

# I like my Twenty20 cricket just the way it is



## HOOK SHOT

Surrey reporter Marcus Hook gives his county view

Ever since 1988, when County Championship games were increased from three days to four, those running the sport have sought various ways of abbreviating cricket matches. But I suspect that, last week, many who savoured Surrey's 139-run victory over Hampshire at the Oval, clinched in the final session of the final day, will be astonished at the suggestion Twenty20 goes on for too long.

Cricket is no stranger to evolution,

but, historically, it has only re-invented itself when forced by falling attendances and dwindling revenue.

The search has been on-going since the 1960s. But thanks to the birth of Twenty20, in 2003, once half-empty county cricket grounds are now packed to the gunnels. Last summer, some 140,000 spectators flowed through the turnstiles at the Oval to get a taste of Surrey's eight T20 fixtures. In contrast, 28 days of championship cricket attracted just 30 per cent of that number.

In short, if you already go to the Oval, the new competition being proposed by the ECB - which will be called The Hundred because each innings will last 100 balls - is not for you; certainly not when Surrey's chief executive Richard Gould is lauding on social media that the

club's Twenty20 ticket sales are 20 per cent up on this time last year.

One would have thought that the first rule of marketing is don't, whatever you do, insult your customers' intelligence. However, Andrew Strauss, England's director of cricket and a member of the ECB hierarchy said: "What we are trying to do is appeal to a new audience, people that aren't traditional cricket fans and, in particular, looking at mums and kids in the summer holidays. We want to make the game as simple as possible for them to understand."

He almost made it sound like cricket for simpletons. Either way, it seemed like a Gerald Ratner moment. Maybe I creep into their target market because I can't understand how 15 six-ball overs followed by a 10-ball at the end is simpler than 20 six-ball overs.

If the proposed new 100-ball competition really is aimed at mums and kids during the summer holidays, matches would begin at 11am, like in the County Championship.

But no, games in The Hundred will start late in the afternoon with the aim of being all done and dusted by 9pm to satisfy the TV schedules.

Thanks to the ECB, the women's game and female participation is light years ahead of where it was a decade ago, but now is not the time for a re-think.

Having negotiated a bumper TV deal on the back of a new competition being added to the mix, the ECB's credibility and, more importantly, a secure financial future for cricket is resting on it being a success.

Call me a traditionalist if you want, but I like my Twenty20 just the way it is.

**SURREY v LANCASHIRE**  
(probable line-ups)



**Surrey**  
Burns (capt), Stoneman, Borthwick, Elgar, Pope, Foakes (wk), S Curran, Clarke, Batty, Dernbach and Dunn.  
**Lancashire**  
Jennings, Hameed, Davies (wk), Livingstone (capt), Chanderpaul, Vilas, Clark, Bailey, Mennie, Onions and Parkinson.

### FORM GUIDE

Lancashire, who finished runners-up in last summer's County Championship, have made an awful start to the season - two games and two losses. In contrast, Surrey, whom they edged into third place last September (courtesy of a convincing seven-wicket victory at Old Trafford in the final game), opened their 2018 account with a win over Hampshire.

### STAT

Last week's Division One contest between Surrey and Hampshire produced a total of 18 lbws - thus equalling the County Championship record. Curiously, the other four such instances have all occurred since 2010; and all in Division Two.

### KEY PLAYERS

**Rikki Clarke (Surrey)** - arguably the pick of the Surrey attack across both innings against Hampshire, and who averages 35.29 with the bat and 33.20 with the ball against Lancashire in the County Championship.

**Joe Mennie (Lancashire)** - with just three international appearances for Australia, it raised a few eyebrows when he was unveiled as Lancashire's overseas player; until, that is, he hit the ground running by bagging 12 championship wickets at an average of 12.41 in his first two outings for the Red Rose. A valiant 56 in last week's defeat to Essex underlines that he can also bat.

### FIXTURES

**April 27-30:** Lancashire v Surrey at Old Trafford (Specsavers County Championship)

### STAR MAN

Ollie Pope - the 20-year-old's career best 145, which was positive throughout without being reckless, swung Surrey's season opener against Hampshire firmly in favour of the hosts. After just seven matches as a professional, Pope has notched up two hundreds in the championship.

### BEST MOMENT

Amar Virdi prizing out Amla and Vince, in the space of five balls and in only his fourth over. It will be interesting to see if Gareth Batty (who missed the Hampshire game with back spasms) will be preferred to the 19-year-old off-spinner when fit.

# YOUNGSTERS GOT TO HAVE FREEDOM

## Burns: We try to give our young players responsibility

BY MARCUS HOOK  
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Rory Burns reckons Surrey's decision to give their youngsters freedom is paying off - with Ollie Pope and Amar Virdi both star performers in their 139-run win over Hampshire.

The Oval outfit picked up a win in their opening County Championship Division One fixture.

Pope, 20, hit 145 on day three - his haul including 18 fours and one six - with spinner Virdi, 19, taking 4-79.

Surrey captain Burns said: "Something we try and do is give the youngsters responsibility. Our young boys always try to step up.

"That was Popey's second hundred against Hampshire, so they are probably sick of the sight of him. But it was also pleasing to see Virds [Amar Virdi] take his wickets. Virds did the same thing at Chelmsford last year, when Gareth Batty also had to miss out through injury - and it was especially pleasing to see him pick up the key wickets of Hashim Amla and James Vince late on day three.

"I'm absolutely delighted with the win. They [Hampshire] played very well to take us really deep into day four, but that's what we expected them to do on the conditions. The pitch was pretty flat by the end.

"That was a real team bowling performance. The boys rallied around, but Hampshire kept coming at us, with those

partnerships all the way through the innings. For Dunny [Matt Dunn], who didn't actually bowl in that middle session, to come in and get that last wicket is testament to him staying switched on.

"Ollie Pope's 145 was the standout in terms of the batting, but I'm happy with how everyone performed."

Burns has stepped up to skipper this season after previously playing the role of vice-captain to Batty, 40.

He signed a four-year contract in December which keeps him with Surrey until the end of the 2021 season.

"Batts is quite a Churchillian speaker," said Burns.

"I've said that quite a few times in interviews.

"It's fair to say I'm not quite as Churchillian, but he's a leader of men and people want to follow him. For me that's how I want to go about it. I want people to follow me. I want to try and be the example for other guys to follow by working very hard and hopefully that correlates. I just want people to follow that attitude in how we go about our business.

"The only thing that has changed is I get asked a lot more questions - what are we doing at the toss? Are we bowling? Are we batting? And sometimes that's before I've sat down for a coffee.

"Off the pitch I've had a lot more admin and how I want our dressing room set-up; changing it from the way Batts had it. That's the key part - I've learned a lot off Batts, but I've got to do it in my own way and he has backed me 100 per cent."



Rory Burns Picture: PA

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