

UTTLEY ON RUGBY

with
ROGER
UTTLEY

England taught a lesson by Australia

Visitors show more purpose

I was down at Twickenham on Saturday for England's defeat to Australia, and the hosts were nowhere near as incisive as the top teams like New Zealand.

I have sympathy with Stuart Lancaster and his squad because they have a very difficult series of matches this autumn, having started against Fiji where they did everything which could realistically be expected of them.

People got all excited after one big win against a side made up of talented players but which crucially spends hardly any time together as a collective unit.

Fiji play far less competitive international rugby than England and therefore the result England achieved was pretty much what was expected in the circumstances.

There were lots of plus points, but when Australia lost badly to France the same day there was always a sense of a potential banana skin about their visit to Twickenham last weekend.

That was borne out by what we saw and, with a fired-up Australia on such a rebound, England were just not able to cope.

They all wanted to do it for Nathan Sharpe in his final test.

Michael Hooper looked like a great

replacement for David Pocock on the openside (if only England had such a genuine No 7) and Nick Cummins on the right wing made a real impact with his try.

These things all made a difference on the day.

You could see they were playing with not only a huge intensity but also a sense of purpose and concentration which England were not able to match.

Any side which has had a good victory and is going into a game against a side which has just been badly beaten will unconsciously think they are going to win.

For them it becomes a matter of how they are going to win rather than if.

The side which has been beaten, on the other hand, is thinking 'let's go out and blast these boys and stop them from playing.'

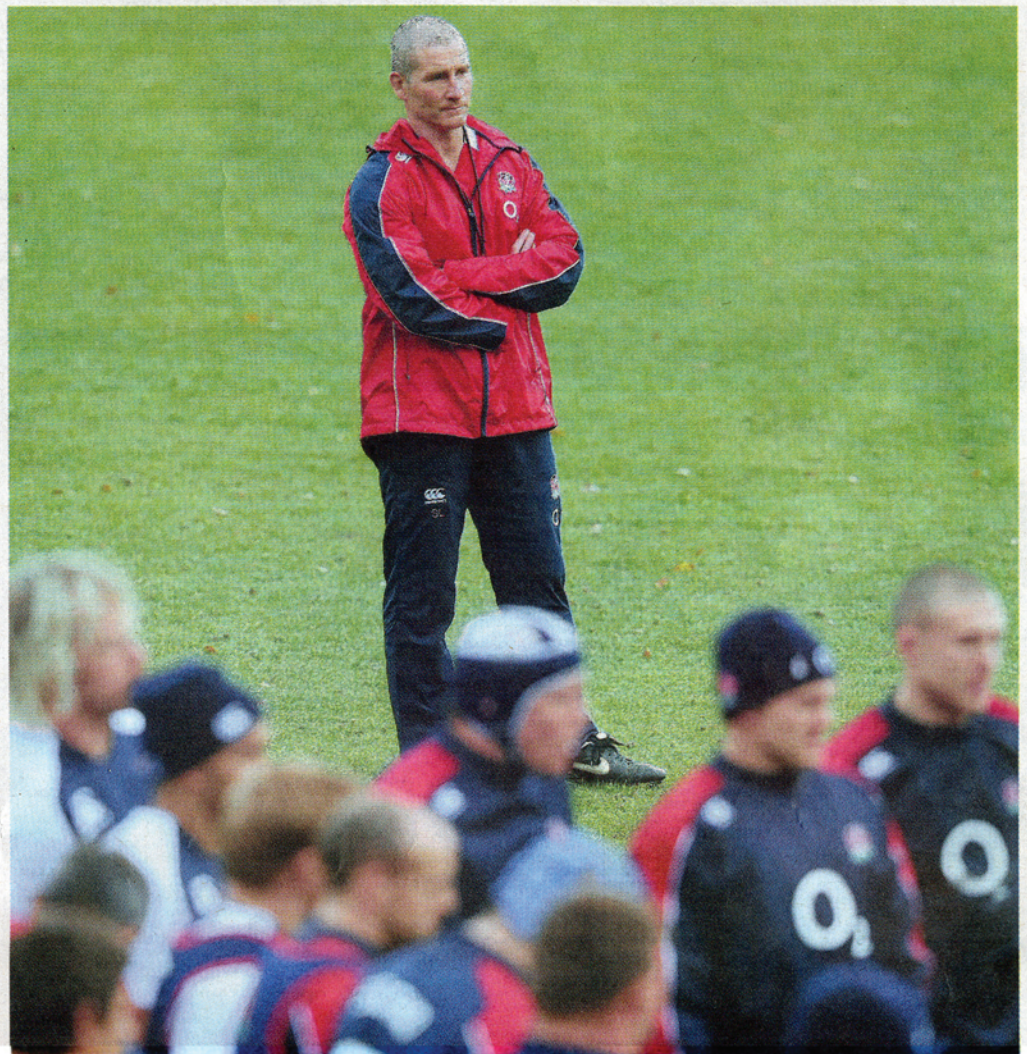
That difference in attitude is pretty marginal, but it is enough off the back of a loss to sway the balance in a game where the two teams are so evenly matched.

What people tend to forget is England are still a side in transition and you don't make a Championship or World Cup-winning team overnight.

Stuart Lancaster has very good players in there now, and they have to be allowed to develop and gel as a team.

They have to cope with defeat and the biggest challenge is how you do that.

They have now to do it in the two biggest challenges in world rugby,



THINK THINGS THROUGH Stuart Lancaster still has some very good players who must be allowed to develop and gel

against South Africa and New Zealand, and if they need inspiration they should look no further than Australia.

France wiped the floor with them in Paris the week before they played at Twickenham, but the Wallabies responded and looked like world-beaters against England.

People have spoken about the lack of skill and judgement demonstrated by England at times.

They kicked to the corners at certain stages when they might have gone for three points, which was fair enough, but

if you do that then you have to stay down there until you score.

Another key area is to work better in the driving mauls and to avoid them becoming static or one-dimensional.

Teams need to think harder about how they play off the maul and it will be interesting to see what lessons have been learnt.

From an attacking point of view, most teams seem to be employing virtually identical patterns with the decoy runners and the rest.

How those plays are used and how effectively they are carried out now determines the success or otherwise of a team.

New Zealand's current dominance of world rugby is in large part due to the fact

they are razor-sharp in executing these aspects of the modern game.

Everything is done at pace and every player knows what their role is.

England, in contrast, were not sharp enough in this regard and need to inject more pace and attacking lines of running if they are going to really compete effectively at this rarefied level.

Against South Africa on Saturday they will face a different kind of challenge.

Playing against the Springboks is a brutal experience, and they are certainly more direct and confrontational.

The players at the top of the game are all big units playing top-class rugby week in, week out. For the England players it is going to be a question of how much is left in the tank.

TEARING A STRIP OFF PURPLE KIT

A LOT has been said about the RFU's decision for England to wear purple against Australia and it has caused a stir.

When I was playing for England we used to have nice maroon tracksuits and we looked pretty sharp in them because no other team had anything like it.

I thought it was bad enough when they started plastering stuff all over the white match shirt, and while I can cope with all the adverts the kit they wore last Saturday looked ludicrous.

You have England playing a home game at Twickenham, the headquarters of the Rugby Football Union and they have always traditionally played in white shirts.

You can't imagine the All Blacks wearing anything other than black or the

springboks their green and gold when they play a home test.

When England ran out in purple there were hoots of derision, but unfortunately the marketing men rule these days.

It is a great pity and, while players will play in anything, if they want to have a shirt which really means something then the lads will want to be in white when they go onto that field.

On a similar theme, the RFU need to be very careful how much it costs to attend an international at Twickenham these days if they do not want to run the risk of losing their support base.

It is not just about the match-day ticket or the cost of travelling to London, but, for example, when you do get there you are paying £5 for a pint of IPA.

Tongan clash deserved better

I WAS fortunate enough to attend Newcastle Falcons' victory over the Tongan national team at Kingston Park and was impressed by their collective effort and concentration against physical but not very 'together' opponents.

The pity was there were fewer than 3,500 people there to see it, which was a shame because it was a good contest with plenty of positive performances.

For someone so young in such a critical position as fly-half, I was again impressed by Joel Hodgson (pictured right).

Not only does he demonstrate good tactical nous, but he also did more than his fair share of tackling. It is tremendous

encouraging to see homegrown talent given the opportunity to play in a competitive game, rather than relying totally on old pros to provide a short-term fix.

Giving young players chances like this is the only way to bring them on and, if continued, will pay dividends in the years to come, as indeed it has done in the past.

The number of stoppages in the game was indicative of what seems to be a

growing trend. It takes all the momentum out of the play at critical moments and, while I am broadly in favour of the extended powers now given to the television match officials, there seems to be a debate

which has the negative effect of allowing the opposition team to recover from a period of pressure which artificially affects the game's momentum.

The law-makers need to be aware of this, and there is even an argument to say when the ball goes out of play the clock should stop.

