Some reflections on schools cricket from Alan Wells, Master i/c at Bede’s

Hi Douglas

As we are entering the second and arguably the most stressful period of term due to exams, revision, parental pressure, aunties birthday's, family commitments etc etc etc, I thought I'd share with you my thoughts on school cricket and how I intend to change our programme here at Bede's.

I have been at Bede's now for about 18 years and have seen a massive change in the schools cricket with regard to participation and engagement in the game. I do put a general apathy towards the game down to the lack of cricket on terrestrial TV - in part, but also in a changing society among young teenagers who want instant gratification - we've all heard these arguments many times so there's no need for me to bang on about them.

My point is that there is no point in any of us acting like King Canute by holding up a shield of tradition against an oncoming wave of change amongst youth of today. Rather than battle it I think we should try to embrace it and accommodate it, after all they are voting with their feet and not committing to Saturday cricket the way they used to 18 years ago. There are more and more pressures on them from academic staff and parents who rightly expect results for their huge investment. I totally agree that getting out and playing the game is so good for them and will actually enhance their chances of success in exams. But cricket doesn't have to be played on a Saturday.

We are a school that doesn't have Saturday morning lessons so trying to get Billy's mum to bring him to school from Tunbridge Wells on a Saturday morning for a 10:00am leave to Cranleigh to play for the 15b's, bat number 8, get 0, not bowl and get home by 6:00pm, isn't too appealing - hence they have grannies birthday on that Saturday - for the 6 time this year!

So this is my proposal and plan for next year. I intend to have a three week cycle that will go like this. First Saturday back trials - giving everyone a chance to shine, and the time for students to get to know their new "coaches" ( maths teachers etc). The second week we will have a voluntary drop-in cricket hub - giving access for all cricketers no matter what level they play at, to the professional coaches in the school, in our case James Kirtley Neil Lenham Petch Lenham (brilliant with the girls) and myself. This will run from 10:00am - 12:00pm and will cater for those that turn up - it won't just be a net based session, but be varied and fun. The keen cricketers will go off and play for their clubs anyway, which will strengthen the clubs and help develop their games by playing against adults. The third Saturday will be totally off, cricket free - the keen cricketers will again commit to their clubs. The next week a fixture, following week hub, following week off and so on.

We will play our matches against local Sussex schools on a Tuesday and Thursday afternoon when all schools have after school activities anyway. The 1st XI will play a 40 over match, the 14b and 15b will play T20 in coloured clothing, pink balls and black stumps. This, I'm convinced will give those B team cricketers a better experience all round and, I believe, will be far more likely to stay involved in the game when they become seniors, making it more likely to get out 2nd and 3rd XI teams. Kids love coloured clothing with numbers on their backs; lay down 24 cricket balls, 23 of them red and one pink and ask a kid to go and choose  a ball, they will all choose the pink one.

We will still have two or three Saturday fixtures, depending on the length of the term when we can play the likes of Whitgift in a big block.

It will be more exciting for the kids to play, easier for parents to buy into the 3 week cycle and commit to just a couple of Saturday's, less stressful for academic staff who think they should be revising instead of playing on a Saturday, better for club cricket as most club teams are stronger during the summer holidays when all the players from the schools are available, better for the elite cricketers development, and better for the lesser cricketer to have access to the professional coaches should they wish.

I understand this model isn't for everyone and that the traditional boarding schools need to "entertain" their students on a Saturday, so need to put out 5 senior teams. But having played against some of those schools this year, I know even they are struggling with pressure from academic staff and parents.

I strongly feel that for everyone's benefit, and my blood pressure, that this model will work. In my view it ticks so many boxes - and I, like so many others are quite tired of banging our heads against brick walls.

Hope you don't mind me sharing my thoughts

Kind regards

Alan