



ECB Yorkshire South Premier League

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Chairman's Pre-Season Blog

Well, we are nearly there again! I hope you have all wintered well and, like me, are looking forward with anticipation to the new season.

It has been a memorable close-season in the Pugh household. As I recorded last October, I have become a grandfather, and after a very difficult first three months, Millie is developing into a very bright and lovely little girl – I do sometimes wonder who entertains who! Despite Mrs P's magnificent efforts, I have managed to lose a few pounds – largely due to my walking regime, I think – and in January I was honoured to be asked to take over as the Hull KR club historian. After our remarkable 'defeat from the jaws of victory' performance in the 'million pound' game last October, all has gone smoothly on the field so far – although our weakened side will surely be beaten in France today. It will though, be the seven games in August and September that will decide our fate.



Cricket work usually progresses steadily over the winter, with a build-up as we approach the start of the season. All that has been in our control has gone smoothly, but this year we have had the fall-out from the stand-off between ECB, who want all Premier Leagues to move to the revamped Play Cricket platform, and CricHq, who own Total Cricket Scorer. Our scoring gurus, Steve Ward and Kevin Motley, tell me that the Play Cricket scoring solution will not yet meet our needs, and we have opted to use an updated TCS package – which should enable live scores, but will cause a little additional work for our scorers in downloading to Play Cricket.

The clubs' pre-season meeting took place last Wednesday. I gave a short presentation on the rule changes for league games – the most important of which are the move to 12 noon starts and the simplified 'time lost' rules for recalculating the overs after weather interruptions. We also heard from our CWO, Ray Knowles, that clubs must take responsibility for ensuring that all relevant personnel are DBS checked and trained on child welfare issues; Simon Widdup spoke about how umpires will deal with disciplinary offences; and Gareth Davis updated us on Club Mark and the new All Stars programme for introducing children to the game at an early age – surely of crucial importance to us all in ensuring the future of the game. It was a smooth and quiet meeting, and Terry Bentham remarked to me afterwards that this was a sign that people are happy about what we are doing – 'if they weren't, you'd have had a barrage of questions,' he said.

The excellent *Rotherham Advertiser* rang me last week for my thoughts on the new season. I thought I said a lot and nothing at the same time. I agreed that after their great achievements last season Thornes are the team to beat – but that I'm sure other teams will be determined to knock them off their perch. Trying to maintain neutrality, I would not be drawn on who will win the league – I think that half a dozen teams are in with a decent shout. More than one club official has said to me that they are optimistic, but feel that they lack one top batsman, a strike bowler, or a slow bowler – or whatever. I think that the truth is that rarely is a club ever totally satisfied with their squads; they'd all like to strengthen in one way or another, but someone will win the league despite that! Transfers are still coming through, overseas players are generally an unknown quantity until they actually start playing – so it is very difficult to predict until we actually get going.

So, for me, there is an element of lottery about how it will all pan out. Nonetheless, I have given Mrs P a sealed envelope with a name on it, to be opened at the end of the season. I apologise in advance to the club named, because I was wrong last season. I do think that our new clubs will strengthen the league, and it should be even more competitive. The *Advertiser* asked me about relegation too, and I refused to speculate. I really don't want to lose any of our clubs but I know two will have to go – I suspect it may simply come down to who is most unfortunate with the weather, form and injuries.

It will be good to welcome back two old friends into Yorkshire Premier League cricket – Richard Wilkinson, with Whitley Hall, and James Osmond at Cleethorpes (hopefully James will also be able to get brother Alex back for the full season too). Whilst wishing all our chairman and their clubs the very best of luck for the coming season, there are a few I would like to single out. Michael Heseltine at Sheffield & Phoenix has had far from the best of luck over the last 12 months or more, and his job has been made more difficult than it should have been. He has worked very hard on behalf of his club, and I hope that work pays off for him. Barnsley Woolley start their first season as an amalgamated club – these things are never easy, and I hope that the merger is a success for them. Hallam and Tickhill will experience Premier league cricket for the first time – I hope they enjoy it and that it is worth all the efforts they have put in to achieve their aims.

I make no apology for closing by repeating my remarks at the end of Wednesday's meeting. Our league officials who do the jobs that are so important to the smooth running of the leagues are all volunteers – they are not paid for what they do and don't have to do it – please make their jobs easier by completing the various admin tasks timeously – we only ask the minimum! Secondly, I was really proud of what we achieved as a new league last year – of how we pulled together, and of our competitiveness and disciplinary record – and I think we can do even better this year. Finally, I am always at the end of the phone or email if you think something is wrong, or have any suggestions – please don't hesitate to get in touch on 07887 732176 or chairman@yspl.co.uk.

Mrs P and I will, of course, continue our regular Saturday visits to our grounds – starting this week with Tickhill for the visit of Thornes (which was an obvious pick really) and look forward to seeing everyone during the course of the season!

All the very best to you all – whether players, officials, scorers, umpires – or supporters! Till next week,

Roger