



SUMMER DAYS DRIFTIN' AWAY

But uh-oh those summer rites. **Jonathan Ray** is like greased lightning when it comes to stocking up on drinks for the rituals that make an English sports fan's summer

WE'VE a bumper summer of sport ahead and I feel completely exhausted just at the thought. As a devoted armchair sportsman, though, I understand the importance of preparation and am already hard in training.

Not only are there the regular events such as the Derby, Royal Ascot, the British Grand Prix, Wimbledon, the Open Golf and Cowes Week, there is the added thrill of the British and Irish Lions tour of South Africa and the Ashes Test Series. Make no mistake, this summer is going to be thirsty work and it is crucial to get the refreshment right.

I always get my eye in with a few pre-season friendlies. I ask the neighbours round and test the seating arrangements, the TV sight-lines and, of course, the capacity of the fridge. It's amazing what you can fit in it if you dispense with such fripperies as food.

First of all, I stock up with plenty of beer and bubbles. My current favourite brews are the clean-as-a-whistle Asahi Super Dry and the Innis & Gunn Blonde Lightly Oaked Beer. The former, Japan's foremost premium beer, is wonderfully crisp and refreshing and if you think I'm being unpatriotic, don't panic: it's made under licence in Kent by family-owned Shepherd Neame, which has clocked up 311 years in the business.

The small brewery Innis & Gunn can't claim such longevity – it's been around barely six years – but its oak-aged beers are an utter joy. If this one is anything to go by, blondes certainly have more fun. It has a generous

flavour to it with a lovely citrus edge and is ideal for a mid-morning, pre-match limber up.

Bubbles, too, are vital for the sporting drinker and I recommend having some Italian Prosecco handy, either in the fridge or in a cooler by the boundary rope. Bisol is my favourite, but all the supermarkets and independents have decent examples these days. They should be crisp, clean, undemanding and effervescent, with just a touch of appley freshness and not too much alcohol. Serve well chilled as a mid-race or half-time sharpener. Add strawberry juice to make a seductive Jo-Jo or white peach juice to make a raffish Bellini (Funkin fruit purées are an easy way of doing this).

Reserve de Sours, the 10-quid pink sparkler from rosé specialist Château de Sours, is another charming, summery way of enjoying fizz without paying a champagne price. That being said, at some stage during the sporting festivities one will need champagne. Perhaps at Glorious Goodwood when that 10-1 shot romps home.

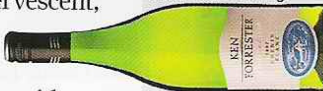
Hang on, this is an English summer, not a French one. We should stock up instead with the increasingly fine English sparklers such as Breaky Bottom, Camel Valley, Chapel Down, Dombies, Nyetimber and Ridge View.

Do try them, for Blighty's best are now world class. The soil and climate in the south-east of England

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SIX OF
THE BEST
SUMMER SIPS



**BROWN BROTHERS
TARRANGO 2007**
(£6, widely available)
A light 'n' fruity Aussie red ideal for chilling.



**KEN FORRESTER ESTATE
CHENIN BLANC 2007**
(£8, Majestic)
Crisp yet honeyed, classy white from a master.



**JIM BARRY "THE COVER
DRIVE" 2006**
(£10, Morrisons)
Cricket-lover's cabernet, rich, ripe and intense.



**SPRINGFONTEIN TERROIR
SELECTION 2006**
Pinotage (£11, Private Cellar, tel 01353 721999)
Sturdy and concentrated.



**CHAPEL DOWN VINTAGE
RESERVE BRUT**
(£18, Waitrose)
Celebrate success with this sparkler from Kent.



THE SOMERSET POMONA
(£8 per 50cl, Waitrose)
An exquisite blend of vintage apple juice and Somerset cider brandy.

are almost identical to those of Champagne and thanks to increased investment, state-of-the-art technology and a better understanding of what to plant where, we are now producing sparkling wines in the UK of which we can be truly proud. If only we could say the same of our cricketers.

Sporting courtesy demands that our head-to-heads with the Aussies and the Springboks are enjoyed with our opponents' wines at hand. We drink more wine from Australia than anywhere else and South African wines are becoming increasingly popular just as they become increasingly sophisticated.

Look for sleek and elegant chardonnays and pinot noirs from Victoria and supple, gently honeyed chenin blancs of the Cape. And I'll be tucking away some South African pinotage too. This has become much more drinker-friendly of late, shedding its notorious "burned rubber" characteristics for deliciously ripe, juicy and intense dark fruit.

I am aiming to be at peak match fitness by the start of July. That first week, in particular, will require plenty of stamina and a well-stocked wine rack and fridge. What with the third British and Irish Lions vs South Africa Test on the 4th, the climax of both Henley Royal Regatta and Wimbledon on the 5th and the first Test Match against the Aussies at Sophia Gardens, Cardiff on the 8th, we won't have time to keep popping down to the offy. Take my advice and plan your purchases now. You will need to be on top form with no wine-related worries. ■

Jonathan Ray is one of the slower-footed followers of the Brighton and Hove Harriers, but manages never to spill a drop.

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