

## KICK OFF TIME BY CHRIS JONES, LONDON EVENING STANDARD.

Do you remember those long-gone days when tank tops were worn for fashion reasons rather than a bet? When a mullett hairstyle used to make the girls go weak at the knees instead of creasing up with laughter? It was also a time when international rugby matches kicked off at 3pm on a Saturday rather than the lottery that currently takes place.

Consider this: the whole point of a Six Nations game on a Saturday is to allow the players and supporters to get to the game, no matter where it is being staged, on the Friday (one day off work in a just cause) with the match twenty four hours later after a pre-game drink with the locals followed by post-game drinks with the locals and a rather iffy kebab. Sunday is recovery day with the return journey to be attempted and, no matter what state you are in when the front door looms into view, there is still time for some kip before the working week starts.

Now let's consider the Friday-night-game-in-Paris scenario; you travel either the night before (two days off work) or on the match day with fingers crossed that Operation Stack isn't being employed at Dover, your aircraft doesn't have to be de-iced at Heathrow or the wrong kind of snow/leaves/litter hasn't fallen onto the rail tracks on this side of the tunnel.

When you do get to the match it's already 9pm (because that's when French TV loves to show the action to those lazy bxxxxxxs who haven't bothered going to Stade de France) and by the time the final whistle is blown, it's a mad dash to the station to get back into Gare de Nord to find a bar that isn't thinking about closing as it's now the following day.

You wake up to find it's only Saturday, with no option but to go home. You are now dangerously available for trips on Sunday with her indoors to various hell-holes, namely DIY superstores, lunatically large shopping centres or the dreaded garden centre where all manner of mind-numbingly boring plants will be offered to you for comment. Could it get any worse?

And who is responsible? Well, let me name and shame the Six Nations committee. For it is they who agree so readily to the demands of the television companies and their ever-changing kick off times while insisting they are still in touch with the fans. Hogwash! The Six Nations, having taken the money for TV rights, sold the soul of the tournament at the same time and, like the tank top, it may never come back.

This is a worrying situation - particularly for tank top manufacturers - and I call on all like-minded supporters to stand up for our rugby heritage. Say "No" to Friday night rugby and strike a blow for what made the championship the jewel in the Northern Hemisphere crown. If you don't, then a life of DIY shelving, endless demands to know if "her bum looks big in this" and herbaceous borders lies ahead.

Go on, you know it makes sense!