Report on the Youth Leagues and Performance Development Group 2022

All Youth Leagues within the County, an overview of the Boys County Performance Age Groups, Boys ‘Zonal’ age groups, together with Youth work in the Community and Schools, come within the Group’s remit. We comprise representatives of each of the six Youth Leagues (Gloucestershire Youth Cricket League, Bristol, Cheltenham & Gloucester, Cotswold, Leaden Vale and Stroud). The GCF is represented by Scott Tremaine, Gareth Dawson, and Chris Munden. We oversee the Gloucestershire Youth League, County Rounds of the Boys Vitality National U13 & U15 KO Cup, the Gloucestershire Leagues U10 Festival, and the NatWest U16 & U19 T/20 Gloucestershire Competitions.

Thank you to everyone involved with the Group including the GCF Staff, who work tirelessly across the County with excellent results. This past year saw Jeanette Tate step back from her role of overseeing the County elements of the National Cups, and we thank Jeanette for her contributions over the years. Thank you also to everyone involved in so many areas with youth cricket across the County, where hundreds of matches and training sessions take place safely through the summer, week in, week out, largely through the commitment of (often unsung) volunteers.

Talking of volunteers, the Group discussed the extremely important and challenging subject of ‘Ensuring Sustainable Youth Leagues in the County’. We are all aware that gaining volunteers for Roles is increasingly challenging, but Youth Leagues will fail to provide the level of service that young players and their Clubs need for their progressive development without volunteers coming forward to run the activities. All the Leagues are aware of the need for sustainability, but it is worryingly clear that some Leagues are currently seemingly running on the ‘shoestring’ of just one or two volunteers. While some of our Leagues are independent, some are part of the Senior Association. If the ‘Volunteer shoestring’ breaks because the workload/expectations become too great, or for some other reason, what then happens to the young players involved? Please contact Scott at the GCF if you are interested in knowing more on this subject.

2022 thankfully was the Season when ‘normality’ returned to youth cricket after the two previous ‘Covid’ affected years. Full ‘pre-season’ activities were able to take place, leading in to a season where the weather was generally pretty good. Gloucestershire saw record numbers of children involved in All Stars and Dynamos at Clubs, with the County punching well above its weight in comparison to others in terms of population figures. The various Cup Competitions ran successfully, and the Leagues generally reported numbers of teams holding up well, with most matches played. The Under 10 Leagues Festival, again kindly hosted by Beaudesert School and sponsored by Martin Berrill Sports, ran smoothly, the weather was kind, and the volume of cricket played provided ample opportunities for the promising young players to gain more experience and show their potential.

The relatively new but increasingly likely subject of ‘Extreme Heat’ Weather Warnings led to interesting and widely divergent opinions being expressed amongst the Group about the Safety of Young Players in such situations. ‘Heat/The Sun’ is a very subjective matter amongst Adults, often dependent upon their personal resilience and experiences, which means Coaches, League Administrators and Parents also have widely varying and strongly held opinions about if and when it is ‘safe’ for Children (all Under 18s) to be playing cricket outdoors. On the face of it, current ECB Guidance appears to put the onus (‘Duty of Care’) on the individual, which, with such a divergence of opinion, only increases the chances of significant disagreement. The ECB have been asked if they will review their current Guidance in these circumstances.

Jim Donaldson Chair February 2023