
This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by King On The Rye - 14-04-2008 13:13

This week the county cricket season gets underway in earnest (we'll ignore the frivolities of Sussex v MCC and the university matches). Given recent events in India, this could well be the last season as we know it.

The IPL has spread equal amounts of panic and excitement through the ranks of county money-men: city teams, as proposed by the Surrey chief exec, seem a more likely prospect than ever before. Equally, the likes of Derbyshire and Leicestershire, not to mention Kent and Somerset, have reason to be more nervous than ever. Change is in the air, even in county cricket. You could smell it at the county press days: something is going to happen, and soon.

That being said, there are a surprising paucity of ideas as to where the domestic game goes next. City teams seem problematical to me: some of the country's cricket 'hot-spots' don't necessarily coalesce around a big city (and the game is arguably more popular in the countryside than in the cities). Yorkshire, for example: you won't find many proud south Yorkshiremen following a Leeds team the way they would Yorkshire.

If we accept that things have to change, then this is my solution. There are too many county competitions, so the Pro40 goes, and is replaced by a Twenty20 league split into two halves (9 teams each), which runs through June and July into August. Teams play home and away. The top two teams from each league go into finals day. For the moment, the county championship and 50-over cup stay as they are. The quality has really improved in the former since two divisions came in.

As for this season, I think we're in for a repeat of last year: Sussex will win the title again; Kent will win one of the short-form titles (Twenty20 or Friend's Provident), and Durham the other. I'm not sure about the Pro40.

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 14-04-2008 13:17

King On The Rye wrote:

you won't find many proud south Yorkshiremen following a Leeds team the way they would Yorkshire Too fucking right!

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by E10 Rifle - 14-04-2008 13:24

I agree that there really is no point in the Pro40, even though it's the only tournament my county (Essex) have been much good at in recent seasons. There should only be three domestic competitions, reflecting the three forms of the game competed at internationally and in other countries' leagues (first-class, 50-over and Twenty20). It'd make more sense, perhaps, to run the Twenty20 throughout the season as a full league, rather than in short bursts in July. And the FP should be a straight knockout from the off, with no pointless "conferences", especially as these games hardly attract any more crowds than midweek championship games.

The championship should be preserved - it's not as bad as it's painted - and, pre IPL, has continued to attract high-calibre overseas players. It's never gonna pull in the crowds (though more effort could certainly be made), but then neither do the first-class state competitions in any other country.

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Mighty Mudhsuden - 14-04-2008 14:01

And of course, there will always be a 'need' for county championship cricket because people always want to see a successful (or at least, good) England Test team.

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 14-04-2008 17:16

I've been thinking that the whole system is screwed, for a long, long time.

One problem has been that I've actually struggled to find games on weekends, sometimes; particularly on Saturdays.

I'd actually be inclined to pushing County Championship games to all be day-night, too, so that you're not only left with the unemployed and pensioners who can regularly go to games. Matches that start at 2pm and finish at 10pm and cost, say, £4-5 to get into, would draw in lots of the after-work crowd, I think.

It would probably also get more TV coverage, and certainly at times more conducive to a decent audience.

I'd also scrap the 40 over competition, and stick with a bigger 20-20 and a 50 over one.

It might make sense to shift the 20-20 to being a city based competition. I don't yet see a case for moving the 4 day game to being city based, though.

Most of all, I just think that far too few people get a chance to see much 4 day county cricket, and therefore they aren't engaged in the way they are with other sports. And, basically, that's why county cricket is in trouble, and has been since I was young. It's the 4 men and their dogs scenario, and the ECB should be looking at radical ways to address this rather than their usual tin-pot tinkering.

Also, if the county season has to start a couple of weeks later because of the IPL, that's probably no bad thing either, as it's usually too cold and too wet to play and watch cricket in early April anyway.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Villain - 15-04-2008 19:50

I really could not support a team called Birmingham.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Rogin the Armchair Fan - 16-04-2008 08:58

I think the biggest problem the County game has is the England team. People will turn up to watch the top county sides if England internationals are playing for them. Increasingly, that's not the case any more - mainly because England play an insane number of meaningless one-day internationals. How many are scheduled in this summer, between the two tours? It's something like 12, including 20-20 games, isn't it? Plus the six test matches?

I used to go with my Dad to watch Somerset play, because Botham and Richards were playing for them. Nowadays, Richards would be in Mumbai, and Botham would be spending his summer scratching his arse waiting to bat in a 20-20 game for England.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Duncan Gardner - 16-04-2008 11:35

I read professionalist nostalgist Frank Keating's Graun column the other day- he says the county game has finally expired. But it hasn't been a major spectator attraction for decades- that was the whole justification for starting the limited over competitions in the 60s.

I think the championship can continue as a valid competition in its own right, not merely as feeder for and funded by test matches on TV. As others say, there are straightforward improvements- play under floodlights, over weekends etc.

Villa Warwickshire fans should be relieved it isn't Coventryshire (which was long the largest town thereabouts).

I'll admit that if four-innings cricket ever disappeared my eccentric interest in the game would certainly fall off. That said, I welcome the greater interest 20-20 brings, though I'm not sure the Indian viewers- and thus the paymasters- will love it to

quite the extent suggested. They love Tendulkar and Dhoni, sure, but the next generation of stars might not be as good. For all that Boyd Rankin and other foreign imports will add exotic glamor...

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by The Purple Cow - 16-04-2008 14:36

I think cricket needs the County Championship even if the general public doesn't. So using a 20/20 premiership to subsidize the 4 day game is fine by me.

You can't call a Birmingham team Birmingham, for the same reason that Minneapolis teams are not called the Minneapolis Vikings or The Minneapolis Twins.

So we need a generic regional name like Arden, or something. Or just 'The Bears'.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Etienne - 17-04-2008 17:40

Oh dear.

Simon Jones only bowled 3 overs (taking 1-2) for Worcs today. No more information yet, but doesn't look good.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by The Purple Cow - 18-04-2008 07:08

He's got a stiff neck, doesn't sound too serious.

Look like another stellar season awaits the Bears.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Mighty Mudhsuden - 18-04-2008 07:23

Rogin the Armchair Fan wrote:

I think the biggest problem the County game has is the England team. People will turn up to watch the top county sides if England internationals are playing for them. Increasingly, that's not the case any more - mainly because England play an insane number of meaningless one-day internationals. How many are scheduled in this summer, between the two tours? It's something like 12, including 20-20 games, isn't it? Plus the six test matches?

I used to go with my Dad to watch Somerset play, because Botham and Richards were playing for them. Nowadays, Richards would be in Mumbai, and Botham would be spending his summer scratching his arse waiting to bat in a 20-20 game for England.

Agree with all this. At my home county easily the most recognisable and most marketable player is the real mighty Mudhsuden but he only plays for them about twice a year.

Which I guess is why clubs go for cheap Kolpak etc players instead of developing up young English ones, because once they reach a certain level you lose them, either to Test cricket, to a county with better facilities and support, or to both.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by noj - 18-04-2008 12:24

A fine start to the season for Vaughan, who makes an aggregate score of 2 against the students.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 18-04-2008 12:27

Bloody Wednesday fan...

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by ursus arctos - 18-04-2008 14:06

Interested parties should check out CricInfo's ball by ball commentary on the inaugural match of the IPL between Bangalore Royal Challengers and Kolkata Knight Riders.

There is still 30 minutes to the first delivery, but Modi is currently quoting Nehru at the Washington Redskins cheerleaders.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by ursus arctos - 18-04-2008 15:43

And I may well be the only one here with even a marginal interest, but Brendon McCullum has just completed his century as the first opener in the first match in IPL history. He's currently on 102 off 55 balls, with 8 fours and 7 sixes.

Kolkata are 159/2 after 16 overs.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 18-04-2008 15:52

I'll be interested to see how Jacques Kallis responds to the challenge set down by McCullum.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 18-04-2008 16:01

And Brendon McCullum finishes with 158, including 14 sixes. Nice standard to set...

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by noj - 18-04-2008 16:01

I'm quite interested, mainly because I've got Setanta so can watch some of this stuff later on. I have an evening of switching between Bangalore Royal Challengers v Kolkatta Knights and Burton Albion v Stevenage Borough all planned.

Mrs Noj might have something to say about that proposal though, especially since bloody Corrie is on twice tonight.

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by ursus arctos - 18-04-2008 16:02

Quite a challenge it is. McCullum ends with 158 not out off 73 balls, 14 Sixes (3 in the last over), 9 Fours.

Kolkata 222/3

Kallis got slapped around like everyone else bowling for Bangalore, 1 for 48 in 4 overs.

According to Cricinfo the crowd is delirious, notwithstanding the fact that McCullum is playing for the opposition.

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 18-04-2008 16:06

I was thinking more of Kallis's batting response. Whether he'll try and now hit three singles in an over.

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by ursus arctos - 18-04-2008 16:11

Har. Har.

I'm starting to get cricket jokes; this is a major breakthrough.

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by ursus arctos - 18-04-2008 16:37

Well, Kallis managed a single six and was out next ball.

Bangalore 24/3 after 5 overs.

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Etienne - 20-04-2008 20:40

What the hell is going on with Middlesex's kit? I was almost as flabbergasted at Strauss' innings as the picture that accompanied it:

<http://uk.cricinfo.com/db/PICTURES/CMS/89600/89622.1.jpg>

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Rogin the Armchair Fan - 20-04-2008 21:02

How can Northern Rock still afford to sponsor a sports team? More to the point, WHY would Northern Rock now be sponsoring a sports team?

Re: This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by axel - 21-04-2008 12:28

Does anyone fancy joining our works Fantasy Cricket Superleague, done through the Telegraph website? Points are scored from the County Cricket (League, Twenty20, Pr40 and one-dayers) We need a few more teams involved so we get a few trophies for the winner.

PM me if interested.

Thanks.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by King On The Rye - 25-04-2008 10:22

This report in the Guardian has caused me a certain amount of concern. For the first time I get a clear vision of how everything I like about the game is going to be swept away in pursuit of money.

What really worries me, though, is that this six-team regional Twenty20 might prove to be very popular. I wouldn't go but if, say, London had Sachin Tendulkar and Ricky Ponting then plenty of people would, wouldn't they? But it's just so Harlem fucking Globetrotters.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 25-04-2008 10:24

And the idea of joining with Lancashire is just anathema...

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 25-04-2008 10:25

By the way, Hoggard's now taken all six Hampshire wickets to fall. What's the follow-on mark in county cricket these days?

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by The Purple Cow - 25-04-2008 11:38

The 18 counties are not going to vote for their own destruction. I think the Twenty20 Premiership will have to exist above and beyond the current structure.

There was talk of a winter league a year or so ago, a kind of traveling global Twenty20 road show playing in covered stadiums around the world. The Amsterdam Arena was listed as one possible venue.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by E10 Rifle - 25-04-2008 13:44

It's 150 behind, GO.

I like Twenty20, meself, but I do fear we're heading for the Rugby League-isation of cricket, big time, now.

I'd like the counties to stay, partly in acknowledgement of cricket's provincial and even rural strengths. Not everything has to be in big cities. This might sound odd from someone who's always banging on about how Essex should be playing

back at Ilford and Leyton, but cricket without its visits to Cheltenham and Worcester and the likes would lose a hell of a lot.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 25-04-2008 14:05

E10 Rifle wrote:

It's 150 behind, GO.It was fairly academic, 'cos they were 239 behind. So they're following on, but it's fucking raining...

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Nathan Helena Handcart - 25-04-2008 17:35

Are Middlesex so skint that they've bought old Dulwich Hamlet shirts?

Anyway, cricket. Is this the place to talk about the political economy of cricket?

I've always had a soft spot for country cricket in that most counties are mutual societies, much like member association clubs in football (Barca, Real Madrid, most bundesliga etc). It's noticeable that the profiteering going on in football, such as asset-strips of ground have been absent in cricket, not least because it can't be done here.

At the same time, you have a sense of that world disappearing, all the same, because it was swept away by dirty commerce. The counties are an anachronism in many respects (as are the county FAs in England for exactly the same reasons) and conurbation-based teams seems to chime better with most people's senses of identity. And the fact that the work-life balance in the UK is so fucked is always going to hurt a sport based on commitment as cricket is.

But why should it change? The counties are owned by people who aren't thrusting types wanting global domination. They seem reasonably happy with their lot. There's lots of fans who might not get to grounds much, but are passionate about their county team, so why the fuck should they change? It seems like a takeover by filthy lucre, in some misguided bollocks about 'growing the sport'. having seen where that leads in football, it all seems, well, just very very sad.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Sky_Blue_Sam - 25-04-2008 23:59

I would like to formally register my support for the county of Coventryshire.

However, before comitting myself to a season ticket purchase or anything, I would just like to confirm that there are no relegation battles in county cricket? Its just that my paranoia / apoplexy muscle could do with a rest during the summer.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by The Purple Cow - 26-04-2008 12:47

First, welcome to OTF SBS, secondly you make an interesting point about the lack of relegation. If one team ran away with the competition you could end up with a lot of dead rubbers by two thirds of the way into the season.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by King On The Rye - 28-04-2008 16:03

Yorkshire and Lancashire have rejected talk of a merger for a new Twenty20 competition. Not exactly encouraging news for the smaller counties, though.

Meanwhile, the New Zealand tourists are getting a batting lesson from a team who haven't been able to buy a win so far this season. This is only Tredwell's second first-class ton.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Etienne - 02-05-2008 16:48

Glory Be! Glamorgan have won a game.

Actually feeling almost optimistic this season. Wood and Dalrymple are solid players, Gillespie is a good choice of overseas player, Powell, Wharf and Harrison are back fit.

We may well manage to finish as high as 6th in Division 2. Can't see us doing much in the one-dayers though.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by barndoorio - 02-05-2008 17:03

Is it my imagination or is the FP trophy now featuring home and away games and Somerset are currently in a day nighter wiht Hampshire.

Is this new? Day nighters in this competition haven't been around long have they?

Have I just gone a bit mental?

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Tony C - 09-05-2008 18:54

God knows what's been happening at Old Trafford. It's been blsitering sunshine here for the best part of a week, the pitch must have been as dry as a bone and Lancashire win an incredibly low-scoring game in just over two days.

Batsmen today, eh? Tsk.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Etienne - 13-05-2008 12:50

In the game between Leicestershire and Northants today, the Leicestershire side is made up of 5 South Africans, 4 Englishmen, an Australian and a Jamaican. The Northants side has 5 South Africans, 5 Englishmen and an Irishman. It does make the decision to only allow one overseas player this season seem kind of pointless.

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Re:This could be the last time (county cricket)

Posted by Zenits date with Satans - 13-05-2008 13:07

Agreed, the Kolpak system is completely daft.

Here's some Englishmen stout and true (plus a Netherlander) sunning themselves in the varsity match.