

NORTH ESSEX CRICKET LEAGUE

CONSULTATION WITH MEMBER CLUBS

September 2017

1. The league's management committee will be meeting next on Thursday 14th September. A main item on the agenda will be to review the 2017 season and to look ahead to 2018 prior to the AGM on 25th October.

2. This season has seen a large number of conceded matches (44 to date: 36 in the 40 overs competition¹ and 8 in the T20) and the withdrawal of two clubs for lack of players (Rayne CC and Gosfield CC). Another club (Harwich & Dovercourt CC) have given notice that they will not be entering the NECL in 2018, choosing instead to enter Division C of the Two Counties Cricket Championship. The committee, therefore, will be taking a long hard look at how the league should be structured in 2018 and what we might do to seek, at least, to reduce the number of conceded matches which, while gifting 20 points to the opposition, otherwise benefit no one, especially the 17 or 18 players who are deprived of a game, as well as being contrary to the whole point of the league, which is to provide member clubs and their cricketers with competitive recreational cricket.

3. The committee are aware that the problem affecting our league is not peculiar to the NECL, but is one endemic to Sunday cricket nationwide. However, we want to see what we might do at a local level in North Essex and South Suffolk to address the issue. Set out below are some of the ideas that have been mentioned and on which the committee would welcome the views both of member clubs and their individual playing members.

The 40 overs competition

4. With smaller divisions of 8 teams (so just 14 scheduled matches over the season), there have sometimes been long gaps between matches, exacerbated if games are conceded or cancelled for any reason. This can cause players to lose interest and, perhaps, not come back to play cricket having gone off to do something different on the 'blank' weekends. One suggestion to meet this is to reduce the number of divisions and thus to increase the number of fixtures.

¹ Including 11 conceded by Rayne CC and Gosfield CC.

So, if there were (say) 33 competing teams, they could be divided into three divisions of 11 teams each, giving 20 games over the 24 weeks of the season.²

5. An alternative suggestion, put to the management committee by one member club, is to increase the number of divisions, thereby reducing the number of teams in each division, but to balance that by providing for the teams in every division to play each other home and away twice. (This is the pattern in the Scottish football league.)

If there were, say, 33 competing teams, they could be divided as follows³:

- Division 1 – 5 teams (16 fixtures per team)
- Division 2 – 5 teams (16 fixtures per team)
- Division 3 – 5 teams (16 fixtures per team)
- Division 4 – 6 teams (20 fixtures per team)
- Division 5 – 6 teams (20 fixtures per team)
- Division 6 – 6 teams (20 fixtures per team)

6. The club that made this suggestion commented as follows:

“We think this might help solve two significant issues we have encountered this season:

1. The lack of league fixtures. In division 2 we have only 14 fixtures across, what I think most clubs would consider, a 22 week season. Thus, there are lots of gaps in the schedule. Not only is this very frustrating (particularly when the sun shines!), but it actually harms availability with players not being certain of a game every week.
2. Reduce the number of potential mis-matches. We mean absolutely no disrespect to any other club, but even within Division 2 there is huge difference in playing standard between sides. For example, we have already had two games this season finish before 3pm - that is no fun for anyone! Equally, we have a couple of games against stronger opposition

² This would not be new, but would be to revert to the position as it was some years ago. In 2001, for example, there were 13 teams in each of the top two divisions, each playing 24 games over the season; 12 teams in Division 3; 11 teams in Division 4; and 10 in Division 5. Some of these matches were ‘double-headers’, with games on both Saturday and Sunday on some weekends– no longer a feature of the NECL, when nearly all games are played on Sundays.

³ Currently, rule 7 of the league rules requires the lower divisions to have the greater number of teams, where the total number of competing teams is not equally divisible by the number of divisions, but this could be reconsidered.

that have been extremely competitive and much more enjoyable. Hopefully this idea would help enable more of that type of cricket.”

If this suggestion were to be adopted, the management committee would have to assess carefully which teams should be placed in which division. Also, after the first season it would probably mean that only one team would be promoted or relegated from each division.

Regionalising the competition

7. It has been noted that some of the conceded games have been by clubs facing a long journey to their opponents for an away fixture. Views are invited on whether **having divisions based more on regional groups** would assist or be welcomed. This may not be possible and its practicality would have to be considered alongside the other suggestions set out above, as well as the implications for promotion and relegation.

The T20 competition

8. This competition, too, in which there were 10 competing teams in 2017, divided into two roughly regional groups (east and west)⁴, was not exempt from conceded games, even though each team was scheduled to play only four matches in the group phase (i.e. playing the other teams in the group only once.) This means that only 12 group matches were played across the two groups, out of the 20 that were scheduled. The competition was good in the matches that were played, and it culminated in another excellent finals day on August Bank Holiday Monday, this year at Castle Park, Colchester.

9. The precise format of the competition in 2018 will have to be considered once it is known how many teams will be competing but, on the assumption that the number will be similar to 2017 (i.e. 10), the management committee would welcome views, especially from the clubs who entered in 2017, on **(i) whether the group phase should continue to be split into two groups and, if so, whether teams should play each other only once (as in 2017) or twice; or (ii) whether all competing teams (assuming not more than 10) should be in a single group, playing each other once.**

10. Given the small number of group fixtures in 2017, the management committee would also like to hear from the clubs who conceded games (especially Great Bentley, who conceded three out of four, and Ipswich, who

⁴ **East Group:** Colchester & East Essex, Great Bentley, Ipswich, Mistley, and Wivenhoe Town. **West Group:** Braintree, Coggeshall Town, Kelvedon & Feering, Little Bardfield Village, and 7 Para RHA.

conceded two⁵) the reasons for those concessions and why they were unable to raise sides.

When to play matches

11. In general, it seems that, unlike the position some years ago when club members frequently played twice at a weekend,⁶ few cricketers nowadays want to play on both days, and the preference for most is to play on Saturday rather than Sunday. As already noted, this is not confined to the NECL. A radical suggestion is that **the 40 overs competition in the NECL should become a Saturday competition, with a T20 competition on Sundays.** The management committee would like to hear the views of all clubs on this suggestion, and how it would affect their ability (or wish) to continue playing in the NECL.⁷

Relaxing rule 30

12. Under rule 30, a player may play for only one club during any season, unless his or her transfer has been approved by the league secretary. Transfers are rare (there have been just two this season), and there is a transfer 'deadline' of 31st July in any season.⁸ With the number of concessions due to clubs being unable to raise sides, as well as the number of matches played where one or other (or both) teams has fewer than 11 players,⁹ a suggestion is to **relax this rule so that someone may play for more than one club in any season, subject to limitations.** Such limitations might include:

- A limit on the number of matches someone could play for another club (or clubs), not their 'home' club;
- Restricting such a relaxation to players under the age of 16 or over 50.¹⁰
- Restricting such a relaxation to the bottom division, or divisions.

⁵ Ipswich did not play a single game: they conceded two matches and two were conceded to them!

⁶ See footnote 2 above about the position in the NECL in 2001.

⁷ It needs to be emphasised that the management committee has not yet discussed this suggestion, which just emerged as a proposal that might merit consideration. Clearly, the views of member clubs will be crucial.

⁸ The reason for this deadline would seem to be to prevent clubs recruiting 'star' players to strengthen their teams late in the season when they may be vying for promotion or struggling to avoid relegation.

⁹ Several matches this season have been played where one team had only 8 players. In other cases, clubs have conceded matches where they have had only 8 players.

¹⁰ Information as to the age (date of birth) of club members can now be recorded on the 'PlayCricket' system.

The management committee invite views on this suggestion and, if adopted, on the conditions that should apply. Unlike the format of the competitions (which is now a matter for the management committee to decide), a change to rule 30 along the above lines would require the approval of clubs at the AGM.

Overseas players in the NECL

13. Member clubs will be aware of the issue that arose in the Two Counties Cricket Championship earlier this season that led to an appeal by Frinton-on-Sea CC to a TCCC appeal tribunal against the docking of points by the TCCC management subcommittee for playing an ‘ineligible’ player in their match against Maldon CC on 1st July 2017. For anyone interested, the judgment of the appeal tribunal can be downloaded from the Two Counties website, and a statement setting out the position of the NECL following that judgment was posted on the NECL website on 19th August 2017.

14. As will be seen from that statement, the NECL does not have an eligibility rule equivalent to that in the TCCC rules, and the management committee have determined to take no action “*unless or until there is any definitive ruling from the Home Office or a court of law.*” What we do have is a rule (rule 31) that forbids payment of players, with the sanction that a club infringing the rule may be expelled from the League. Although the management committee are not proposing any change to the rules in the light of the TCCC appeal tribunal judgment, views are invited on the issue generally of overseas cricketers playing in the NECL.

Other issues

15. Suggestions are welcome on any other matter that clubs or their members may consider would improve the playing, or the opportunities for playing, cricket in the NECL, including any specific proposals for rule changes. Clubs are reminded that any proposed alterations to the league rules for consideration at the AGM must be submitted in writing to the league secretary by Saturday 30th September 2017.

Responding to this consultation

16. Please send any comments or suggestions in response to this consultation paper by e-mail to execommittee@necl.co.uk. It would assist the management committee if all comments are submitted by 12 noon on Wednesday 13th September, as that will enable them to be collated ahead of the management committee meeting the following day.

6 September 2007