

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

In many previous annual messages, and in AGM addresses, I have referred to them being akin to a 'State of the Nation' update, and perhaps that is more relevant than ever at this pivotal point in time for cricket.

The recent media rights deal struck by the ECB has given renewed hope that by the year 2020 cricket will return to the position in the nation's affections and imagination that it once enjoyed. The massive injection of funds will benefit the recreational game as £50m will be pumped in over 4 years to 2024, the new T20 tournament is primed to capture youngster's imagination, some free to air viewing will be back on our screens, and there will be mass digital promotion to engage with the widest audience of all ages.

But that is still more than 2 years away...and the ECB has seen its current reserves dwindle, so we still have to try and get from A to B in the most dynamic way possible. 2019 should offer opportunities to inspire with both the World Cup and the Ashes in this country, but what does 2018 look like, and what did 2017 deliver.

The national figures from the 2017 recreational season are relatively positive. All Stars Cricket, launched in a rush, has nevertheless been a huge success – 37,000 new to the game youngsters from 5 to 8 years old registered, although perhaps just as important...65% of the parents of those 37,000 are now volunteering in their clubs bringing massive long term benefit in terms of volunteering and revenues. Some clubs have spurned the opportunity to go down the All Stars route because they felt they would lose revenues in the short term, but you've got to take the longer term view on this one.

The target for 2018 is 100,000 youngsters..... hugely ambitious, but the County network is determined to provide wholehearted support. All Stars Cricket will be where it's at for youngsters in the coming years, and with plans afoot to build in natural progression through the club network by linking in Chance to Shine it will provide a very clear pathway from playground to club.

In late 2017 I passed on a ECB document to all clubs which I do hope you took the opportunity to read. It was entitled 'The Future Purpose of a Premier League' and brings into focus what we are, or should be, about and it was interesting to note the priorities highlighted: Strong leadership focusing on grounds, facilities, coaching, officials, financial rigour, discipline and ensuring the players get the game they want - formats, start times, travel etc – all things we have discussed at length with you and which many of the longer serving of you will recognise as basically our 2004 business plan.

It is our job as a league management body to ensure we address all those things so you can then use them to your advantage in your role of trying to inspire your players and members. Hand on heart I honestly believe we have delivered for over a decade now in all those areas highlighted, and most certainly in the area of strong leadership. But strong leadership is also required within clubs themselves – we can provide the canvas, but club officials have to paint the pictures. Please give yourselves the best chance to inspire. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure the game moves with the times and remains relevant.

Quite a few of our clubs are already exceptional in how they run their affairs, and in asking them what the secret is there is common ground. Communicate, pull in the same direction, work together, be positive – not negative – inspire your members, promote yourselves within your community and bring them along with you.

Having spent much time with the game's hierarchy over the last few years I'm absolutely convinced that there is a collective will from the very top of the game, through the counties and leagues, to work together to re-energise the game we all love, but we must all take responsibility for delivering our shared vision of cricket and, in my opinion, the clubs are the most crucial part of the mix.....your role is pivotal....without you there simply wouldn't be a game.

Enough of the sermonizing! What of the last year or so in the NYSD? The November 2016 AGM introduced another raft of changes – the vast majority aimed at ensuring our cricket is relevant to today's players. During 2017 we engaged in a further bout of insight gathering from players, a consultation paper was followed by a meeting of all clubs to discuss the future direction of the League, and from those information gathering exercises another spate of rule proposals went before the 2017 AGM and were all passed.

On the field there were many highlights but, with due deference to all the other successful teams, the two that stood out above the rest were the T20 game against Yorkshire Vikings at Marton and Saltburn's success in being crowned under 19 champions under the floodlights at the Riverside.

The Seaside carried the NYSD flag with pride and no little skill, brushing aside all comers – I have little doubt that final night will be remembered long into the players' old age. The League side's triumph over the Tykes came from the very last ball, but more important than a stunning success was the fact that anyone watching could not fail to be inspired – a large crowd thrilled in watching Test and County players in action, and thrilled in seeing how well we acquitted ourselves in arguably the best game of short format cricket ever seen in this region.

As usual I must close by ensuring proper thanks are given to that small army of people who keep NYSD cricket thriving. Players have been at the forefront of developments in the recreational game in recent years, but it is the club officials and volunteers who deserve an equal share of the limelight – without their tireless efforts there wouldn't be a game, so on behalf of NYSD cricket I thank you all.

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, Neil Hutchinson and Dave Oliver. At the last AGM we had one retiree, general secretary James Dykes who made a valuable contribution in his one year in office. I must give thanks to all the Officers on everyone's behalf - the vast complexities of modern day league administration were, as ever, coped with admirably and professionally.

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 who do a splendid job without too many plaudits and 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.

And so to 2018 which promises to be another exciting chapter in our history as we absorb a set of significant rule and structural changes, not to mention the new and amended Laws of Cricket which will no doubt test one or two captains! My best wishes go to each and every one.

Chris West
President