This diligent PM deserves a second chance
Theresa May is an uninspiring leader but the vilification of her is damaging to prospects

Clare Fогes

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Matthew Syed

So much to learn from the All Black team spirit

Cheered for the Lions during that marvellous Test on Saturday morning but couldn't help registering a sense of ennui, admiration for the All Blacks after they completed a 30-15 victory. When you look over the arc of the last century or so, they must surely rate as the most formidable team in sport.

They have a 77 per cent winning record, and have triumphed in the last two world cups, but it is not the statistics that denote their quality so much as their team ethic. When they are in the midst of battle they seem to think with one mind, anticipating each other's runs, protecting one another's backs and reaching a level of collective expression that is, in its way, beautiful to behold.

One should perhaps not exaggerate the metaphorical significance of sport, but New Zealand seem to show just how much can be accomplished when individual egos are suppressed for the betterment of the collective. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this vision could filter into other areas of life?

Thinking allowed

I was a joy to watch Bryan Magee's series The Great Philosophers on YouTube. The programmes, first broadcast in 1987, have a simple but mesmerising format: Magee, an outstanding philosopher in his own right, interviewing leading academics about thinkers such as Aristotle, Hume and Kant.

It would, of course, be impossible for such a series to be commissioned today. Editors assume that the average attention span of viewers is two seconds max, so the idea of an extended discussion by two experts sitting on a beige sofa would be ruled out of court.

But, in addition to great insights, there are also piercing examinations of intellectual pomposity. In the programme on Schopenhauer, Magee — an MP before becoming a broadcaster — starts with the following simile: "Of the books in print about Schopenhauer... the longest and most recent is by me, but I can't very well interview myself. So I've invited the author of one of the others to come along to discuss with me."

Heavy going

O racy Ascot on Saturday was, so to speak, a game of two halves. I had never been before, so was enchanted by the sense of occasion as I walked along the high street towards the turnstiles, chatting with a stewart, learning about "the going" from one of the tipplers, and applauding as the Queen took a horse-drawn carriage along the course.

By 4pm, however, the atmosphere had started to turn. There was a scuffle between two women queuing to have a photo taken with a horse that perhaps fell over by the pavilion. By the time we got back to the car park it was carnage. When the train stopped at Staines, a young woman in an apricot dress walked outside, vowed on to the platform, and got back into the carriage.

Nobody batted an eyelid. British institutions like Ascot are wonderfully uplifting; the British tradition of drinking to oblivion is inexcusably ugly.

Fawlty partners

Leadsom was wrong to ask the BBC to be 'a bit patriotic'

Mark Damazer

A ndrea Leadsom's call to the Newsnight studio on Friday for broadcasters to "fight for victory in the Brexit negotiations by asking them to find their echt patriotism (as she would put it) is beyond parody. But although my outrage meter, honed by 30 years at the BBC, went straight into the red zone on listening to Leadsom's assertion that "it would be helpful if broadcasters were willing to be a bit patriotic, because the country took a decision and government is determined to deliver on that decision," the happy truth is that the sheer witlessness of her remarks will ensure they have no impact on news and current affairs output at all.

It is only just over a year ago that she was deemed to have done done the right thing and knife her? Should shedo the decent thing and knife her? Should she wish to see the back of this beleaguered prime minister as a stiffer of urgent issue, No, May must stay, the plotters shut up and the media hysteria die down.

I have been a loyal person for the prime minister. A year ago I wrote here that she was not the right person for the glory by the former. I feared a May government would soon have a flag-end feel. It would become a "cones holding administration," in reference to John Major's phone line for wrongly deployed traffic cones, the emblem of vision-free government. Lo, it has come to pass.

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