

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### History In The Making

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1892 a meeting was held at the Fleece Hotel in Thirsk and the North Yorkshire Cricket League was formed.

The founding clubs were Constable Burton, Ironopolis, Middlesbrough, Northallerton, Redcar and Thirsk and they played under a devastatingly simple points system - teams that won got 1 point, teams that lost were deducted 1 point, and teams that drew didn't get anything – there was no restriction on the number of overs. Woe betide the weary captain or scorer who forgot to put the minus sign on his results card – a £1 fine – equivalent to £1,000 these days!

Four years later, as several clubs fled the newly formed Durham County League and joined our ranks the name change to the NYSD reflected the new geographical boundaries that exist to this day – and that was without a national players survey!

By now those mathematicians amongst you will realise that we have just started our 125<sup>th</sup> year, another major milestone in our wonderful history – if, like me, you attended our centenary dinner at which David Lloyd – 'Bumble' to some - was the chief guest, you probably struggle to comprehend how time has flown.

Now much as I'd love to wallow in bygone days when the sun always shone, helmets were for motorbikes, and umpires were paid 25p (5 bob) plus 3<sup>rd</sup> class return rail fare – 1894 – there will be time aplenty for reminiscing as our anniversary celebrations unfold over the next 12 months.

### Cricket At The Crossroads

There are weightier problems facing the game at the moment, so this annual address is perhaps a little heavier than usual – certainly in terms of content.

The NYSD have a very positive story to tell over the last 10 to 15 years – but I think it important to put the parochial to one side for a short while, and look at the bigger picture. We are all too well aware of falling participation levels, and we all probably know the reasons by now.

The key participants in league and club cricket fall into three broad categories. Firstly, the players – digitally enhanced (as we sometimes know to our cost) and time poor, other areas of their lives demand more attention – especially in the 20 somethings bracket.....employment structures, partner pressure, social media, so many more things to do.....these are just some of their distractions.

Crucially, and this is often forgotten, our volunteers are also time poor...in many clubs their numbers are dwindling with those remaining carrying ever greater responsibilities and burdens. And thirdly, umpires .....according to a recent BBC Five Live 'expose' they are leaving the game in ever increasing numbers, primarily, although not exclusively, through player indiscipline.

What can we do about this? As you know the ECB have been on an information gathering exercise for the last four years – they call it insight – mainly by asking players what they think through the national player surveys. The purpose of this was to pinpoint the problems more accurately and thus be in a better position to devise and provide some solutions.

At the end of the 2016 season, the outcome of the fourth NPS led the ECB to identify that things that needed to be considered by leagues were the length of game played, the distance travelled to matches, and the formats of games. It concluded by suggesting that leagues needed to be bolder and faster with change.

That it took four years of surveys, at not insubstantial cost, to arrive at those conclusions is a little disturbing bearing in mind the NYSD identified those very issues some 10 years earlier, but the exercise had to be gone through to provide evidence that the wider cricketing community would believe – there were many, and there are still some, who believe that cricket must never change.

### **Cricket Unleashed**

Last year I mentioned Matt Dwyer, the Aussie appointed at the top of UK recreational cricket, head-hunted on the back of his outstanding success in his own country in increasing participation... although this doesn't appear to have benefitted the national team – fancy Australia having to turn to a lad from the Boro to help save them!!

Matt has been in situ for 21 months now. A charismatic presenter, most of that time has been spent putting his staffing structure in place. The ECB's five-year strategy – 'Cricket Unleashed' – has been published for a long time now – not so much unleashed as striving at the leash to be unleashed!

But whilst the delays have been frustrating the ECB are now ready to go. 2017 will see them concentrating on two main areas of the recreational game (others will follow) - womens and girls cricket, to tie in with the Womens World Cup being held here, and the new entry level programme called All Stars Cricket, aimed at the 5 to 8 year age group, a similar model to the one that was so successful in Australia.

Everyone will be delighted if the project delivers long term improvement in participation rates and long term sustainability, but in the short term it signals to me that in league cricket we need to continue to be masters of our destiny, and take responsibility for our own success.

### **Martin Peters?**

The NYSD have been at the forefront of league cricket innovation for a long time now – we've even been accused of being 10 years ahead of our time. We drew up our 'business plan' many years ago and went on to deliver it. We bought into the need for initiatives, innovation and change several years before they became the fashionable buzz words down at Lord's.

But we can't stand still. Our member clubs have proved to be way ahead of the game in buying into the future....other leagues are now in a race to catch up.

### **Intense Competition**

For us 2017 will see our new streamlined league structure, where virtually every game played will carry meaning and importance, and teams will quickly find the correct level of competition to make their cricket more enjoyable and challenging.....a key factor in keeping players in the game

Once more there will be great rewards on offer – ten years ago who would have thought we would have teams playing at Headingley and the Riverside, who would have thought we'd have teams playing under floodlights, who would have thought one of our teams would have the chance to play in Abu Dhabi

If T20 is the new addiction, who would have thought we'd regularly feature in the later stages of national competition, who would have thought we'd be playing Yorkshire's first team. And if short format and innovative cricket is the new drug, who would have thought that our Fifteens competitions would receive national recognition as being 'visionary'. Everybody's scrambling to introduce a version now.

The November 2016 AGM introduced another raft of changes – the vast majority aimed at ensuring our cricket is relevant to today's players. Many of these derived from asking our own players....in ECB terminology, gathering our own insight.

The burning desire, as always, is to see the NYSD prosper – if we prosper, our clubs prosper, and the game of cricket prospers. For our clubs that occasionally means they have to set aside personal interests for the wider good of the game. Many of us, myself included, might be termed analogue administrators in a digital world....but it's pointless raging against the passing of time. Cricket is not like it used to be 25 years ago, never mind 125 years ago.

We need to get over that, we need to embrace the modern era.....the most successful clubs will be the ones that do that. By not doing so we will alienate the current playing generation, by doing so we might just ensure the long term sustainability of the game of cricket.

### **Thankless Tasks**

I often wonder whether we say thank you enough – the answer I always give myself is no. As you know we have introduced numerous initiatives in recent times to try and ensure administrators and volunteers feel valued and appreciated....at the very top of that list is the Hall of Fame.

Without doubt the annual inductions are the most rewarding and fulfilling things I do each year – to see and hear the appreciation of the many wonderful people they recognise is one of the things that actually re-charges my own batteries. I make many pleas to clubs, but if you do one thing this year then please make sure you make use of the HoF to properly recognise your own outstanding people.

Whilst on this subject, my own thanks as ever must go to your hard working committee who do the NYSD proud, and in particular the current officers of the league – Graeme Smith, Dave Stanwix and Neil Hutchinson. At the last AGM we had two retirees – general secretary Derek Watchman and umpires coordinator Mick Kirkbright. Each has served the League with distinction, each has made their own valued mark on our 125-year history. Both will be recognised more formally in due course, but for now I must give thanks to them on everyone's behalf for jobs well done – a retirement well earned.

Welcome on board to James Dykes and David Oliver, already settling down well to the vast complexities of modern day league administration – they are valuable additions to our line-up, but most of all I hope they enjoy it. Elsewhere within the NYSD firmament thank you to my other colleagues on the Management Committee who all have the NYSD at heart and, of course, we also owe a real debt of gratitude to our front line troops – our umpires without whom the League would not function.

I would also wish to again publicly thank all those clubs who accommodated league events of one kind or another in the last 12 months, whether that be cup finals, representative matches or meetings. Without exception, the clubs who put on our finals days and inter-league matches do so with great enthusiasm, skill and good grace and are a pleasure to work with.

Finally, but certainly not least, our headline partners who have enabled us to do so much for so long. We are intensely proud to be associated with such high performance organisations as Darlington Building Society and Teesside University, both the most wonderful of supporters, and we look forward to continuing our valued associations throughout the coming season.

### **To Infinity And Beyond**

And so to 2017 which promises to be one of the most exciting in our history.

On the domestic front we have now completed our extensive league re-structure. When that re-structure was passed at the 2014 AGM it involved some serious soul searching for a lot of clubs, but the passing of the proposal represented the most far sighted decision by our clubs since promotion and relegation came in in the late 1990's.

It's now time for lift off. 2017 should see a vibrant and competitive pyramid in place consisting of five divisions which are set to provide real opportunity for the ambitious, and a safe haven for those who simply want to enjoy their cricket.

New cup structures at various levels – even the old boys – will add further intrigue and interest at all levels while in 'Europe' Headingley, a floodlit Riverside and the National T20s will continue to prove tantalising carrots for the top performers.

Despite the intensity of competition I hope always that teams will adhere to the core values of the game that still do, for the most part, mark cricket out from any other sport and make it the greatest game on the planet.

My very best wishes to everyone for a successful and enjoyable 2017.

Chris West  
President

### **Epilogue**

Plenty of readers will have their own fond memories of days gone by, but in one last nostalgic nod to those NYSD people who were the custodians of our great league, a few more reflections which might be of interest.

In 1893, the first year of actual competition, an umpire was reported as being under the influence of drink and accused of overcharging the home club 5p (a bob), and runners-up Redcar officially complained that inaugural champions Constable Burton – the village, not the policeman – had played, contrary to league rules, more than one professional against them in both games – the times they do not change!

In 1940 Herbert Trenholm, a ruthless guardian of the game, penned a letter to the Football Association protesting against the extended soccer season as it was affecting participation levels, and in the same year he introduced a rule which read – should an air raid siren sound during the course of a game the game should continue until danger actually threatens, and should continue as soon as danger ceases.....puts the headlong charge to the dressing rooms at the merest hint of rain into perspective. Get The Game On eat your heart out!