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Now into its second week, the cricket world's Champions Trophy is reminding us all of the benefits of a short, sharp tournament in which one defeat can spell the end of a team's aspirations. That might sound obvious but, crazy as it seems, too many one day international matches are played in which the result does not directly matter – there is always another game in the series of five to follow in a couple of days' time. It breeds a 'lose today, win tomorrow' culture

that does the sport no favours. Conversely, the impact on the players of a winner-takes-all game is dramatic, with the pressure biting when it comes to the crunch and with the tension of a close finish gripping the spectators and commentators alike. What a shame that we do not see enough matches like that.

These world events also produce opportunities for the greatest rivals to go head to head, free of political interference. This weekend India and Pakistan clash at Edgbaston, which will be packed to the rafters and definitely not a place for the faint hearted. The fear of losing one of these all too infrequent meetings can sometimes be too much for the politicians on the subcontinent to bear. But while members of the Asian community throughout Britain will be fiercely competitive on match day, they have learned to take defeat stoically – even if it means enduring weeks of gentle teasing from the victors.

'The magic of the Ashes might wear thin'

Last week saw England face Australia in Birmingham in the first of their 26 matches against each other over the coming seven months, and such is the anticipation for this summer's Ashes that it was difficult not to treat this single one day game as an apéritif. In that context, I was disappointed with what

I saw from Australia. True, they were missing their captain, the prolific Michael Clarke, but looked devoid of both confidence and, more importantly, the characters that bring the greatest sporting event into the lives of people who do not

ordinarily follow cricket.

With nothing on the cricketering agenda between July and February other than 25 England versus Australia games, there is a danger the magic of the Ashes might wear thin. It is not often I say this, but I really hope to be proved wrong.