

## **Minutes of the annual meeting of the Cricket committee of HMC schools**

### **Lord's cricket ground**

**March 6<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**Present:** Andy Whittall (Chairman), Mark Allbrook, John Bobby, Stephen Charlwood, Douglas Henderson (Secretary), Rob Morris, David Moss, Andy Palmer, Richard Risebro, Glenn Roberts, Steve Tomlinson, Andy Wagner.

Paul Bedford and David Graveney (ECB) in attendance.

**Apologies:** Rory McCann, Mike McKaughan, Stephen Tonge, Paul Bedford (ECB), Richard Risebro, Fraser Stewart (MCC).

With exceptional promptness, all members were well on time and so the meeting began at 1.50pm.

1. **The Minutes of the meeting** of March 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 had been circulated in April 2018 and re-issued prior to the meeting. They were accepted as a true record. Any matters arising would appear later in the meeting.
2. **Apologies for absence** had been received as shown above. The Chairman noted that Scotland was again unrepresented and this had been so since Charles Swan retired some years ago. He felt we ought to invite somebody else to represent them. DCH reported that there was one keen offer but Rory McCann had not responded to a suggestion that he should hand over. DAG said he was in close contact with Scottish schools and could also make suggestions.
3. **Regional reports**

#### **North East: Glenn Roberts**

At their regular annual meeting, the schools had agreed to implement the proposals of ECB (of which more later) on pitch length, size of ball etc for younger age-groups. They had also agreed to try the new 100-ball format for Under-15s. As in most areas, there were more schools than ever taking part in the National Schools T20 competition.

#### **North West: David Moss**

At their biennial meeting, problems had been aired about the proposed arrangements for younger ages about pitch length (on grass) and whether it was feasible on a small square. Also the “length of games” proposals, especially for Under-17s, were queried. In brief, they were unhappy about implementing some aspects of the proposals.

For the National T20 competition, David’s “seeding” experiment had come unstuck because of the appalling weather early in the otherwise glorious summer of 2018. Because four schools, but especially Sedbergh, dominated the region (see later discussion), he had arranged it so that the other schools felt they had some chance of progression. He was attempting the same seeding arrangement for 2019.

### **West: John Bobby**

They had held their first meeting for 15 years very recently and it was felt to be very useful. Not least, he had emphasised that the schools should act positively and not return the following year to go over the same ground again.

Various issues had been aired: for the National T20, the region is dominated by two very strong cricketing schools (Millfield and King’s Taunton) and some others feel there is little point in participating as they are almost bound to be knocked out in round one. That is why hitherto he has included a best runner-up for the second round. The Bath area schools have their own T20 competition and therefore do not participate. The region is very widespread, from Bristol to Penzance, and so geography has to play a large part in arranging groups.

JB raised various ideas for solutions about the dominance of two schools. Either a two-division National competition (or even just locally) or a Plate competition for those knocked out in round 1. He favoured the two-division model and felt that only about six schools would opt for “Division 1” if they were given the option (which they should). These suggestions were not discussed more extensively at the meeting even though they were clearly thought-provoking for the future of the National T20.

The meeting had almost unanimously agreed that anything to “jazz up” cricket for at least B and C teams was to be welcomed, including coloured clothing. Indeed, such was the euphoria that all agreed that coloured clothing should be used for all year-groups in all matches except the 1<sup>st</sup> XI (and maybe even them). Later, the Headmaster of King’s Taunton had vetoed the idea for his own school, insisting that cricket is played in whites.

Other interesting ideas had been raised: not only two-innings matches for B and C teams (12 overs x 4 with batting in the second innings opened with those who hadn't batted in innings one) but also putting, say, Under15A and Under 14A at the same venue rather than Under 15A and Under 15B (to save "hanging around time"). None of this was discussed more widely.

### **West Midlands & Wales: Rob Morris**

He had had problems of many Masters i/c failing to respond to emails. This had meant delays in arranging T20 and also a regional meeting. He was hoping to re-arrange a previously planned meeting with Adam Shantry of Shrewsbury running a coaching workshop.

### **North London: Stephen Charlwood**

SC confessed that they had enjoyed a very good lunch (the Chairman had already suggested that expenses charged to our committee were intended to cover such things as any speaker's expenses or incidental costs such as tea or coffee) but the meeting had been very useful. They had agreed that the 5oz ball – used for women's cricket - should be used for Under-14 boys. Amid much hilarity, it transpired that not only were such balls quite difficult to procure but JB had conducted a highly scientific enquiry (ie in the Physics labs) that 5oz balls were actually **smaller** than  $4^{3/4}$  balls and weighed much the same.

There was a record entry for the National T20 competition and even, for the first time, included his own school (Habs).

### **South London: Richard Risebro**

Richard reported that three of the stronger schools in his region had decided not to participate in the National T20 competition in 2019 and it was not quite clear why. He was hoping to hold a regional meeting next year.

### **East: Mark Allbrook**

In another very widespread region, it was clear that Cambridge was a good place for a regional meeting and The Leys had offered. It was suggested at the meeting that Fenner's might be good, to encourage better links with the University. He hoped to hold a meeting in the autumn of 2019 and observed that it would be good to have a **template** for such a meeting. This was agreed to be an excellent idea. The secretary (DCH) pointed out that this had been widely agreed in our previous meeting, but nobody had suggested who would create it.

Entry for the National T20 was at a record level, going in three years from 17 to 24.

### **South Central: Steve Tomlinson**

Entry for the National T20 in 2019 was the very neat 16.

### **South East: Andy Whittall**

Entry for the National T20 in 2019 had, as usual, been the very neat 16 but this simple formula had been thrown into disarray by the late application of one other.

### **Regional meetings more generally**

It emerged as the meeting progressed but for clarity is summarised here, that it was highly desirable that there should be an annual meeting in each region, ideally in **September** but October at the latest. Nothing elaborate (eg expensive lunches!). Just a couple of hours one afternoon. We have funds to cover incidental expenses, and also for rare one-off all-day events (said the Chairman).

It was felt that our annual meeting in March was always too late to implement anything for the new season. DCH observed that our meeting could never be any kind of executive body as all schools are independent anyway, though we could make recommendations. The place for discussions about plans to be implemented was in **regional meetings** with as many Masters i/c present as possible who could agree to implement any proposals.

Thus a possible scenario might be that we should continue with our annual meeting in **March** but that would be to finalise a *template* (see above) for regional meetings in **September** to discuss specific issues within the template (plus anything else they wanted to discuss). But then for us to meet again in **November** – together with ECB - following regional meetings to come up with **recommendations** for the following season. It was not stated, but the obvious sequence would be that regions would again have a meeting in **January** and agree (or not) to adopt our recommendations.

It was also felt it was probably time for another National conference, given that cricket in many schools is at near-crisis level.

## **4. ECB**

The Chairman had already welcomed Paul Bedford and David Graveney. PB was admirably succinct, telling us that MCC had recently published a document on concussion from a Laws point of view and that ECB would very shortly be publishing a similar one for widespread publication.

PB also said that the new and very-much-improved Play-cricket scoring system was now up and running, after the problems that had been encountered in the previous version(s). A brief discussion ensued but with nothing of note.

After that, and for the rest of most the meeting, the floor was held by David Graveney on behalf of ECB. It turned out into an extended question and answer session but was very productive in addressing many of the major issues we face.

Starting with safety, David Graveney (DAG) said that safety *between* nets was very important: not merely a top-net, but no gap at all between them, and extra material.

Moving on to the ECB recommendations for younger players, alluded to in regional reports, he admitted that all the trials had been done indoors. He accepted that there could be difficulties on grass with different lengths of pitch on the same strip. However, the Institute of Groundsmen had accepted that it was feasible and would be recommending the proposals to their members.

ARWh (Chairman) asked what we could do about the huge dropout in numbers of boys (sic) playing cricket, saying that the statistics were alarming. This was where the proposal for another National conference (see above) was mooted. Amid the ensuing discussion, but somewhat erratically, various ideas were aired, most of them to do with making the game more attractive to the young. Almost all involved variations on shortening the game, wearing coloured clothing or other ways of, frankly, dumbing down.

DAG resumed his discourse by reminding us that ECB would be taking over responsibility (and funding) for the current MCCUs. This would happen in 2021, and ECB would be looking for much greater accountability in return. The number of “University centres of cricketing excellence” (not their proposed title) would probably be expanded and all would be losing their first-class status. They would be expected to produce results. AJP reiterated his offer to help with providing discussion between schools and MCCUs (whatever they would now be called).

DAG strongly felt that fielding as a skill had been highly devalued in recent years (news to most of us who felt that it had long been elevated above batting or bowling).

Other ideas cropped up, such as perhaps (DAG) that emphasis should be placed on Under-17 cricket not schools' final year (ie Under-18).

ARWh suggested that too much emphasis had been placed by ECB on the cricketing elite, whereas the overwhelming majority of our pupils neither could nor would aspire to participate in professional cricket. He suggested that we should be looking after the 90+.

Time was moving on as many of us had to catch trains before the deadline for off-peak occurred and so the Chairman summed up:

- a) To attract the young to cricket, especially B and C teams, we probably need to move to shorter versions of the game
- b) We should perhaps encourage coloured clothing to “jazz up” the game
- c) We should certainly consider encouraging the idea of two-innings cricket (see above)
- d) Six-a-sides (also mentioned above) should also be encouraged.

## **5. Girls' cricket**

There was clearly a very strong movement in schools – not least prep schools - towards girls playing cricket and dropping rounders. As yet, the momentum had not yet built towards establishing a competitive structure for a National competition. Rob Morris had tried to organise one, but with only 30 queries and 15 definite entries it was not a runner yet. Pink balls were also a problem; cue renewed hilarity (no salaciousness: merely availability).

DAG suggested the idea of mixed boys/ girls cricket, especially at younger ages, using a soft ball. This seemed to be warmly welcomed.

## **6. National Under-17 competition**

This is the competition run by Andy Barnard at Shrewsbury and Rob Morris (present). RM said it was becoming increasingly popular, given the constraints on A level pupils. For 2019 there are 79 schools participating, including those who feel unable (or are not allowed) to take part in the National Schools T20. The problem as always is fitting it all in. It seems likely that the final will have to be in September.

They are also considering running a Plate competition.

## 7. **Playing some declaration cricket**

DCH had circulated a paper saying that he felt that the almost universal use of the 50-over format in schools had gone too far. In his regular weekly (widespread but by no means universal) observation of results, there was a huge number of results where the game was extremely tedious because the side batting first, without any incentive to declare, simply batted the other side out of the game. Declaration cricket was much more likely to produce a closer match.

There was little time left to debate the issue but ARWa observed that at his school they had tried to preserve the declaration format for some years but that the boys themselves preferred the win/lose format.

DCH's position was supported by DAG (as well as the West Country meeting): schools should at least try a few games in the traditional format. This was tentatively agreed.

## 8. **The revision mania disaster**

DCH had also submitted a paper in advance, the key point of which was the strong assertion by a Professor of Psychology that recreation and refreshment, especially physical exercise in the fresh air, were essential for a healthy mind. His suggestion (for the revision period) was **two to three hours per day and one whole day per week** of doing no revision whatsoever but something active.

Given that this excellent advice is wholly ignored by almost all candidates for public exams, especially their parents and connived at by schools, DCH felt that his paper – no doubt in considerably truncated form - might go some way to persuading schools and in turn their pupils and parents, that cricket had a *positive* part to play during the revision period. In DCH's view, the current warped notion of how to revise (ie do nothing else whatever) was the key factor in the rapid and alarming death of cricket in schools.

MA, as a former Headmaster, thought it very strange that day schools in particular gave so much time for "exam leave" (ie "revision"). And all schools seem to suffer from a ludicrous need for "exam-pressure relaxation" – ie a post-exam week in Magaluf – just when pupils might have the time to do something productive like playing cricket.

DAG re-iterated his notion that perhaps in future the focus should be on the Under-17 (Lower Sixth) year as being the principal school team.

9. A glance at the accounts showed that we receive much the same amount as we pay out. DCH said it was something of a trial chasing up subscriptions and it was agreed that he should circulate regional organisers with his chasing emails so that they themselves could pursue backsliders (especially those taking part in the National T20 competition, which is about 3/5<sup>th</sup> of the cost of the subscription).
10. The Chairman ended by thanking DCH for all his work, and the meeting ended at 3.55pm.

DCH  
11/03/2019