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Hot on the heels of the historic achievements of the British and Irish Lions and Andy Murray comes the Ashes. This is the 12th series between England and Australia I have covered, home and away, and none has come close to this one for hype and anticipation.

The start of the infamous tour of Australia in 2006/07, which England eventually lost 5-0, was so tense

that poor Steve Harmison hurled the first ball of the series so wide that it missed the pitch altogether – but the build up even to that encounter pales comfortably into insignificance when compared to this summer. The reason? Simple, England are expected to win. And you have to go back to 1989 for the last time that was the case.

England do not like being favourites. They are not used to it, and it is a difficult tag to live up to – far more so than being the underdog of whom little is expected. There is definitely a feeling of tension around the camp, which must be channelled into positive energy rather than destructive anxiety, and even if things do not go immediately to plan, the players must remember that this is a long haul of five matches.

The Australians can hardly go wrong. If they lose, they are merely matching public expectation and after the sudden and surprising sacking of their coach, the South African Mickey Arthur, they are now in the

care of one of their own – a personable and sociable animal, Darren Lehmann, whose arrival has already had a positive impact on morale.

With the sun shining and virtually every seat for every day of every match sold out long ago, this is a wonderful opportunity for this set of players to establish a lasting legacy for Test cricket.

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The photograph of Andrew Flintoff comforting a distraught Brett Lee at Edgbaston in 2005 remains one of the most endearing images of the Ashes. It illustrated how it is possible to fight for your life on the field while still respecting your opponent – and particularly when he has just been defeated.

As for the outcome – I expect England to win the Ashes by a comfortable margin. However, it is worth remembering that in 1989 the Australians were described in the British media as 'possibly the worst side ever to tour England.' Australia won 4-0.