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And so the most intense summer of cricket we have ever known enters its final phase with the one-day series between England and Australia. I suspect even the most ardent supporter would need a gentle nudge to recall the first Test of the season against New Zealand. The Champions Trophy was fun with India beating England in a nail-biting finish,

and all of that before the main event: the Ashes.

Glorious weather, just the right amount of controversy to keep us busy and healthy victories for both England's men and women made for a perfect summer - which was spoiled a little by the late night 'sprinkling' of the famous Oval pitch.

We have heard quite often that the men's team does not feel loved, despite its performances. Well, perhaps now the Ashes is over, they might have time to consider not merely the inevitable public reaction to that distasteful incident, but also the level of gamesmanship - particularly deliberate time wasting - that has crept into their game. It is a cynical ploy, and while weak umpiring has not helped in this series, the 'win at all costs' mentality that England players speak proudly about might help you win matches, but few friends.

Of course, winning is the bottom line but the team is also responsible for playing in the right way in order to showcase cricket in its best light and leave the game in the best pos-

sible condition for the next generation to enjoy.

The manner in which this series was played confirms what some of us feared at the start - that the return visit to Australia this winter is likely to be hostile and unedifying. The Australian coach, Darren Lehmann, has encouraged their supporters to give Stuart Broad such a rough time

that he 'returns home in tears.' It was an unfortunate remark, which although partly made in jest on a laddish commercial radio station, illustrates the level of resentment in the Australian dressing room.

We have learned that security around Broad will be beefed up as a result (a new concept in English cricket), and if both teams play to win whatever the cost in a series officiated by the same umpires who so conspicuously turned a blind eye to gamesmanship this summer, the series down-under might prove to be a very poor advert indeed for Ashes cricket.

'The "win at all costs" mentality wins few friends'