

CHIEF EXECUTIVES REPORT 2010/11

I feel it has been a mixed year. The County teams event went reasonably smoothly, although the number of conceded matches is of some concern, but more of that in my controllers report. It was also pleasing to see the main Grand Prix expand and the Rapidplay GP with a goodly number of events included in its first year. It is however clear that trying to fit any other MCCU events that are not based on existing congresses, or linked to county matches, into an already crowded calendar is something of a problem. Trying to find dates to accommodate junior or club events was fraught.

I would once again offer congratulations to Bushbury who have reached the National Club finals, by the time of the AGM Rushall could have also joined them, but as I write have yet to play their semi-final match. Nevertheless the level of entries from the MCCU continues to disappoint.

As you will see from the separate report, what on the face of it appeared a simple task – reviewing the MCCU levy, turned out to be anything but. There have also been developments on the ECF funding front which may in turn impact on MCCU funding options, but until the ECF AGM has decided whether to fully support the option of replacing game fee with membership, and if it does how it will be operated, I feel there is little point in the MCCU deciding on its own future funding arrangements. Whilst counties will decide how they wish to vote come the ECF AGM, I do feel there is some merit in this meeting exploring what those views are and whether or not they feel there is any role for the MCCU to play if the membership option is taken forward. A few years ago we attempted to set up an MCCU MO, but were thwarted by the then new CEO deciding that he didn't want this, despite the outgoing Board having agreed.

My own view is that whilst there is some merit in the idea of the MCCU offering to be a conduit for membership for its counties, I can see a number of difficulties. The old MO proposal related to a voluntary membership, any new membership scheme will be compulsory. It would be very difficult for the Union to pinpoint all the players who ought to be signing up, let alone know how to contact them, and we do not have the administration set up to deal with a compulsory scheme. Our leagues & counties are clearly in a much better position to do this and will already have some mechanism set up for collecting fees via clubs. That said, the NCCU managed to operate a membership scheme. Whilst any scheme will not be operational until 2013/14, planning needs to begin as soon as possible after the ECF AGM. Whilst we could look at having an MCCU GM after the ECF decision has been made, if we have a steer from this meeting that may not be necessary. Your thoughts would be appreciated.

Another issue that I feel requires some thought, but no definite decision at this meeting, is the county championships. I raise this as part of my report as CEO, rather than as county championship controller because I refer to the ECF stages & their rules. Previous meetings have taken the view that the MCCU events should largely follow the format of the ECF stages. Making nominations to events for a small unions with few counties, when your unions event takes a different format is one thing, doing so for the MCCU with multiple teams is entirely another. So it with the ECF format that any significant changes need to start. I have recently learned that the current format of the event is due to be raised at the AGM of at least one other Union. Whilst the SCCU do not seem to have had many defaulted boards & no conceded matches in their events, the same is not true of some other unions, MCCU included. As a result the question has been raised as to whether the grading bands need revision, or indeed whether even more fundamental change is needed. Changes to the format & rules of the event are usually made at the April ECF Council meeting, to be put in place for the following season.

You will see from my MCCU county report that experienced captains have been indicating an increased difficulty in raising teams, & some have indicated that they will not be continuing next

season, or have already resigned or not stood for re-election. The view in some quarters that there are currently too many sections. Whilst the current 20 point bands do not preclude players graded below the lower limit playing, and some players will happily double up between the bottom end of one team & the top end of the one below, others feel they must make the choice to play for only 1 team. The current bandings also mean that smaller counties are faced with entering a higher graded section simply to raise a team & finding themselves out-graded, particularly on the lower board, or entering a lower section & leaving their highest graded players without county chess. One suggestion raised is to move to average gradings for graded sections, perhaps with upper & lower grading limits. This format is currently used in the National club events & could theoretically be adopted for the larger numbers in a county team.

Another issue to be considered is the number of players in a team. This was raised by the MCCU a few years ago, when it appeared the view of MCCU counties supported a reduction to 12 a side. However, counties did not actually vote in favour at the ECF meeting, which almost led to a resignation on my part. Thus if the MCCU is to either propose or support proposals made by others, I feel that both the CEO, & the ECF delegate from the MCCU, need to have rather clearer assurances about what counties actually want. I would like this meeting to have an initial discussion on this, and for delegates to go away and consult their counties. We have between now and early 2012 to gain a clearer view of the appetite for change, & to see what proposals are favoured, what proposals any other union might look to make, & how best to go about getting enough support countrywide to put changes in place. My view is that without changes either the number of MCCU teams competing will reduce, the number of defaults will increase, or worse still, both will happen.

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