Changes to Playing Conditions for consideration at the Council Meeting on 17 October 2016

In this document are some proposals that the Executive Committee is minded to take forward to the AGM in January 2017 for adoption in the 2017 season. The job of the Council meeting is to test the views of the clubs on the ideas put forward by the Committee so that the resolutions put forward for a formal vote at the AGM are as close as possible to the changes which the clubs want to see. For the AGM they will be written up as carefully-worded amendments to the existing playing conditions and although it is sometimes possible to provide the AGM with options for change, more often the meeting has only two choices: to approve an amendment or reject it. That is why the Council has a key job in ensuring that what goes to the AGM has the best chance of being voted in. A negative response from the Council may result in a proposal being dropped and not taken forward.

The proposals are in two groups, the first of which directly affects the cricket we play and which has been drawn up as a result of the recent captains' meetings, while the second group covers various administrative issues where the Committee has become aware that the current regulations are not working as they should or have not kept up with changing circumstances. If some of the first group of proposals come as a surprise, remember that they reflect views expressed by captains and are broadly in line with views emerging from the ECB players' survey carried out during the summer.

The survey results and the notes of the captains' meetings can both be found on the website. It is important that the cricket we play reflects the preferences of players. Of course players hold a range of views about the best format, start and finish times and other matters and no set of playing conditions will meet everyone's expectations. However, the prosperity of the club game depends on recruiting and retaining players, an increasing problem across the game. Please ensure that your club's representative is attuned to players' views when responding to the proposals set out below.

1. ISSUES DISCUSSED AT CAPTAINS' MEETINGS

Length of matches

Based on the survey results and the captains' meetings there is a preference for retaining matches at the same length as in 2016 for all tiers and divisions, with any desire for earlier finishes to be achieved by other means.

The Executive Committee proposes no change to length of matches.

(This conclusion relates to 100 over cricket as played by 1st, 2nd and some 3rd XIs and 90 over cricket by other 3rd XIs and 4th XIs. Subject to any views expressed at Council, the Committee will consult clubs with 1st XIs in Premier and Division 1 about the length and other aspects of timed games at that level to see whether any changes would be supported.)

Start times

Based on the player survey the captains were consulted on starting all 100 and 90 over matches throughout the season at 12.00 (other than earlier starts for 1st XIs on the last two Saturdays). The 3rd and 4th XI captains strongly supported maintaining starts at 1.00 while almost all 1st and 2nd XI captains preferred to see all matches starting at 12.00 subject to the customary earlier starts in the last two weeks.

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The Executive Committee proposes fixing start times for all 1st and 2nd XI 100 over cricket in weeks 1-16 at 12.00, with no changes to 3rd and 4th XI start times.

Format of matches

Clubs were consulted on moving to a limited overs format for all games below 1st XI level. 3rd and 4th XI captains showed a clear preference for retaining the "split" format of 9 timed games and nine limited overs. A clear majority of 2nd XI captains present thought that their players preferred the limited overs game and were willing to trial a full season of games under that format.

The Executive Committee proposes that in all 2nd XI divisions in 2017 the full programme of games be subject to limited-over regulations (to be reviewed at the end of the season and voted on again for 2018).

Limitation on overs bowled by a player in timed games

While captains other than 2nd XI captains favoured retention of timed games, there was a general view that where teams use a bowler for most or all of an innings in such cricket this can be detrimental to the development of young bowlers and limit the extent of full participation in a game by other team members.

The Executive Committee proposes that in all timed cricket no bowler shall be permitted to bowl more [than one third of the] overs in any innings.

The Executive Committee would like the views of The Council on whether this should be one third of the total available overs to be bowled, or one quarter of the total available overs to be bowled.

Note: for one third of the total available is possible that only 3 bowlers could be used – whereas with one quarter of the total available overs the bowling side must use 4 bowlers.

(For Premier and Division 1 1st XI games this approach will be one of the options included in the separate consultation referred to above.)

Over rates

Captains at both meetings agreed that (except in panel-umpired games) slow over rates are a problem and a factor in the trend towards late finishes. Equally there is recognition that enforcing regulations on over rates in matches where there are club umpires or player umpires will be a challenge. The proposal floated at the meetings involving a points deduction based on post-match reporting of innings lengths did not find general favour. However, in view of the commitment in principle to improvement of over rates the Executive Committee will give further thought to what solutions could work, including investigation of those adopted in other leagues.

The Executive Committee does not currently have a new playing condition on over rates for 2017 in mind but may ask one or more divisions if they are willing to trial a system of "shadow" not involving penalties. The issue will remain on the agenda for further discussion.

2. Other proposals from the Executive Committee

"Golden" half hour"

Currently the playing conditions for all 1st XI limited overs matches in Divisions 1-4 provide that in the event of weather interruptions after the start of a match, overs deductions will only start to be

made after 30 minutes playing time has been lost. This is part of the reason why limited overs matches in those divisions currently start at 12.00. With the change to start times proposed above this condition could be applied to all limited overs games for 1st and 2nd XIs.

The Executive Committee proposes that the 30 minute delay before deducting overs for weather should apply in all limited overs games starting at 12.00.

(This change was not discussed by the captains but is seen by the Committee as a logical consequence of adopting earlier start times for the matches in question. The proposal would fall if the change to start times was not agreed.)

Powerplay regulations in 50-over matches

International and first-class cricket now appear to have settled on a consistent format for Powerplays in limited overs cricket. These are:

Powerplay 1 : Overs 1-10 – maximum 2 fielders outside the 30 yard circle
Powerplay 2 : Overs 11-40 – maximum 4 fielders outside the 30 yard circle
Powerplay 3 : Overs 41-50 – maximum 5 fielders outside the 30 yard circle
If these regulations were adopted by the League the following benefits would be secured:

We would be aligned with the professional game as seen on TV.
There would be no need for groundsmen to make 15 yard markings.
It would end the requirement for close fielders – so a little safer for players.
It would be more straightforward for umpires to manage.
It would end the discretion offered to the batting side to call a Batting Powerplay – rarely used until after Over 40 anyway.
It would provide consistency of Powerplay overs across all matches - currently in poor weather conditions, some teams may take the Batting Powerplay early to complete a match before rain comes, to the disadvantage of teams who were not batting.

The Executive Committee Proposes that these regulations are adopted for Tier One matches (Premier and Division 1 1st XIs):

The Executive Committee further proposes to move to these regulations for Tier Two matches, for the same reasons, except those relating to the existing Batting Powerplay.

This would also provide consistency across all Divisions in which the Umpires Panel operates.

The Executive Committee further suggests that there could be a case for introducing the same approach (subject to adjustment for 45 over matches) in all Championship limited over cricket. Views on this will be welcomed at the meeting.

Definition of exempt overseas players

Following discussions with Surrey CCC and the ECB the League made an administrative adjustment to the playing conditions relating to the "overseas exempt" category of players who may be registered by Premier and Division 1 clubs in addition to a full overseas player. At the 2016 AGM an amendment was passed making the definition of such players tighter than previously. The administrative variation allowed a small number of players who have declared an intention – and who are confirmed in writing as supported by a First Class County – to qualify for England to be registered as overseas exempt.

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The Executive Committee proposes that the registration rules should be amended so as to include players qualifying for England within the "overseas exempt" definition.

Concession of matches

There are a number of issues which need review and potentially change to the current regulations.

In the 2016 season we found that the current wording of PC 11f stops us penalising a club for fielding a side in a lower XI Championship match having conceded an FBSCL fixture due to be played by a higher XI.

The Executive Committee will recommend an amendment to close this loophole, to the AGM.

The penalty for clubs which make late concessions varies between the Championship and FBSCL, as do the regulations giving the League Committees discretion to remove teams making serial concessions from divisional tables. This is confusing for clubs with teams in both Leagues. In addition, Beddington have written to the League proposed that the requirements on teams which concede matches should be amended in various ways including uprating for inflation the compensation payable to the opponent (which has been unchanged for many years). Finally, the requirement on clubs to inform the League in advance of concessions is widely ignored which is unsatisfactory.

The Executive Committee will bring forward for approval at the AGM changes which clarify and strengthen the requirements on clubs and (subject to negotiation) are more closely harmonised with the equivalent FBSCL provisions.

Definition of a "match"

Obvious as this might appear the havoc created by the weather on some league Saturdays led to uncertainty about the number of matches players had "played" when the "12 match" rule came into effect in the latter stages of the season. There is no currently no definition of a match for these purposes in the playing conditions.

The Executive Committee proposes to amend the regulations relating to the dropping of players to lower sides late in the season so as to define a "match" as any game in which at least one ball was bowled regardless of whether a player who may need clearance to play in a lower side because of the 12 match rule took an active part in the game, but was at least named on a team sheet.

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