



LETTERS

MINORITY VIEW

NOT for the life of me see point in the new two-division p. The all-play-all four-day programme has worked during its reign in improving the physical and mental quality of players supplied to the Test team. I ask an Australian who has been in or watched the Tests at Wastons or The Oval in 1997, why South African last season. The consequence of this over-plan will be that the best players will be concentrated in the top teams. A good thing? With seven Tests and 10 Day Internationals each

The very best teams will be punished even more severely under the present system in being arbitrarily reduced to two and XIs for more than half of Championship fixtures. International players can also be on the diktat of the ECB. The table will generally be decided by whichever team has the largest squad or the best team and fewest stars, not the quality outfits – Surrey being a typical example who will risk promotion and then a soccer-style loss of stars. Camelot should be the Championship sponsors. The system must be pursued, the best two divisions of 12, the top Minor Counties such as Wiltshire and Devon a year just as Durham had theirs 10 years ago. Promotion and relegation can form a link with the best of the Minors, giving a wider spread of talent and more class fixtures, not fewer.

STEPHEN M. LARK
Witch, Suffolk.

SURREY REUNITED

KHAM, Butt, Cole, Scholes, Neville brothers. Now read part. Thorpe, Butcher, Brown, Gubby, Tudor, the Hollioakes. Is there any similarity? All have been England players recently in respective sports, and all represent one team, in the case of cricketers, Surrey. Or rather play for Surrey occasionally. In the last few years Surrey has fielded a weakened side for parts of the season due to international commitments and

requests for players to be rested.

Of course I want England to do well but the price one county has to pay is too great. Imagine what Alex Ferguson would say if he lost all his internationals for half of the football season, which would cost them the Premiership.

Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Glamorgan, all recent County Champions, complain about their lack of Test selections. I hope they realise how lucky they are.

JOHN ALSTON

Bourne, Lincs.

IT NEVER RAINS...

THE RAIN rule suggested by George Christos in the December issue was rejected by the ECB some time ago. Making batsmen forfeit their innings would mean a fundamental change to the nature of the game, which we did not consider acceptable.

His criticisms of the D/L method are not justified. It takes full account of any differences in the performances of the teams and ensures that any advantage gained is maintained across an interruption. Changes described



as 'patching' were made after a detailed review at the end of the first full season of use in October 1997 and were largely to simplify the calculations. There is now only one table but this is identical to the corresponding table used in 1997. No changes have been made since and none is planned.

Our scorers are quite happy with it and do not need 'on-going training'. Although they have a computer programme to assist in providing quick and accurate information, the calculations can be carried out using nothing more than the single table of numbers and a pocket calculator.

Finally, let me put the record straight on the infamous England v South Africa World Cup semi-final. The figures stated are wrong. If the D/L method had been in operation South Africa's target from their one remaining ball would have been three runs.

JOHN CARR
ECB Director of Cricket Operations

...BUT IT POURS

JOHN CARR wrote to me on April 3, 1997 after I sent him a copy of my paper which appeared in the December issue, outlining my wicket-averaging method for rain-affected matches. This was my first encounter with the Duckworth/Lewis method. Mr Carr said: 'Clearly your proposed system is easier to understand for players and spectators.'

Now Mr Carr claims that my method represents a fundamental change to the game as batsmen would have to forfeit their innings, but in a rain-reduced match the tailenders do not get to bat in any case. Making the rules unnecessarily complicated, as in the D/L method, represents a much bigger change to the game. Originally the D/L method used 51 tables for all matches ranging from 10 to 60 overs. Those tables have been replaced by just one.

Mr Carr also says no further changes have been made since October 1997 and none is planned, but at a conference in Australia in July 1998, Dr Tony Lewis delivered a paper with a section called 'Modifications to D/L', summarising the changes made since 1997. An example is the averaged projected score to correct this problem: Team 1 is 80 for 0 after 10 overs, it rains, and the match is reduced to 10 overs. Using the condensed D/L table, Team 2 would be set a target of 282 runs in 10 overs.

Even this was not enough to resolve a dilemma noticed by an MCC scorer: Team 1 survives the first ball, it rains and the match is reduced to 10 overs a side. If Team 1 made 60, the target for Team 2 would be 71, though there is little difference between the two innings. If Team 1 made 120 Team 2's target would be 92. The problem was 'patched' by introducing an 'if' statement in computer programming language, which led to a different formula depending on the situation. Another change was introducing penalties for slow bowling.

As a mathematician I do not believe the D/L method is as simple as Mr Carr asserts. At the Gold Coast conference, Dr Lewis also told us that Minor County scorers, who did not have laptops with D/L software, would need special training. Staff at the ECB responsible for training scorers attended a workshop on the D/L method early in 1998.

Finally I have rechecked my calculations for that World Cup semi-final and I have not made any error as claimed by Mr Carr. D/L would give South Africa a target of 255, three runs more than England scored, but since South Africa were 231 for 6, they would have needed 24 off the last

ball. This shows the complexity. The public and players need to understand the method in order to plan strategies during the match.

DR GEORGE CHRISTOS
Perth, Western Australia.

PITCH AND PUTT

I AM sure cricket lovers in the London area will be as shocked as I was to learn that the splendid cricket pitch at the 'Lensbury Club' in Teddington is threatened with destruction. On a delightful riverside location, this high-quality pitch has been used by Middlesex Second XI in recent years and was one of the grounds used for the Under-15 world championship in 1996.

The club is restructuring, as its corporate owners are unwilling to continue to support it financially. This is forcing them to seek other sources of income and one of the solutions is to convert the pitch into a 'Golf Court' – a sort of superior pitch and putt course.

I understand that the proposed redevelopment will not take place before the end of the 1999 season. But the club has advised me they are not even prepared to do the winter work to ensure the pitch is ready for next year.

As a former player of Lensbury I hope that if enough pressure is applied, the club will reconsider its decision and at least ensure

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