

# Jonathan Agnew



Heading to Newcastle last Saturday, it was impossible not to be struck by the loyalty of football's supporters and the price they pay for that dedication. Newcastle United were entertaining Leicester City, so our train was

packed with fans in either blue and white or black and white. Dads and young sons, groups of middle-aged men, wives and partners; we all rattled merrily north together.

It was not long before our conversation focussed on the BBC's Price of Football survey, before moving on to next summer's Ashes. Tickets have reached record levels with some seats for the first day of the Lord's Test set at £110 each. To watch the first ball of the series in Cardiff could cost you £85. What chance of the dad and his three young Newcastle-supporting boys chatting animatedly on our train being able to go to the Ashes, even if they all desperately wanted to?

Common sense suggests that football and cricket are heading towards disaster. How much longer can the cost of supporting these sports continue to spiral before they are really beyond the means of the majority? That is not to suggest that the majority is not already priced out, but it seems that the dedicated fan will still find a way.

However, the crunch must come soon considering that the average price of the cheapest tickets across English football has risen at almost

twice the cost of living since 2011.

The authorities will argue about supply and demand and I am sure the Ashes will sell out. But the reason both sports are living so dangerously is that they are combining soaring ticket costs with cutting access for terrestrial television viewers.

Next year, not a single live delivery will be shown on anything other than satellite TV and Sky has just put its prices up. I am not knocking Sky, which is always the easy target.

It has done a brilliant job with cricket, transforming its coverage both at home and away. It is the authorities that sold our sport to the highest bidder rather than adopting the re-

sponsible long-term view of retaining at least part of it for those who cannot afford anything other than terrestrial TV.

Worryingly, terrestrial broadcasters also appear to have lost interest as a result. If it carries on like this, sport will not only be watched exclusively by the wealthy, but played by them, too.

*'Football and cricket are heading towards disaster'*

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