



2020/21 ESCA AGM - President's Report

Date

25th January 2021

To say 2020 was a challenging year would be somewhat of an understatement. This time it wasn't the weather for once; though it tried its best. Although I am sure there will be some pessimists who will claim foresight of a global pandemic, I'm not sure many of us could have fully predicted the impact on our lives or, albeit on a smaller scale, the impact the pandemic would have on a Scottish cricket season.

Whilst the challenges of fast moving situation and almost hourly changes in the middle to end of March were one thing, the planning required to restart any form of cricket in 2020 was quite another. In writing this and reflecting on what we managed of a season, I have to say we were lucky to even get the matches we did play. At one point on a regional call, the abandonment of all cricket was put forward by more than one individual.

However, to me, it was always hugely important to get some cricket and avoid 2020 becoming a 'lost season'; very much a reality for rugby this season. I'll not go as far as to say it was a successful season, however in getting some cricket and keeping some engagement, we will hopefully have kept some players, young and old, interested and avoid losing yet more to golf or home projects. It was also important to show key decision makers that cricket can be considered lower risk and a health benefit, despite having been initially classed as a contact sport involving a "natural vector of disease".

There are plenty people to whom clubs and players should show their appreciation for what was achieved in 2020. I'd like to start by thanking CS. We know that social media can be an unforgiving place and there were certainly some very vocal individuals when things started to open back up, apart from cricket. However, without their efforts in lobbying sportscotland and turning their thinking round, we would have had no cricket this year.

I would also like to thank you, the clubs and your members, for showing us the patience that was necessary to allow us to get fixtures and protocols sorted. We know that the regionalisation caused challenges for clubs, particularly those who were restricted by travelling or those who ended up with some mismatches in games.

Fixture replanning would not have been possible without help, particularly when ground availability was uncertain. As such, additional thanks to Grange, Carlton, Stewart's Melville, Heriots, Edinburgh Accies and IPCSC/Edinburgh South; all of whom were supportive when we were seriously considering needing to look at a small number of grounds acting as neutral venues. Thanks to John Blain, Fraser Watts and Robin Pollok for their organisation of the EPL Super 6 fixtures.

A huge and continued thanks goes to our sponsors at Baillie Gifford, Felsham PD and Readers for their support, even in an abridged season. Their continued support is

appreciated and is absolutely vital to the development, growth and playing of grassroots Cricket in the region.

I'd also like to thank my ESCA committee colleagues and advisors for the effort put in to ultimately make this happen. I'd like to thank David Gibson and Phil Yelland in particular for their support around some of the more difficult decisions and being reliable sounding boards for my, at times, frustrated ramblings. I cannot reiterate enough that the ESCA committee members are all volunteers and gave up significant chunks of their own time to make some cricket happen; something that isn't always remembered, particularly with respect to the aforementioned social media.

Our focus switches quickly to 2021 and the planning for ESCA has already started. We have already met with CS and the other regional associations to discuss common challenges, sharing of ideas and scenario planning. Although we are planning (and hoping) for something akin to a 'normal' season, openly and honestly, we will unlikely know until March or even April what the season will look like. Depending on both Scottish Government and sportscotland guidance, particularly with respect to tiers, travel restrictions and timing of the opening back up of the country, we may need to review the start date of the season or review the structure of the league competitions. We will need to understand the viability of the EPL and potential regionalisation, fortunately for which we already have help from John Blain and team again.

After the formal business of tonight is concluded, we plan to break out into smaller club engagement sessions to hear from clubs. Whilst some of the discussion will inevitably involve some crystal ball gazing, we want to get some formal feedback from clubs on 2020, any challenges that are foreseen (particularly with respect to participation) and identify what may need to be put in place for 2021. As part of these discussions, I want to encourage clubs to continue to be open minded as to what form cricket may need to take and, particularly in the lowest leagues, recognise that flexibility and collaboration is likely to benefit all parties in the longer term.

One thing I do want to put back on the radar for 2021 is player conduct. A short and predominantly friendly fixture based structure last year largely gave the discipline sub-committee some well deserved rest from dealing with 'incidents'. With 2021 hopefully reverting to competitive cricket, I would like remind clubs that we are largely amateur cricketers in the East and a win at all costs mentality is not something we should also be reverting to. CS will be introducing a change to the code of conduct that we will expect clubs to adhere to, with further work being undertaken by ESCA's own discipline sub-committee.

In closing, I note that this will be my final year of Presidency at ESCA and, although I do promise a smoother transition than that seen across the Atlantic, I do want to put in place some further changes in committee structure and develop a formal 5 year plan to benefit the game in the East. As can be seen in the AGM papers, we have a number of individuals who have put their hat in the ring with respect to committee and sub-committee roles. Whilst there are still conversations to be undertaken around the finer point of the roles, I am hoping some fresh faces and ideas can benefit us all, particularly with respect to Annette Aitken-

Drummond and how we will look to develop Women and Girls' cricket. We are also still looking for a couple of key roles to be filled, not least secretary, where Jim Brims steps down from the role, and is remaining on the committee. I'd like to place on record my gratitude to to Jim for all of his hard work and effort over the years in that role.

I note that all offers of help to overcome the remaining challenges and drive forward cricket in the East in 2021 are most welcome. Whilst there is a lot of work to be put in by the committee prior to the season proper, there is light at the end of the tunnel and most importantly, hope for a return to competitive cricket and some normality.

Neil Granger
ESCA President