

Last week the local paper in Bolton carried a letter from a resident, Harold Heys: "Could I just say that Amir Khan's dad, Shajaad, and his union flag have done more for cultural harmony in this country in the past few days than the race relations board, and its many hangers-on, in nearly 40 years?" I can imagine that Heys is right. Shajaad Khan has been a tremendous bridge-builder. It is just a shame that the reason for his success is probably that he looks like a man who would pass the Tebbit "cricket test" with flying colours. If you have forgotten Norman Tebbit's contribution to race relations, it was this: that people from ethnic minorities in Britain should not be considered British until they supported the English cricket team, rather than the team from the country of their or their ancestors' birth.

I guess what Heys was feeling was pleasure at Khan's answer to a question that troubles many liberal whites' minds: even if we accept them, will they want to part of us? Shajaad Khan's answer was emblazoned in red, white and blue across his chest: yes, he does want to be part of Britain.

But one of the problems with Tebbit and his litmus test of Britishness is that he ignored the fact that there are some people who will have not only be unappreciative of a black person's display of patriotism, they would despise it. Would Tebbit expect Khan to stand in the England supporters' stand during a football international with Turkey and wave the flag of St George while "I would rather be a Paki than a Turk" is chanted around them?

Identity isn't a simple, one-word answer. I didn't notice it, but apparently Khan had a Pakistani cricket t-shirt underneath his union flag waistcoat and why not? Being British isn't really about the colour of the flag you wave or even about flags at all. It is about attitude: even-handedness and tolerance.

I would like to see more even-handedness in our media coverage of the next games. People are always going to want to know how the British competitors have done: it is only natural to be curious about how familiar faces get on. But I'd also like to know more about the competitors from other countries. I can recite the details of Paula Radcliffe's Olympic races, but don't actually know who won them. How did the winner of the women's marathon cope with the heat? How did she prepare?

I'd abolish the stupid national league table of medals too. What does it mean that we got more than Ukraine but less than Italy? That we should eat more pasta?

If we could have coverage that was more about the people taking part than the colour of their strips, it wouldn't matter so much what flag you were waving and the Olympics would be on the right track to fulfilling its potential: as an event that draws the people of the world together in a festival of talent and commitment.