



PAYMENT OF PLAYERS: A CALL FOR VIEWS

Rule 26 of the League's constitution provides that: "No player may receive from his Member Club any direct or indirect payment or expenses for playing cricket."

2. The League has had a similar provision for most of its existence and is the only local Premier League to prohibit payment for playing. The League Executive and its predecessor management committees have always taken the view that money should be spent on facilities and youth development, not on players. We have also taken the view that we do not want the League Champions to be simply the club with the deepest pockets, which has arguably happened elsewhere. In the 1980s, Edmonton CC were expelled from the League on suspicion of payment of players when John Snow and Sunil Gavaskar had played for them.

3. No disciplinary action has been taken against any club in respect of payment of players since then. Successive League Chairmen have approached various clubs over the years with informal warnings when there were strong suppositions that players were being paid to play; but there has never been thought to be enough evidence to propose adverse consequences for those Clubs.

4. The position has become more complex over the years with the growth of Director of Cricket positions held by good cricketers. Legitimately, post holders are paid to coach and administer colts etc, but in some cases there is a suggestion that the posts would not have been offered without also the understanding that the Director of Cricket would play in the first team. Does this therefore constitute indirect payment to play?

5. When overseas players were common in the League (before Covid-19), some were provided with accommodation. In return, they undertook various coaching and ground duties, but to what extent was there also an expectation that they would play for the club?

6. The issue of payment of players has been thrown into sharper focus this year. There are various well-circulated rumours that certain clubs have been paying one or more players to play; and there have also been acquisitions of high-profile players who have been known previously to earn significant sums in other local Premier Leagues. In its statement on the registration of Monty Panesar by Twickenham CC – which it approved - the Executive said that it would undertake a review of the current constitutional position and report in time for the AGM. We are not able to reach conclusions in that timeframe, but this short paper is an attempt to ventilate the issue and to call for views from across the League.

7. For what it is worth, the Executive doubts that any Member Club is directly paying player(s). We now have the provision to inspect the books of all Clubs; and we do not think it likely that any Club is breaching the rule in what would be a very transparent fashion. Rather, if payments are being made – and we are not making any allegations to that effect, though we have heard many such suggestions around the League – then they are likely to be from wealthy individuals who are supporters of the Club in question, whether directly engaged in the Club's management or otherwise.

Options

8. The following is a non-exhaustive list of options that have been suggested to us:
- i. continue with the existing rule, which probably deters the most egregious forms of payment. The issue here is that the rumours would continue to circulate, and that there would continue to be an undercurrent of dissatisfaction;
 - ii. enforce the rule more robustly. The difficulty here is that evidence is very hard to obtain, even to satisfy on the balance of probabilities. Often, it amounts to no more than "X Club must be paying to get Y player". I am told that there was no conclusive evidence against Edmonton but that the League Executive of the time felt sufficiently emboldened to act in the knowledge that the other Clubs would support them. They did, though not unanimously. Would Member Clubs now be willing to entrust the Executive with the power to act on unproven allegations? And, in a society that is much more litigious than that of 40 years ago, would the legal consequences be sustainable?
 - iii. abandon the rule on the grounds that it is unenforceable. This would open the possibility of legitimate payment of players and would remove the suspicions of improper behaviour. It has been suggested that it would be a good thing to open up the option of payment as this would enable Clubs to attract bigger name players who would like to play in Middlesex but now go to one of our neighbouring leagues. Equally, it has been suggested that this would destroy loyalty to clubs and put the League title in the hands of those with the deepest pockets.
9. If option i or ii is pursued, there probably ought to be more clarity around what is and is not permitted in respect of Directors of Cricket and overseas players. It has been suggested by a number of Clubs that they would be more comfortable if greater guidance were available from the League.

Action

10. This is an emotive issue, and it is not one on which the Executive wants to put any proposal to Member Clubs without a great deal of thought and discussion. As a first step, anyone with an interest in the subject, whether player, Club Committee member or indeed supporter or follower of the League, is invited to let us have thoughts. These should be sent to keir.hopley@blueyonder.co.uk by 31 December 2021. A further paper will be prepared following receipt of views for discussion over the course of the 2022 season. A formal proposal – if change appears to be the preferred option – will then be put to the 2022 AGM for consideration by the Member Clubs.

MCCL Executive

19 November 2021