

SURREY ASSOCIATION OF CRICKET OFFICIALS

CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE 2024 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

I have to admit that this year has been challenging from both an ACO perspective and from a personal perspective. Not only have I been trying to cover the Education and Scorer's Officer role but my personal life has been expectedly busy, so I am grateful that Seb and Stephen have come forward through the year and started taking over these roles. I know that I will not have delivered any of the three roles to the level that I would have liked and ask you to be understanding if I have not managed to progress an issue that is important to you.

Locally I think that the Surrey ACO has continued to do a good job for umpires and scorers operating within the county, although our ability to train umpires has been significantly hampered by national decisions.

Not wanting to repeat what Graeme is going to say, the issue of umpire regrading and promotion has not gone smoothly. There were clerical errors at the ECB ACO which have taken a lot of effort to get corrected. There was a review and change of which grade umpiring in the different leagues was seen, but this was not reflected through into umpires grading. To get to see how the promotion process worked, I signed up to get a promotion and was disappointed at the end of the year to find that I had been unsuccessful. This disappointment was intensified when it became clear that it was due to a combination of poor information from the ECB ACO and a lack of willingness to accept that the information should have been better. On your behalf I want to say a big thank you to Graeme for his efforts to plot a path through this process and to get as many of these errors corrected as he has.

I had a personal meeting with David Elworthy at the Regional Conference in January to discuss "Is the ECB ACO serving either its members or in the senior leagues in Surrey?" because I had concerns about the situation with umpire training and the grading / promotion process. It was a very friendly meeting where David suggested that there had been significant miscommunication about umpire training and I thought that he had agreed to resolve the issue with grading if I gave him the details. I struggle to see how the poor/contradictory communications are not the responsibility of the centre and am yet to see any evidence that the grading issues are being resolved.

Personally and collectively, we the SACO, are committed to developing umpires whether that be through to the national panel and beyond or simply to be the best umpire they can be, but the tools and rules that we are working with and under make that very difficult. For example, the current grading structure and process is positively unhelpful to the Surrey Championship and hence is relatively irrelevant.

As you will be aware cricket within Surrey is undergoing a restructuring. I have been asked to be part of the both the Officiating and Governance workstreams. After the resignation of the chair of the Officiating workstream, I was asked to lead that work stream. It is difficult to be sure what we will do until we have more information on both the new structure and the number of umpires who wish to be on the panel, but initial thinking is:

Four levels of umpiring within the new competition:

- Level 1 – Panel appointed umpires

SURREY ASSOCIATION OF CRICKET OFFICIALS

CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE 2024 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

- Level 2 – Only accredited umpires supplied by the clubs – possibly supported by a bureau.
- Level 3 – Certified umpire priority - if a team provides a certified umpire and the other does not, the certified umpire stands at the bowlers end through-out.
- Level 4 – the rest – where we will look to train those who umpire to be the best that they can be.

Levels 1,2 & 3 will be supported by captains reports to help us identify training needs or the few bad apples that need to be restricted in the umpiring that they are allowed to do.

It has also been note that clubs in the Surrey Cricket league are currently supported by a panel of umpires, but in the new structure they will be at a level which is unlikely to be supported by an umpiring panel. The current expectation is that there will be transitional arrangements where the SCL teams will each have an umpire appointed to their matches for the first few seasons, but equally the umpires from that panel will have the opportunity to stay with the arrangement or move to the central panel.

At the moment there is no real progress on what, if anything, would happen for scorers in the new structure. It is hope that there will be minimum standards defined as to what scorers can expect when they arrive to score at matches at the different levels.

One of the main activities that I have undertaken in the last year is the running of an Umpires Panel and Bureau for the Surrey Women's cricket league. This has been successful and will be expanded for 2024.

I am keen to look at how we can give aspiring young players with more understanding and knowledge about the game and how it is umpired and scored. I did not manage to make any progress with the Performance Program, but the Foundation has a new program the "SCCC State School Sixth Form Programme", where 6th formers are getting Cricket training in addition to their normal 6th form work. I am going into see them in March.

There have been a couple of disciplinary matters worthy of note; the first where a captain used one word in a common statement which was race based; he and his club were strongly disciplined by their league in collaboration with the ECB. The other where a club captain, with a track record of poor behaviour, accused two umpires of being racists for no other obvious reason than he did not like their decisions. The sanction from the league was not strong and when the umpires took the matter the ECB Diversity group the response was slow in coming and gave the umpires no support. The last that I heard the two umpires are no longer standing. I have tried to get some clarification on the apparent inconsistency but have struggled to get any explanation or advice to pass on to leagues as to how they should handle similar situation should they encounter them in the future.

At the local level we continue to do what we do in an effective and professional manner; for which I am grateful to the SACO Committee members for all of their hard work.

Dave Walter - Chair SACO, March 2024