

JONATHAN AGNEW



For sport to be at its most compelling and dramatic, we need rivalry and fierce competition. Better still if the protagonists have a well

known loathing of each other.

The duels on the Formula One circuits in the late 1980s between Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost were all the more exciting for the bitter enmity that existed between them – a personal battle within the main event itself, which exploded in Suzuka in 1989 when their wheels locked and they forced each other off the track at a tight chicane. And they were in the same team! Has F1 ever been as captivating since – at least to the casual supporter?

Michael Schumacher's years of domination included a controversial collision with Damon Hill early in his career, and there was an element of the Senna/Prost rivalry about the way in which Sebastian Vettel disobeyed his team's orders and denied Mark Webber victory in Malaysia this year. Great credit to Webber, therefore, for describing his team mate as 'in another category' when the German won his seventh consecutive race at Abu Dhabi last week. They will all meet again shortly in Austin, Texas, but the F1 championship is all over with Vettel claiming his fourth successive title with three races to spare. That is unlike-

ly to set the pulse of anyone other than the diehard F1 fan pumping in anticipation or – importantly from the sport's point of view – tempting them to tune in to watch.

It is hardly Vettel's fault that he is better than anyone else and, as he proved in his altercation with Webber, is driven by a true champion's competitive edge. How can he possibly be expected to drive in any other way other than to be the

first past the flag? It is anathema to him.

Pete Sampras was labelled by some as dull and predictable when he dominated men's tennis – it seems that is an easy tag to apply to someone who wins all the time – but that sport is far more appealing now for the

keen, respectful rivalry that exists between Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray. The same can be said for the Ryder Cup and, after years of utterly predictable Australian success, the Ashes.

We admire and respect our champions not least because they fire the imaginations of our children. But it is competition that brings sport to life.

'Dull is an easy tag to give those who always win'

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