

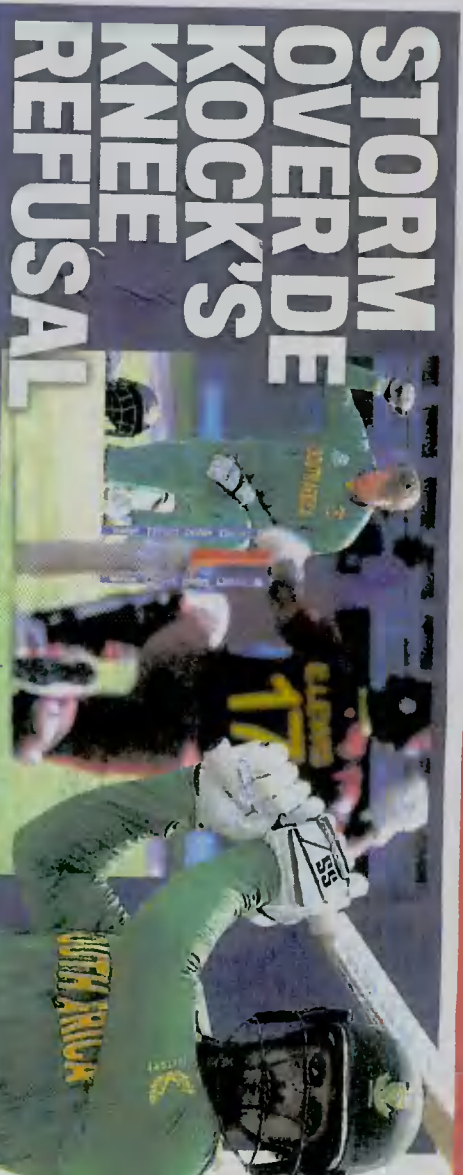
By LAWRENCE BOOTH
In Dubai

CRICKET'S racial politics were in the spotlight again when South African star Quinton de Kock pulled out of a crucial T20 World Cup match after refusing to take a knee.

The drama began a few hours before yesterday's game against West Indies, when the South African board told their players to adopt a consistent and unified stance against racism and take a knee ahead of every match.

But De Kock — his side's opener — decided during the coach journey to the Dubai International Cricket stadium that he would not join in, effectively ruling himself out of the match, and possibly the tournament. Last night, there was even speculation that, at the age of 28, he had represented his country for the last time.

At the toss, South Africa's captain Temba Bavuma said De Kock had withdrawn for personal reasons. But, after his side beat



STORM OVER DE KOCK'S KNEE REFUSAL

the West Indies, Bavuma said he had been 'surprised and taken aback' by the development. He said it had been 'one of my toughest days to deal with as a captain', but added: 'Quinton is an adult. You have to respect his decision, whether you agree with it or not.'

Bavuma said the South African board's decision to impose their edict on the morning of a crucial World Cup game was 'not ideal'.

And while he described De Kock as 'still one of the boys', he admitted the dressing room had not yet properly digested the implications of his stance.

West Indies captain Kieron Pollard, an IPL team-mate of De Kock's at Mumbai Indians, appeared unaware of the day's events but said taking a knee was 'something we feel strongly about as a team and as a people', adding: 'We will continue to do it.'

Everyone has their own opinions on it. Education is the key. It is not the first time De Kock has gone against the grain.

In June, before a Test against West Indies in St Lucia, he was against the gesture, later saying: 'I'll keep my reasons to myself.' Cricket South Africa responded yesterday by putting out another statement, insisting 'it was imperative for the team to be seen tak-

Protest: South Africa's Quinton de Kock pulled out of the World Cup tie with West Indies

ing a stand against racism, given South Africa's history.

In the commentary box, former Zimbabwe seamer Pommie Mbangwa could not hide his disappointment. 'Excuse me for being political,' he said, 'but I cannot shed my skin.'

The controversy comes not long after uncomfortable stories were told in front of South Africa's Social Justice and Nation-Building Committee. Among them, current head coach and ex-wicketkeeper Mark Boucher admitted he had taken part, during his playing days, in a team song in which spin bowler Paul Adams was referred to as a 'brown s***'. Boucher said he deeply regretted his behaviour.

Despite De Kock's absence, South Africa managed an eight-wicket win against West Indies, who have now lost two out of two after being bundled out for 55 by England on Saturday. Set a modest 144, South Africa were boosted by Alden Markram's unbeaten 51 off 26.

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