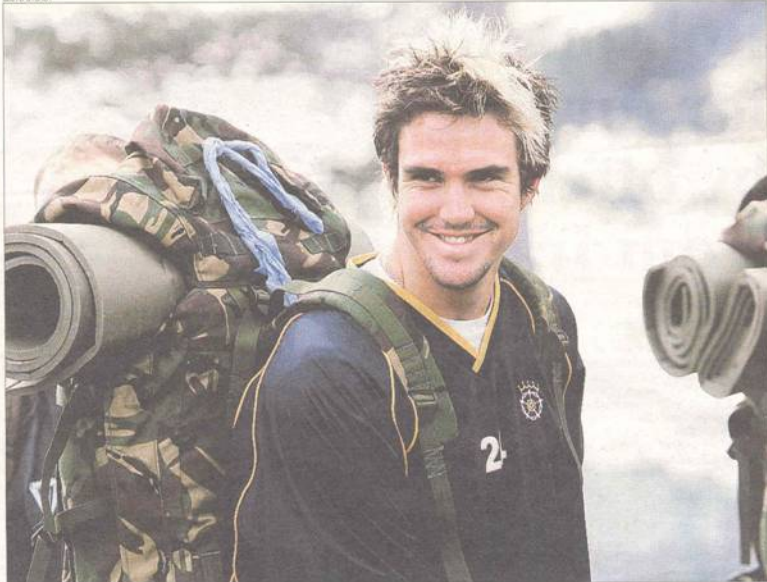


LLOYD STURDY



Hampshire find fresh approach works wonders

Geoffrey Dean on a club preparing for the new season with military precision

AS A county who have always been strong recruiters from the public schools — the old joke being that you had to have three initials to captain the club — it was fitting that Hampshire sent their playing staff to Sandhurst for 48 hours to spice up their pre-season training.

It was the second successive year that the county have spent time at the Royal Military Academy, the British Army's officer-training school, and Tim Tremlett, the director of cricket, is so convinced of the "bonding" value that he is already planning a third visit next spring.

Even old sweats such as Alan Mullally and Shaun Udal cheerfully acknowledged that the experience was refreshing and useful, although both pro-

fessed themselves "knackered" at the end of a day that had begun at 6.15am with a swim.

"Good for discipline," Tremlett mused, while Mullally added: "For the older players like us, it's a chance to get to know the younger ones much better than you otherwise would do and to see what makes them tick."

Hampshire's stay was organised by the Inspirational Development Group (IDG), a company that works in partnership with the Academy, developing leadership and the team ethic within non-military groups in the worlds of sport and business. "Hampshire's stay was a combination of theory, reflection and practical activity," Craig Preston, a former army officer who is now IDG's chief consultant at Sandhurst, said.



Tremlett, the Hampshire director of cricket, says that training at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, left, has helped to add edge to a side boosted by the signing of Kevin Pietersen, above

Unlike last year, the players were spared any assault courses, instead being given orienteering tasks in a large wooded area. "It was against the clock, we were working as a team, and it was demanding physically as it took four hours," Tremlett said. "Some Gurkhas also spent a couple of hours teaching us about survival techniques and living wild, and we had a lecture from a former SAS officer. The whole two days was not all seriousness — we had fun and it was good to get away from our cricketing base."

Preston, who oversaw Hampshire's 2004 visit, was clearly gratified by the players' advance over the past 12 months. "I'm very impressed with them," he said. "They wanted to get rid of a certain

culture when they first came and I detect a more ruthless edge. They have a highly effective team spirit and a lot of that is down to Shane Warne. Their challenge is to develop their new culture so that they maintain high performance levels when he is gone."

Warne, who arrives in England early next month, has already sent to Tremlett a long list of skills and instructions that he wants players to work on and consider in pre-season. In Preston's view, Warne's most important asset is the example he sets. "The players are always willing to follow it," Preston said. "He never asks a player to do something he would not, and there is a loyalty from the squad to him and to each other. That is a very powerful thing."