

KP vs. GP,
Coombe
Wood,
Kingston-
upon-
Thames,
April 2008.




WINNERS' ENCLOSURE

KEVIN PIETERSEN

*The nation's greatest winners take on the
nation's greatest sports magazine...*

Words: Richard Lenton Photography: Darren Arthur



70s hair - check, retro top - check, 80s cassette recorder - check

The Oval, 10.57am, September 12, 2005. The final day of an enthralling Ashes series is upon us. England are 2-1 up against the old enemy, but the deciding Test is delicately poised. Will the Three Lions finally regain the treasured urn after 18 years of bi-annual humiliation at the hands of the Aussies, or will they contrive to shatter the hearts of a nation?

It's the day I'd been dreaming of for nearly two decades – the day when we rise from the abyss of Ashes disasters to finally put one over those upstarts in the baggy green caps. But, as skipper Michael Vaughan and opening batsman Marcus Trescothick stroll calmly out of the dressing room to tumultuous cheers and the atmospheric sound of Jerusalem reverberating around the stadium, the emotion of the occasion proves too much. I burst into tears... And I'm only watching – on TV... What on earth was it like to be at the hub of the action, trying to perform in a pressure cooker atmosphere with the hopes of an entire country resting on your shoulders?

Kevin Pietersen didn't just perform on that fifth and final day, he withstood a rib-tickling onslaught from Brett Lee and Glenn McGrath before putting old pal Shane Warne to the sword. Had KP caved in that morning with England only 73 runs ahead and three wickets down, and with the nation on tenterhooks, then make no mistake, the Ashes would have remained in Australia. His monumental 158 guided England to a series-winning draw and the ultimate prize. That in itself makes KP a winner.

The 27-year-old has now scored over

3,000 runs at an average of 49.74, and he is England's highest ranked batsman in both Tests and one-day internationals. In the recent Test series with New Zealand, Pietersen's innings of 129 secured a 2-1 victory just as England were staring down the barrel of a humiliating loss. And, if you wanted any further proof that the swashbuckling South African-born batsman is a bona fide winner, then just take a peak at his wedding snaps. The lucky girl on his arm is the lovely Jessica Taylor from Liberty X...

Coombe Wood Golf Club, Kingston-upon-Thames, 9.37am, April 3, 2008. KP's been twiddling his thumbs in the clubhouse for over an hour, patiently awaiting the arrival of yours truly and a nine-hole *GOLFPUNK* challenge. After attempting to make a cup of tea in the deserted bar, he's just been read the riot act by a grumpy club official. It's not a great start to the day...

"I've heard he's a bit surly anyway," I say to GP snapper Darren as we crawl along the A243 from Leatherhead. "If he hasn't gone home already he's not gonna say two words to us."

Thankfully I couldn't have been more wrong. "Sorry I'm late Kevin. Traffic's terrible mate," I say, fully expecting stone cold silence or mild fury in return. "Don't worry about it big fella," he replies cheerily. "I'll just have to kick your arse out there!"

I'd heard on the grapevine that KP is the epitome of an on-course bandit. During the recent tour of New Zealand he'd had the audacity to beat the England cricket team's undisputed number one golfer, Paul Collingwood.

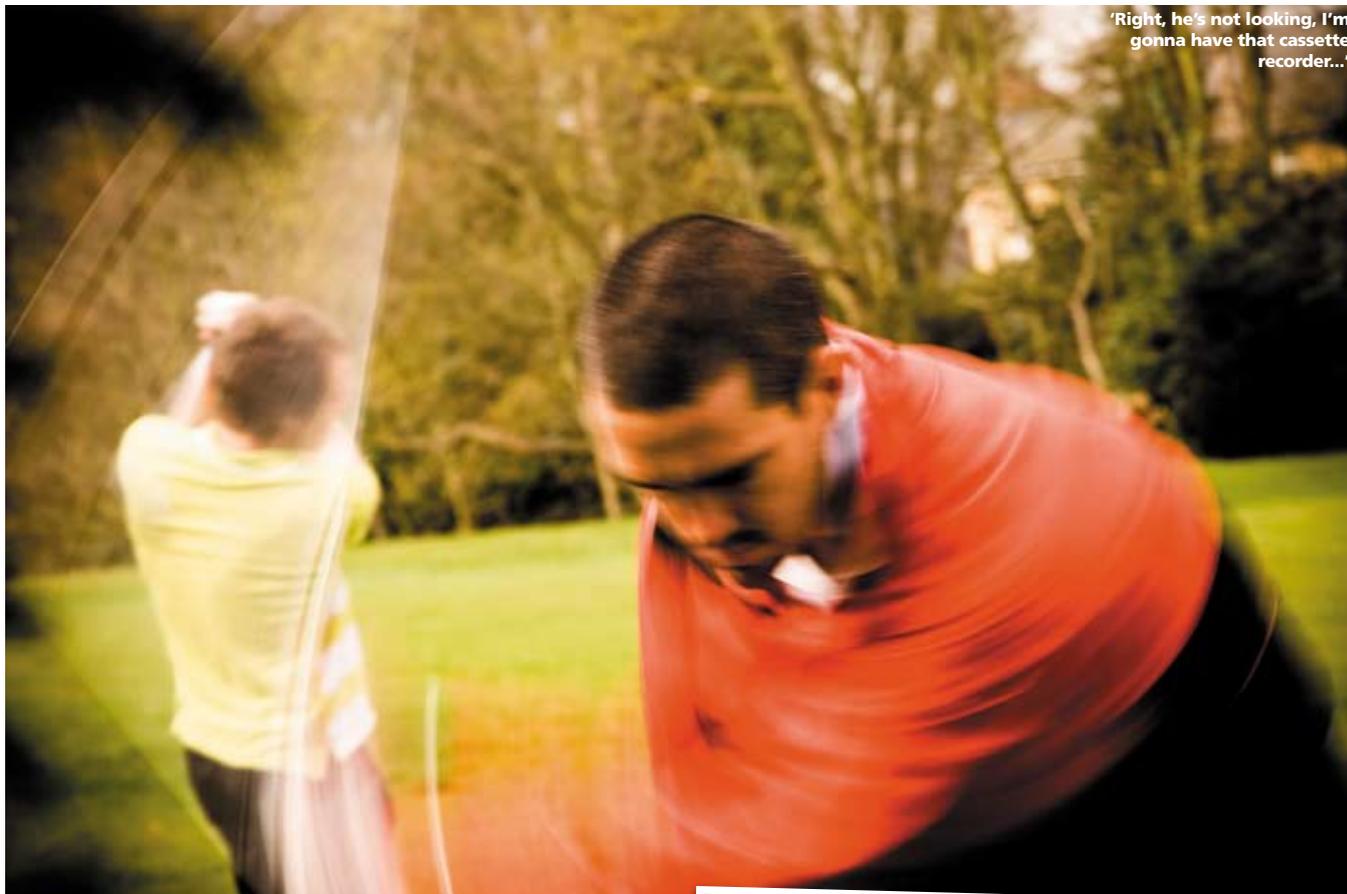
"I took him down by one shot at a



'If you work for GolfPunk then what's with the trousers?'



'and the swing...'



'Right, he's not looking, I'm gonna have that cassette recorder...'



'When I beat Colly Rick...'



'...I hit it that close'

course in Dunedin," he says with obvious pride as we head for the first tee. "He hated it and wanted to play me again to set the record straight, but unfortunately for him my wife was in town so I turned down the invitation. To this day I've played Colly once and I've beaten him once and it'll stay that way for a long time!"

A thunderous drive, crisp four-iron and two putts later, the best 18-handicapper I've ever clapped eyes on (*What about me - Ed*) is one hole to the good. As we head to the next tee KP's super-friendly, offering advice and attempting to lift my crushed spirits after three ugly slices and a duffed chip had left me needing snookers.

On the second I sink a 30-footer to somehow halve the hole. KP looks genuinely pleased for me. But then, after an outrageous, once in a lifetime 45-foot putt finds the cup at the third to level the match, the smile's replaced by a grimace and a liberal sprinkling of industrial language. "You're fucking joking," he grumbles. "Never in doubt Kev. It's Yorkshire grit that," I smile. "Yorkshire shit more like..."

I was now under no illusion that KP was here to win. Time to wind him up even more... "So how do you feel about being called 'The Ego' and 'FIGJAM (Fuck I'm Good, Just Ask Me)' by the Aussies?"

"I don't mind it all," he says. "I'm playing to win and I play tough, hard cricket. The Aussies hate to be bullied. They don't like it when someone stands up and confronts them. That's what we did to them in 2005. We confronted them, bullied them and they hated it. Off the field I'll talk to them and respect them, but on the field it's a totally different story. I'll do anything to win. That's the way it has to be. That's life. If you don't want to win and get to the top of your profession then there's no point doing it."

"But how did you keep your cool and handle the nerves on that final morning of the 2005 series?"

"What helped me was that I was going in to bat on a hat-trick and so I didn't have to think too much about what was going on," he adds. "I was looking at the papers in the morning, a bit nervous, and they said that the nation needed one hero

C.V. Kevin Peter Pietersen MBE

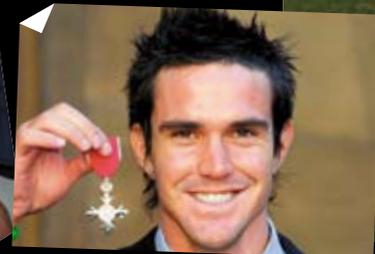
Age: 27
Winning credentials: Secured England's first Ashes triumph in 18 years in 2005, and the recent Test series in New Zealand with backs-to-the-wall centuries. Nuff said.
Records: ICC One-Day International (ODI) Player of the Year & Emerging Player of the Year 2005, fastest century by England player in ODI's (69 balls vs. SA 2005), World No 1

in ODI's in 2007.

Contribution to society: Loves sticking it up the Aussies.

What you didn't know: Loves Yorkshiremen. Darren Gough was his best man last year and Geoff Boycott is a big pal.

If he was a golfer... Lee Westwood. Superb iron shots but can't putt...



KP...Nuts



'For the love of Christ Kev, just give us a hug'

"IF YOU DON'T WANT TO WIN THEN FOR ME THERE'S NO POINT"



Good hands



'Look, there's someone greyer than you Kev...'



'Oh no, it's just you...'



- someone to stand up and be counted. I said to myself that I could give that a good go.

"Obviously there was huge pressure, but on that day and ever since I've shown that I thrive under those circumstances. It's a test of character to see where a person's at - when you're chucked in at the deep end you find out if you can swim or not. It's something that I pride myself on."

He should also take great pride in his golf swing. Long, languid and rhythmical, he uses every inch of his six-foot-four frame to effortlessly melt the ball a long, long way...

As we reach the 330-yard par four seventh, I'm somehow still in the game. KP's one up, but he's pulled his tee shot way left and his ball has come to rest up against a tree. Time to nibble it out and effectively drop a shot? No chance. KP flips over a six-iron and reverse sweeps the ball 70 yards towards the green. It's an incredible piece of improvisation. "You could have broken your wrist Kev," I say. "Fuck it. If you don't try things you'll never know if you can do it. Besides, I'm not

giving you an inch."

Pietersen's competitive streak is incredible. "I've always wanted to be the best at whatever I did. As a kid I wanted to win everything, I hated losing. Schools in South Africa are definitely more competitive than schools in England and that's stood me in good stead for when I'm playing against the likes of South Africa and Australia."

As we head down the ninth I'm a hole adrift. KP and I are stood, arms folded, focused in the middle of the fairway with 100 yards between us and the pin. It's an examination of bottle, a test of character. KP eyes the target intently, brushes a stray blade of grass from his prematurely greying hair, waggles his hips and then proceeds to uncoil an almost melodic swing. His ball rises in the perfect arc and lands 20-feet past the stick before spinning to within 15.

The pressure's on. My hands tighten around the club and the sweat starts to drip from my brow. "Watch out for that bunker," says KP, smiling. The ball lands in the sand. He wins two-up. Fuck He's Good, Just Ask Me. **GP**