making by simply harking back to the times of comparative failure? Are we saying that in Ramprakash's case his die is cast? Are we saying that despite his great success he can never be considered again?

If that is the case, this is regressive, unforgiving thinking.

I would have little hesitation in bringing Ramprakash back for the fifth Test. Let us consider the option of Jonathan Trott, for example. Why would you want to blood a talented youngster on such a knife-edge occasion? The potential fallout if Trott fails is far greater than it would be for an experienced player such as Ramprakash. If Ramprakash had failed the thinking behind his inclusion would still have been justified, that is if you place any weight on his record.

The Ramprakash debate highlights one of my chief concerns with the England selectors; cricketers are labelled too early. Are we not human beings? Are we not trying our best to get better, to right our wrongs? Can one's expertise not evolve? It seems stupid for our national press to write continually about Ramprakash being England's best batsman over the past six years when such recognition is wasted because the thinking is ingrained; he has had his chance.

Let us look at my Middlesex team-mate Owais Shah. Criticised for his somewhat tense posture at the crease, Owais has seemingly been discarded. And yet since he was dropped by England I have witnessed the extraordinary amount of work he has put in to correct his cramped appearance at the crease. His recent innings have been a revelation, which suggests that the selectors either haven't acknowledged his transformation or that nothing he now does could overturn what I see as a callous categorisation.

I have never seen him hit the ball so well. He is dominating bowlers in a manner that suggests he should also have been part of the discussion to shore up England's top order.

It would appear that too frequently our selectors have a mindset, almost an established template of performance, that does not cater for the fallibility of human beings. The flexibility to acknowledge that people develop differently, that they can overcome weaknesses, is not an English trait. Ramprakash and Shah are very fine examples of outstanding batsmen who I feel have become victim of this managerial intransigence.

Yes, we are a critical society, but it seems it is a far more enjoyable thing to pick apart people than to work with them. This is a simple point at it's heart but needs to be understood.

Ramprakash and Shah are casualties of the overt cynicism that pervades English county cricket and does nothing to encourage players to right their wrongs with a view to reclaiming their rightful positions as international performers.