

Chairman's report, 2009

At the danger of not just sounding repetitive, but - in fact - being repetitive I think we can again file season 2009 away in the folder labelled "Wet". As Secretary Jim Young will allude to I'm sure, junior cricket here in the west again suffered at the hands of the weather gods. The result of this was the now perennial scrambling to play matches as the nights drew in, in late August and early September, allied to a diminishing acceptance of what "playable conditions" are. We've all done it: noting to an opposition Coach on a cold, dark September evening that the water in the puddles on the square wasn't actually displaying any tidal characteristics, and so play's probably possible - so, 8 overs a side it is! The biggest consequence of rubbish weather is - of course - less cricket. And, in a short-enough season, this isn't good for any of our clubs. I think, however, we shouldn't be too hard on ourselves as, again of course, there's very little we can do about the weather, and I believe we still play a very healthy number of junior cricket matches compared to counterpart clubs in other districts. But, a couple of issues are brought into sharper focus when poor weather is impacting matches, these are:

- clubs calling off fixtures for - in my opinion at least - no good reason;
- clubs entering leagues/cups then scratching;
- the determination of league placings; and
- the preponderance of representative and non-league fixtures.

Taking these in turn:

The league rules as currently written allow clubs to call off fixtures, without conceding them, for any reason at all, as long as minimum notice is provided and as long as they don't do it too many times. This is open to abuse at the best of times I'd argue, but in seasons badly affected by the weather, the frustration felt by clubs at being informed by their opponents that they're postponing a match on one of the few warm and sunny nights because, say, their best team isn't available is magnified. The Committee will be looking at rule changes for next season to reduce clubs' scope to postpone.

Clubs entering competitions and scratching is deeply frustrating too; not just because it causes hassle for the competition organisers, but because - again - it can often result in teams being without a fixture on perfectly playable days. As is repeated every year please think very,.....very, carefully before entering your club in a competition. Of course we are here to play as much cricket as possible, and don't want to discourage teams from competing, but entering and scratching actually achieves the opposite: less cricket than was planned. If greater flexibility is needed remember, too, combined teams have been entered in the past, and the "B" leagues are ideal for facilitating cricket if a club has more "fluid" playing numbers.

League placings again this year have ended up - at least to me - in producing an order that more accurately reflects the number of games played, than which is the best team or teams. And before anyone suggests it, of course this is a generalisation, and I'm happy to admit that my own club Poloc has, in the last two seasons, been both a beneficiary and a victim of the current points and placings systems. As with rights to postpone matches, changes to how league placings are determined will be introduced for next season. Allied to this are the rules - or lack thereof - surrounding the rescheduling of matches - these will also be reviewed over the winter.

The final point made was the impact of - really resulting from the growth in - non-league fixtures. It is a fact that there are many, many more representative matches than in the past. In days of yore there was a one-week Inter-District Festival, end-of, for most age-groups. And, at the oldest age-group, there were a limited number of Inter-District matches organised, but fitting in around WDJCU matches. Now our players have Area Squad matches, Academy matches and squad sessions, schools select teams, national age-group squad sessions and matches, Inter-City matches, etc. A question that arises is: can there ever be too much cricket? Maybe not, but the impact of these others things undoubtedly impacts our clubs' junior players and their junior set-ups. Player unavailability, players being told to rest, mixed messages to

players concerning technique and other development issues, WDJCU matches not being scheduled to accommodate other fixtures, etc. The dialogue between the union, the Western Regional Academy, Cricket Scotland and schools is ongoing, but 2009 may have seen a tipping point where, from feedback from junior convenors both during and after the season, I detect that there is a view that the interests of the clubs and the union became a junior partner in what has to be an equal partnership with these other interested parties. And this is unhelpful, particularly if it has adversely impacted the many, in favour of the few; and adversely impacted clubs' abilities to offer continuity of cricket to their youngsters, particularly in an already badly weather-affected season. But I am not suggesting throwing any babies out with bath water however, and much of the non-league cricket has merit, but more thought about fixture scheduling allied to better communication about what's going on when, affecting whom, and why, need to be implemented. Players move in and out of these para-club activities, but they always remain club players and clubs remain their largest influences - it's important this is borne in mind. In concluding this point I'd stress that neither Cricket Scotland nor the clubs hold a monopoly on knowing what's in the best interests of our junior cricketers - so to repeat, genuine partnership is what's needed. The union's dialogue with the other parties involved in these things, as noted, is ongoing.

A couple of other remarks in closing: the league had to address a number of player disciplinary issues during the season. Bluntly, this is unacceptable. A Zero Tolerance approach was and will continue to be adopted to bad behaviour, on or off the pitch. The league will not think twice about expelling clubs who cannot control their players,.....or coaches! The Committee's approach to such issues can safely be summarised as "an iron fist in an iron glove"!

A comment on sponsorship: the union was again delighted that The Trophy Centre continued its sponsorship of the League - again thanks to Richard Rutnagur for his time and effort in securing this deal. And The Frank Smith Trophy gained a new sponsor in 2009 in the shape of Clydesdale Bank, another welcome partner for the union. A question often asked is what happens to this sponsorship money: the answer is - in 2009 - it part-funded the Western Regional Academy's junior squad's tour of Ireland, and part-funded an under 12 representative match against Northumberland. The union, as the accounts circulated in advance of this AGM by Treasurer Colin Dawson reflect, remains in a financially sound position, with much of its reserves ear-marked for district tours. Plans to tour, as in the past, remain an active matter for the Committee. More on this to come no doubt.

In closing I would add my congratulations to those clubs winning leagues and cups in 2009, to those junior players from the West who represented both the district and their clubs in national age-group squads and teams, and thanks as always to both the union's other office bearers for their work behind the scenes in ensuring the smooth running of the union and to clubs' junior convenors for their continuing sterling efforts. Thanks also to Iain Stewart and Tim Hart for the work with the Regional Academy, and the coaches who contributed there - we wish Iain well in his continuing recuperation from illness, it's good to see him up-and-about again. As I think I have said before at this forum, it remains a mystery to me how Cricket Scotland expect one person to carry out the two roles Iain has, particularly given the geographical size of the West District. In touching on the work of Cricket Scotland in the West it is also worth noting Josh Johnson's input. Working with Iain Stewart, I am aware Josh has undertaken a lot of grass-roots development work in the district - thanks to him too for his efforts.