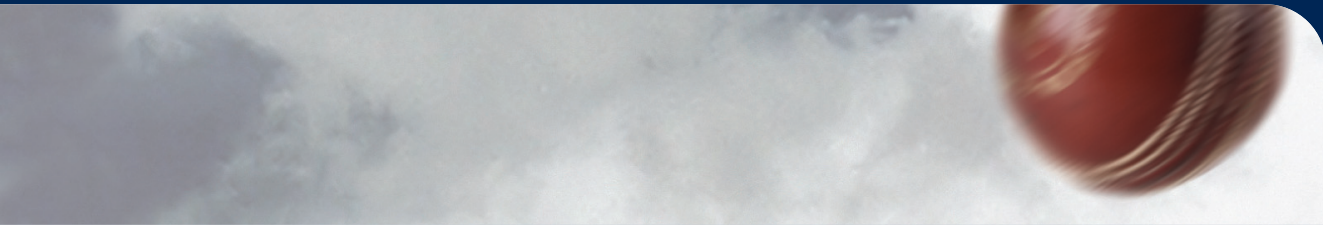


# TOUGHER STRUCTURES TO TEST COUNTY PLAYERS



A revised county structure to promote  
Intensity, Integrity and Quality of competition

3rd May 2007

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents the players' views on the competition structure of first class domestic cricket.

It is widely accepted that there is a need for change, yet there is too often a lack of consensus on the best way forward. Our review has taken a holistic approach by considering all the competitions together rather than adopting a piecemeal review of one competition at a time.

Players accept that while a perfect structure for the game is hard to achieve, with many differentials to take into account, some changes are needed to make the standard of cricket tougher.

We have established the definitive statement of players' views on the structure of domestic cricket. This is based on the responses of 320 professional cricketers, including England centrally contracted players.

### Core beliefs

Players know that the success of the England team and the success of the county game are inexorably linked. Playing considerations must be considered in unison with commercial factors.

Cricket is best served when the whole cricketing family works together in partnership.

### PCA aims

Competition structures to ensure maximum intensity, integrity and quality in each match.  
Focus on quality not quantity.

De-clutter the season so that it is easier for everyone to understand.

### Headline results of survey

95% of cricketers said the domestic structure should mirror international formats as closely as possible.  
93% of cricketers believed that the divisional structure with promotion and relegation worked well in the County Championship.

Only 23% of cricketers felt that the structure for 50 and 40-over cricket worked well in 2006.  
67% of cricketers said that there should be just three domestic competitions.

### PCA recommendations

County competitions must closely mirror the international competition set up.  
Keep current two division, four day County Championship structure, but reduce the number of overs to 96 in a day – moving closer to Test matches.

50-over competition to be prioritised and redesigned.

To abandon the 40-over format and focus on 50-overs mirroring the international set up.  
Invest in success – continue to grow the Twenty20 Cup.

## 2. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYERS' VIEWS

### General

88% of cricketers said that the structure of domestic cricket was 'very important' for developing the next generation of England players. 12% thought it 'important'.

### Amount of cricket

49% of cricketers thought that they played 'slightly too much' County cricket.

Only 28% thought that they play too much County Cricket.

### Competitions

95% of cricketers said that domestic competitions should mirror international formats as closely as possible.

67% of cricketers said that there should be just three domestic competitions.

58% reported that the current structures were cluttered and hard to follow.

89% of cricketers said it was important to have symmetrical competitions.

### County Championship

93% believed that the County Championship exists to produce England Test players.

96% of cricketers felt that Championship fixtures should be four-day games.

93% supported the divisional structure in the County Championship.

95% said that the Championship should be reduced from 104 overs per day to 96.

43% of players said the ideal amount of County Championship matches is 16 per season. 24% went for 12 matches, 23% for other numbers and 11% were unsure.

### One-Day Cricket

95% of cricketers believed that 50-over cricket is important for the development of our International One-day Cricketers.

Only 22% of cricketers thought that the new structures for 40 and 50-over cricket worked well in 2006.

Only 21% of cricketers said there was any place for 40-over cricket from both a cricket and commercial viewpoint.

78% of cricketers felt that the Twenty20 competition should be symmetrical – counties playing the others in their groups an equal number of times.

93% of cricketers believed that a Lord's final is crucial to 50-over cricket.

### 3. BACKGROUND

This paper is based on the views of the professional cricketers who make their living representing their counties and their country.

Players believe in the need for a flourishing county system that supports an excellent England team. This paper represents the players' views on the best structures to achieve both these aims.

**We believe that it is essential that any review of county structures looks at all aspects of the county game – rather than a piecemeal approach of just one competition at a time. That is why our research covered all the domestic competitions.**

#### Methodology

The PCA undertook an extensive round of consultation with its members in 2006. Detailed discussions took place on the structure of domestic cricket with senior players, county captains, the PCA Cricket Advisory Group and PCA representatives. The results of this consultation were reported back to both the ECB Cricket Committee in December 2006 and the Domestic Structure Review Group in January 2007.

Our initial findings were further supported by an in-depth questionnaire which was completed in March and April 2007. 320 players have responded to the questionnaire, including the members of England's World Cup squad. This represents a response rate of over 80% and provides the definitive views of professional cricketers in England and Wales.

This extensive sample of player views has been taken from the 18 Counties during PCA pre-season visits this spring. Each county was given a presentation on the research and we have learnt from the players' feedback. Players were questioned on all aspects of the current domestic structure. In addition, they were also shown an example of how the County Championship might look if it were changed to twelve matches in a three conference style format.

## 4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Our research has confirmed once again that the county structures are very important in developing the next generation of international players.

Despite this, 58% of players said that the current domestic cricket structures were cluttered and hard to follow. If this is the players' view, then spectators, television viewers and sponsors must find it similarly confusing and complicated. This lack of clarity in the competition structures severely limits domestic cricket's appeal to new spectators, broadcasters and sponsors.

### **95% of players said that domestic competitions should mirror their international formats as closely as possible.**

Mirroring the international game should achieve a structure that is both easier to follow and encourages spectators to move from international cricket to the county game. It will also make it easier for players to step up to the international arena and ensure that county cricket is supporting our international success.

This approach naturally leads to questioning the future of the 40-over one day competition.

### **67% of players would like to see just three competitions in domestic cricket.**

This would have financial implications but these could be overcome by expanding the commercially successful Twenty20 tournament. Furthermore, streamlining the competition structures by moving towards just three competitions would add value to sponsors by creating 'cleaner' sponsorship opportunities that are more accessible to spectators. We believe this would more than compensate for the loss of sponsorship revenues for the Pro40.

Domestic structures must look to incentivise and motivate sides to be competitive for as long as possible throughout the season.

Cricket needs to aim for a county game that has intensity, integrity and quality for every day, session and hour throughout the season. This is a vital ingredient in replicating the experience of international cricket at a county level and is one of the reasons that Twenty20 has done so well.

Any new structures need to address the commercial concerns of the counties. This means that it is necessary to look at the role of all the competitions together and then play to their individual strengths - whether commercial or cricketing.

## 5. FOUR DAY CRICKET

### Purpose of the Championship

#### **93% of cricketers said that the key objective of the County Championship was to produce Test cricketers.**

The Championship is not a key commercial driver for the counties. The future of the competition is heavily dependent upon the annual ECB subsidy to the counties. It is therefore helpful to consider the County Championship primarily as a development ground for International Cricket, funded by Test Cricket. This is in accordance with the ECB philosophy underpinning their strap line, "From playground to Test arena".

The best way of preparing players for Test matches is to have a County Championship that closely mirrors the format of Test matches.

### Promotion and Relegation

The large majority of players believe that promotion and relegation is vital for the health of the competition.

#### **71% of players do not believe that match intensity in the County Championship could be maintained without promotion and relegation.**

This is a powerful statistic and shows the value that the two division structure has brought to the Championship. Our research showed that whilst financial incentives can go some way to bringing about fiercer competition<sup>1</sup>, they would be a poor substitute for promotion and relegation.

To further emphasise the point, 93% of players said that the two division structure worked well. Discussions with players suggest that they see the quality of play in Division 1 as being roughly 20% higher than Division 2. This is because in many cases the better players play each other more often. It has also gone a long way to reducing the number of meaningless matches by ensuring that teams have more to play for, more often.

It is correct that two divisions mean that 9 clubs are unable to win the championship each season. However we believe that, no matter what the format, there are only a few clubs with a realistic chance of winning at the start of every season.

The two divisions provide three realistic and spectator friendly targets – winning promotion, avoiding relegation and winning the championship. This provides far more opportunities for each side whilst maintaining excitement and intensity throughout the season.

Finally, unlike the current structure, any proposal for three conferences (six teams in each) would mean that it could be possible to win the championship without necessarily playing the best teams. This is always a danger with non-symmetrical competitions and could explain why 89% of players said that a symmetrical system was important.

### Too much cricket?

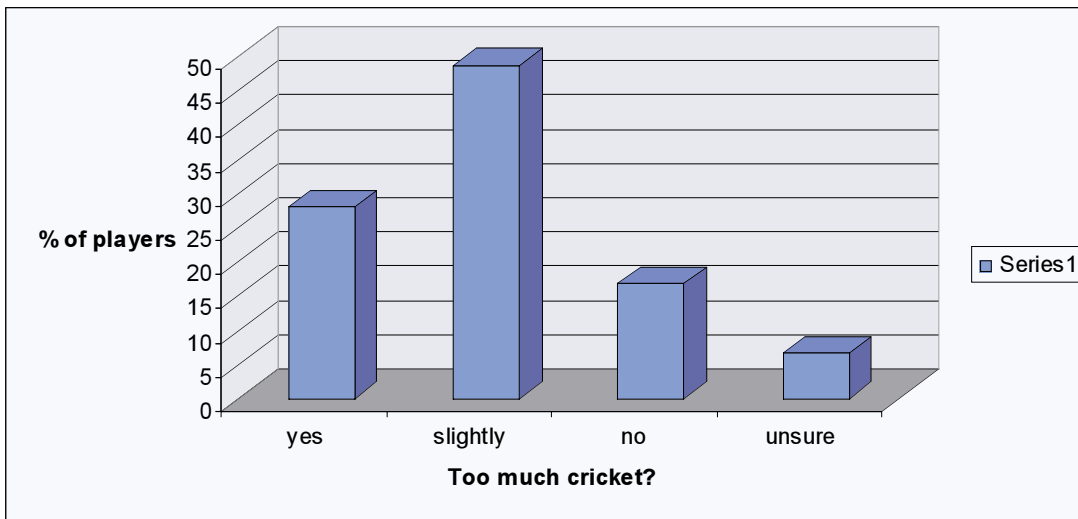
For some time, there have been many questions and comments on the amount of county cricket played. The general consensus was that we played too much cricket.

There have been calls for a new structure to the County Championship in order to reduce the amount of four day cricket by four matches per team – reducing the number of playing days by 16 (the conference idea mentioned previously). The players feel this type of proposal has emerged on the assumption that we play too much cricket and not enough thought has been given to the formats played.

Interestingly the players' responses suggest that there is only 'slightly too much' county cricket being played.

<sup>1</sup> 46% of players felt that match intensity could be achieved through financial incentives, 39% were unsure and 15% said that it could not.

## Do you believe we play too much county cricket?



We do not believe that players want to see the County Championship dramatically altered. When players were asked what was their ideal number of Championship matches, the most popular response was sixteen.<sup>2</sup>

**The existing Championship structure was supported by players with just a few small tweaks needed to bring it more into line with Test Cricket.**

**95% of players thought that a reduction from 104 to 96 overs a day would bring benefits to the game.<sup>3</sup>**

This reduction in overs would bring the County Championship closer to Test Matches as well as bringing England into line with other Test Playing Nations<sup>4</sup>.

This small change would generate the equivalent of four days reduced workload over the course of a season, whilst not affecting the actual number of playing days<sup>5</sup>.

The change to shorter sessions would also ensure that the better bowlers were used for a higher proportion of the match. This will improve standards, intensity and competition.

It is necessary to consider the effect of the weather on our proposal for a reduction in overs. The players proposed that there should be provision to make up 30 minutes of play on each day or carried over to days two and three. This would help to offset any loss of overs due to the weather and give maximum opportunity for matches to reach a natural outcome.

**One of the issues consistently raised by players during discussions with the PCA was the desire to reduce back-to-back matches.**

Less back-to-back matches would enable more recovery time and mean that players played at a higher intensity. More effort must be made with the schedule to ensure that this can happen.

The players support the decision to allow the new ball to be taken after 80 overs. This will bring many benefits by removing some of the poorest passages of cricket. Despite this, the players were disappointed that there was no reduction in the number of overs per day for the 2007 season.

**A sixteen match two division County Championship is not a key commercial driver for the counties. Nevertheless, our research shows that the players believed it was the best competition format for producing future test players.**

<sup>2</sup> See Page 3 'Headline Analysis of the Questionnaire' for full details

<sup>3</sup> See appendix A for full list of these benefits

<sup>4</sup> Australia and South Africa: 96 overs a day  
Pakistan and India: 90 overs a day

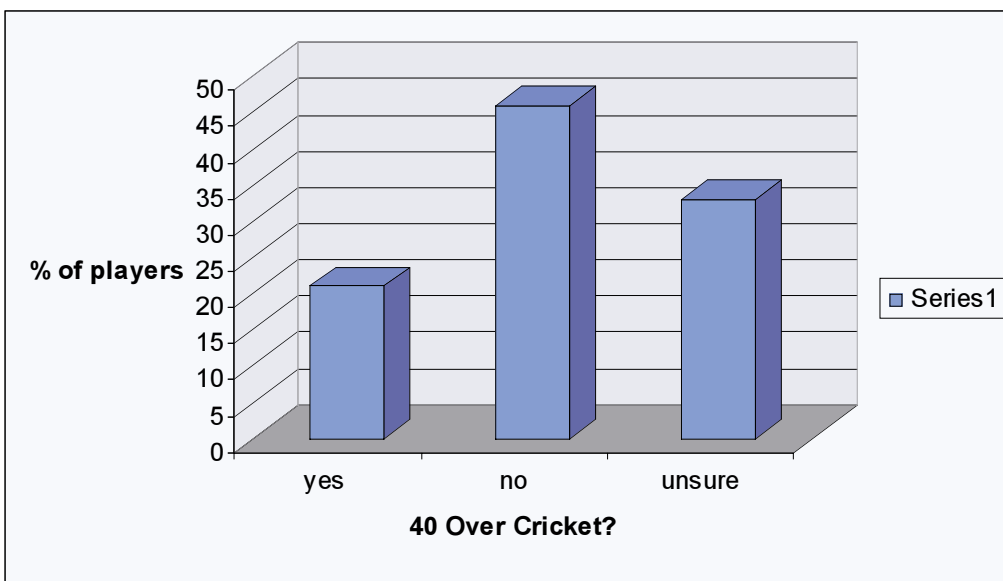
<sup>5</sup> The reduction saves 8 overs per day (for the first three days) = 384 overs per season = 3.7 days

## 6. 50 AND 40-OVER CRICKET

**Worryingly, only 22% of cricketers thought that the new structures for 50 and 40-over cricket worked well in 2006. This is a damning statistic and a strong call for change.**

50-over cricket is the premier International One Day format. One of the core threads of this report is that the players believe that the domestic game must mirror the International game as closely as possible. 95% of players said that 50-over cricket was important to the development of our International One Day Team. The same cannot be said of 40-over matches.

### Is there a place for 40-over cricket from a cricket and commercial viewpoint?



The majority of players felt that 40-over cricket has no future in the new competition structures. Removing the Pro40 would help to make the structure of county competitions less cluttered and easier to follow.

These benefits need to be balanced against the loss of ticket sales and commercial income from the loss of the competition. We believe that these could be offset by increasing the number of Twenty20 and 50-over matches. The loss of the Pro40 as a commercial sponsorship property would be mitigated by the resultant increase in the value of the remaining one-day competitions. Sponsors generally prefer cleaner sponsorship opportunities and will normally pay a premium for these.

**We recommend that the Pro40 should cease to be a part of domestic competition structures. There should be an increased focus on 50-over matches and the Twenty20 Cup.**

## 50-Over Cricket

The existing 50-over competition structure is in need of major improvements.

2006 saw far too many meaningless matches in the C&G Trophy. This resulted in some Counties treating the later part of the Trophy as a training competition entering weakened teams. This approach created a major lack of intensity, integrity and quality.

The introduction of semi-finals in 2007 is a step in the right direction. But it still falls short of the structural change that is required to ensure that more teams retain a chance of winning the competition for longer.

### A new structure

We propose learning from the success of Twenty20 and applying its format to 50-over cricket.

The new structure should be based upon a three conference competition consisting of six teams in each conference<sup>6</sup>. Each team would play every team in the other two conferences home or away - creating a minimum of 12 preliminary matches.

### How the three conferences might look

Conference 1	Conference 2	Conference 3
Warwickshire	Yorkshire	Worcestershire
Lancashire	Nottinghamshire	Kent
Somerset	Sussex	Surrey
Derbyshire	Glamorgan	Northamptonshire
Gloucestershire	Essex	Durham
Middlesex	Hampshire	Leicestershire

The teams could be allocated into the different conferences according to a random draw to take place each year. This would have the added advantage of creating a unique TV event of the draw.

Alternatively, the group stages could be regional as is the case with the Twenty20 Cup. This would protect local derbies and hence could lead to greater commercial exploitation. A regional structure for the initial league stage would also reduce travel times and therefore create space to practise.

Regardless of the method of allocating teams to each conference, the mechanism for progressing would be the same. The top two teams in each conference would go through to the knock out stage, and would be joined by the two third placed teams with the highest points.

Eight clubs qualifying for the knock-out stage would mean that more clubs would retain the prospect of qualification for more of the season. This would help to ensure maximum intensity of competition throughout the initial league stage.

The knock out phase would consist of quarter and semi-finals followed by a Lord's final.

**93% of players said that a Lord's final was crucial to the competition.**

<sup>6</sup> A format designed to amalgamate the best features of the old B&H (zonal) and C&G (knock-out) competitions.

## 7. Twenty20 CUP

The introduction of Twenty20 has been one of the outstanding success stories in the domestic competition structure.

Twenty20 provides excellent entertainment in front of large vocal crowds; it is a leading revenue generator for the counties; and an accessible and exciting introduction to cricket for new spectators.

This commercial success is complemented by the support of players for the new game. They said it was exciting to play and provided maximum intensity. Discussions with cricketers also highlighted that playing in front of large, vocal crowds helped to replicate the thrill of the international arena.

Our research suggests that Twenty20 was increasingly seen as a premier tournament by players who loved playing in front of the large crowds.

We propose building upon this success story by expanding the Twenty20 competition. 78% of players said the Twenty20 cup should be symmetrical – that is, all Counties playing each other an equal number of times. This is a small change which would add an additional two matches for each team in the initial league stage. Such a change would make the competition fairer and maintain integrity.

We fully support the current structure of three regional groups which protects the very popular local derbies. Playing every team home and away will add value to this exciting competition and remove the anomaly of an asymmetrical competition.

Importantly, the Twenty20 is viewed by players as something of a mini-break due to the reduced workload and the two 'natural' weeks off (four day fixture breaks) either side of the competition. In other words there is both a sound commercial and cricketing reason for growing the existing competition.

### **The Twenty20 Cup should be expanded by two matches so that the teams play each other home and away in each of the three regional groups.**

We would also recommend that the Twenty20 Cup is moved back a month in the fixture schedule.

This could allow for no international fixtures to be scheduled in this period, therefore enabling England players the opportunity to play in the game's key commercial domestic competition.

Placing the competition in the middle of the traditional school summer holidays would allow greater opportunity for children and families to attend. This would maximise the Cup's potential as an exciting introduction to cricket for new family audiences. For more information please see the proposed fixture schedule in Appendix B.

## 8. EFFECTS ON PLAYING DAYS

### Current number of days

	Minimum Days	Quarters	Semis	Final/ Play-offs	Minimum Total	Maximum Total
<b>4 Days</b>	64				64	64
<b>50 Over</b>	9		10	11	9	11
<b>40 Over</b>	8			9	8	9
<b>20 Over</b>	8	9	10	10	8	10
					<b>89</b>	<b>94</b>

### Number of days under PCA Proposals

	Minimum Days	Quarters	Semis	Final	Minimum Total	Maximum Total
<b>4 Days</b>	64				64	64
<b>50 Over</b>	12	13	14	15	12	15
<b>40 Over</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>20 Over</b>	10	11	12	12	10	12
					<b>86</b>	<b>91</b>

The new competition structure will create three days less cricket. This is in addition to the proposed reduction in overs in County Championship matches which in itself is equivalent to 3.7 days.

**The proposed new competition structures will create a minimum of three free days and a reduced workload of almost four days in the County Championship.**

New structures need to consider the impact on the number of days' cricket that County Members will see. Whilst members will lose four Pro40 matches, this will be offset by an additional Twenty20 match and one more 50-over match.

**Our proposals will result in just one day less cricket for county members.**

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

Communication between all cricket's stakeholders is the key to moving forward in partnership.

The role of County Cricket as a development arena for International cricket must be balanced with the commercial needs of the Counties. There needs to be clear communication and agreement on County cricket's "raison d'être".

Radical change to the structures of the county games is unlikely to be acceptable to all stakeholders and in all probability it is not needed. The subtle but important changes outlined by the players in this paper are designed to retain the support of all stakeholders whilst bringing about significant improvements in our county structures.

We should remember that in 2005 England won the Ashes with the present structure and its centrally contracted players. The poor performances this winter do not suddenly mean our structure needs radical overhaul. Mitigating circumstances have and did affect performances, not least the fact that four of the Ashes winning side of 2005 were unavailable.

The players' proposals are based more on evolution than revolution. Aligning the domestic competition structure to the international formats will bring both playing and commercial benefits. The proposed structures will:

- Provide a more appropriate breeding ground for future International players.
- Reduce the workload on players by 8% whilst only reducing the number of days' cricket for members by 0.5%.<sup>7</sup>
- De-clutter the season and make it easier for fans to follow, thereby increasing its attractiveness to members, television and sponsors.

Players strongly supported the current Two Division County Championship system with its sixteen matches a season.

Any moves to reduce the County Championship to a twelve match, three group conference or any other format, needs to be balanced against the feedback within this document. Clearly a reduction in the number of days' cricket may be of benefit but if it is at the expense of intensity of competition then the change would be counter productive.

Rather than reduce the number of four-day matches, players would prefer the number of overs per day to be reduced. 95% of players wanted to see the number of overs in the County Championship cut from 104 to 96 a day. This would bring the four-day game closer to Test Cricket and reduce player workloads – with no loss of commercial income.

Players said that the existing 50 and 40-over tournaments were failing and needed to be fundamentally redesigned.

A new three conference structure for 50-over cricket, combined with quarter finals, will reduce the number of meaningless matches. This will rejuvenate the competition by creating more competitive and intense (and hence commercially attractive) cricket. We have outlined two possible mechanisms for allocating teams to each conference – a random draw and regional groupings. The players' preference is for a random draw but regional groupings would be an effective compromise.

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<sup>7</sup> In 2007 the minimum number of days cricket per team is 16 four day matches and 25 one day matches = 89 days cricket. A reduction of 6.7 days cricket is equivalent to 5.9% (including reduction of overs per day in four day cricket)

Members currently see 45 days cricket a season. The proposed structures would reduce this to 44.

The Pro40 competition is not relevant and does not achieve the required cricketing outcomes and therefore should be lost. The 50-over game is preferred on cricketing grounds and Twenty20 is commercially more successful.

The Twenty20 Cup has been one of the best ever innovations in the County structure. This is an English success story that is being replicated around the world. Domestic cricket should build upon this success by increasing the league phase of the tournament to ten matches. This is a natural expansion.

The proposals for the new competition structures need to be considered within the cricketing calendar. As noted earlier we feel that moving the Twenty20 Cup into the school summer holidays would bring even more new spectators into the game. The calendar is considered in more detail in Appendix B. Our calendar demonstrates how the proposed structure could fit into this season's fixture schedule. We believe that this schedule goes a long way towards providing an attractive menu for players, supporters, sponsors and importantly broadcasters.

Finally, whilst competition structures are the single most important feature of any comprehensive review of cricket, there are other areas that need to be considered.

During our discussions with players the following issues were also raised:

- International workloads and opportunities for England players to compete at domestic level more often.
- The volume of University matches, their first class status and their eligibility.
- The volume of tourist matches.
- Opportunity for England A fixtures and their necessity.
- The inclusion of Scotland and Ireland within our domestic structure.
- The appropriateness of 'ad-hoc' one day games and competitions arranged by Counties.
- The structure of recreational cricket and how it can be enhanced to produce cricketers 'ready made' for the professional game

These areas will need to be considered in due course, but they must not delay the agreement and introduction of new domestic competition structures as soon as practically possible.

## **The Benefits of a reduction in the number of overs from 104 to 96 for the first three days of County Championship matches.**









- It would bring first class cricket closer in line with Test Match cricket.
- All stakeholders agree that we play slightly too much cricket.
- Reduce chances of injury when players are tired in longer sessions.
- Keep cricketers fresher to perform at a higher level.
- Shorter sessions ensure better bowlers bowl more often throughout game – improving standards, intensity and competition.
- Mirror other domestic cricket in Test playing nations.
- Has unanimous backing by the players.
- Members will see a higher standard of cricket.
- It would reduce the workload by 3.7 days over the season but would not reduce actual playing days  
County members would still see the same number of days' cricket.
- A focus on quality not quantity.
- Not so much a structural changes but rather a minor playing conditions change to enhance quality of cricket.
- A good move, taking the game forward in a positive way.
- Less is more in this case.

# Appendix B

## A new calendar

Draft 2007 Outline Schedule <b>PCA</b>																																					
	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W							
April						1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
																									1								2	World			
																																				Cup Fs	
May	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31						
		3					1	2		4						3			5			4			6			5	6		7						
June				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30				
							7			8					8		9				9			10			10			11							
July					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
							11			12			Wim Fs		13			13	14																		
Aug		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31					
Sept					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30			

	Test Matches		Twenty20 internationals
	Daytime ODIs		potential slots for test to allow clean Twenty20 zonal stage
	Floodlit ODIs (3 out of 4)		
	Liverpool Victoria County Championship		
	Trophy		
	Twenty20 Cup		

3 conferences, 12 matches, quarters, semis. Season long.  
10 matches (both Option 1 and Option 2)



**Professional Cricketers' Association**

5 Utopia Village  
7 Chalcot Road  
Primrose Hill  
London NW1 8LH

Commercial: 0207 449 4226  
Player Services: 0207 449 4229  
Events: 0207 449 4221  
Fax: 0207 586 8520

**[www.thepca.co.uk](http://www.thepca.co.uk)**