

Consultation on petition P-04-335 The Establishment of a Welsh Cricket Team  
Response from Jonathan Edwards MP

## **Towards a National Future for Welsh Cricket – Jonathan Edwards MP**

### **Introduction**

It has been an issue of contention for supporters of cricket in Wales for many years that current arrangements mean that a Welsh national team is not allowed to compete in global International Cricket Council (ICC) one day and Twenty20 tournaments. Wales, a cricketing nation with a proud and venerable tradition, finds itself conspicuous in its absence on the global stage, whilst countries with arguably less of a tradition and a weaker player base have graced competitions in both formats of the game. A Welsh national team has not graced the global stage since the inaugural ICC tournament in 1979, although the Welsh Women's team has competed in international tournaments as recently as 2005.

The creation of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in 1997 to govern the game in both countries has had undoubted benefits, not least the historic staging of an Ashes Test match in 2009, and the remarkable development of Sophia Gardens into a World Class cricket centre.

However, the inclusion of Wales within the ECB structure has created an open sore in relation to the legitimate international ambitions of Welsh cricket supporters and players.

- Wales has twice as many clubs as Scotland and four to five times as many as Ireland.
- Wales has a cricketing grass roots equivalent to New Zealand and a total population similar to New Zealand, who is a full member of the ICC and test playing nation.
- Between 1993-2002, a Welsh team competed in the British Isles national Championship consisting of a Scottish, Irish, Welsh and England (amateur) team.
- Wales has a stronger population of club cricketers and fans far greater than any Associate ICC member, and greater than full members Zimbabwe and New Zealand.<sup>i</sup>

### **Reasons for a Welsh National Side**

- Proper representation demands that Wales has its own national cricket side able to compete in world competitions. The England cricket team does not represent Wales. It does not amount to a GB team nor to something akin to the British and Irish Lions. Instead, it is an England team, exhibiting all the

symbolism of England, in which Welsh players compete on a very rare basis as if they themselves were English.

- There is demand for a Welsh team as demonstrated by a recent Wales Online poll in which over **80% of participants supported the creation of a Welsh side**. Both Ireland and Scotland have competed in recent World tournaments and even Jersey and Guernsey are associate ICC members. If Scotland, Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and England are all able to support national sides there seems little doubt that Wales could do the same.
- A Welsh national side competing in showpiece events would be an incredible boost for the development of the game in Wales. Instead of very sporadic selection for ECB teams, a full squad of Welsh players, if qualification is secured, would participate - an incredible incentive for young cricketers.
- A Welsh team competing in a cricketing World Cup could be a key economic driver as a significant boost to brand Wales. The current England (and Wales) team in no way promotes Wales, which is disappointing because the potential reach of cricket dwarfs other major sports in Wales. India alone has a population of over one billion people and is earmarked as a key 21<sup>st</sup> century economic area for developing relations by the UK Government.

## Bottom Lines

- Glamorgan's status as a first class county must be maintained - Glamorgan was formed in 1888 and since 1921 has been a participant in the English County Championship. As a result Glamorgan gets a share of the ECB's approximate £40m a year county allocation. Any negotiations on the creation of a Welsh national side would need to ensure that Glamorgan's position is suitably protected together with ECB domestic funding. However, it is disingenuous by those opposed to the creation of a Welsh national side to argue that Glamorgan's status would be endangered. David Collier, the Chief Executive of the ECB, has already stated that with a Welsh team Glamorgan would be welcome to continue in the English County system and as such would continue to receive the funding available to other counties. Furthermore, Holland, Ireland and Scotland, despite being national teams, compete in the English system in various competitions. In other sports Swansea is in the top tier of the football pyramid, playing in the English Premier League, and yet Wales has one of the oldest football associations in the world.
- Sophia Gardens status as Test venue cannot be jeopardised – Under both proposed models for the creation of a Welsh national one day team Welsh players would be eligible to play test cricket for England. Glamorgan would continue to play first class cricket. Therefore there is no reason why Sophia

Gardens couldn't continue to bid successfully for England games. There are no ICC rules barring test nations from playing home games in other ICC member countries. Abu Dhabi often hosts international games and Pakistan currently play home games on foreign soil.

## **Two possible avenues**

1 - The ECB to be allowed to enter two teams for one day and Twenty20 ICC competitions – The ECB represents two distinct sporting nations and should be allowed to field a Welsh and English team with an England team automatically qualifying for global competitions and a Welsh team competing against other Associate and Affiliate members for qualification. This would require the ICC making special provision for the unique position Wales finds itself in. This is the simplest solution but may face hostility from other ICC members.

2 – For the Cricket Board of Wales to seek ICC status – This scenario has the advantage that support from the ECB and ICC is not necessary i.e. if the Welsh Government decides to set up a Welsh team the ECB and ICC would not prevent it. In this scenario it is highly likely that Wales, due to its strong player base and tradition, would be granted Associate Membership like Scotland and Ireland.

## **Qualifying for Global tournaments**

The ICC is currently holding a review of its structures and is considering changes to the qualification systems for ICC global tournaments. It is likely that a new Welsh side would enter tournaments conducted by ICC Europe. As of October 2011, the principal competition structure for senior men is a three tier Twenty20 championship, leading to places in a global qualifying tournament and potentially to the World Twenty20 tournament itself. Rankings from this competition also determine access to the 50 over World Cricket League (WCL). There are currently nine European countries in various divisions of the WCL with Scotland, Ireland and Holland in Division 1.<sup>ii</sup>

A Welsh side would start at the beginning of the competitions and it is anticipated that it would take two to three years based on player availability to reach the higher divisions and be eligible for lucrative Higher Performance Programme (HPP) funding and a potential qualifying tournament for a World cup.<sup>iii</sup>

## Player Eligibility

The ICC has strict rules on who is allowed to play for any country, and there can be little doubt that separate Welsh membership would give rise to some issues that need to be noted. The main criteria are:

1. the *Player* was born in the relevant country;
2. the *Player* is able to demonstrate (by his/her possession of a valid passport issued by the relevant country) that he/she is a national of the relevant country; or
3. the *Player* is a *Resident* of the relevant country, in other words:
  - 3.1 the *Player* has resided in the relevant country for a minimum of 183 days in each of the immediately preceding two years (female *Players* only);
  - 3.2 the *Player* has resided in the relevant country for a minimum of 183 days in each of the immediately preceding four years (male *Players* only); or
  - 3.3 the *Player* has resided in the relevant country for a minimum of 183 days in each of the immediately preceding seven years (male *Players* only).

In addition to these criteria, there are some additional requirements for eligibility to play for an Associate or Affiliate member, with some global events being excepted. These 'development criteria' are:

4. the *Player* has played in a minimum of 50% of the domestic league matches that his club team was scheduled to play within the relevant domestic structure in any 3 of the preceding 5 domestic league seasons;
5. the *Player* has spent a cumulative total of at least 100 working days in the relevant country coaching cricket, playing cricket or working in the administration or development of cricket in that country in the immediately preceding 5 years; or
6. the *Player* has previously represented the relevant country at Under-19 level or above after satisfying the additional *Development Criteria* in these *Regulations* or similar requirements under predecessor eligibility regulations.

At least one of these must be satisfied for the player to be eligible to play for an Associate or Affiliate member, with the exception of the World Cup and World T20, other full ODIs, the Intercontinental Cup, and global qualifying tournaments.

There are further rules governing movement between one country and another: in summary, a male player seeking to transfer to an Associate or Affiliate member may not have played international cricket for any other member in the preceding four years, while there is no such restriction on a player moving from an Associate or Affiliate member to a Full member. **In other words, an Irish player could appear for Ireland and England on consecutive days, but would then have to wait for four years before requalifying to play for Ireland (as Ed Joyce of Ireland has recently done).**

In the particular circumstances pertaining to Wales, especially the existence of Glamorgan as an English first-class county, player eligibility would need careful definition, but in many respects the situation is little different from that in Ireland or Scotland – or, for that matter, in the Netherlands. Young Welsh cricketers could continue to aspire to play for England, if that is their wish, and playing for Wales in the meantime need be no barrier to that ambition; having once played for England, however, they would be barred for playing again for Wales for at least four years.<sup>iv</sup>

Therefore there are no current eligibility barriers in the event of Welsh ICC membership for Welsh players being able to play test cricket for England if selected. If anything, the existence of a Welsh nation team gives Welsh players a choice that would be to their benefit, thus removing another argument by opponents of a Welsh team.

In the event of the creation of a Cricket Board of Wales sponsored Welsh team, in the interests of the game in Wales, there would need to be an agreement with the counties for the release of players to enable a significantly strong Welsh side to reach the higher echelons of the qualifying pyramid as soon as possible.

### **Funding**

Welsh cricket, via grants and direct fee payments, is in receipt of £2.2m in funds from the ECB. Welsh cricket also receives £550,000 funding from Sport Wales. With Glamorgan continuing to be a part of the First Class scene and Welsh players eligible for ECB test selection there is a clear case for the continuation of current ECB sponsorship. Any move towards ICC status would require careful bridging arrangements either from the ECB or ICC until Wales would qualify for full ICC funding. The ECB currently funds Scotland, Ireland, Jersey and Guernsey so the same should apply to Wales.

The potential sums available if Wales were to gain High Performance status should be substantially more than current ECB and Sports Council for Wales funding.<sup>v</sup>

Welsh international matches would also provide an income stream in gate receipts, merchandise, sponsorship and TV revenue.

### **Role of ECB**

Any movements towards the creation of a Welsh team would require the consent of the ECB. In the event of a dispute between the CBW and ECB the ICC would support the current governing body unless the Welsh Government was to announce that it did not recognise the ECB. This should not be an issue as David Collier has

already stated that setting up a Welsh team is a matter for Wales, meaning the ECB would not stand in its way. The future direction of the game in Wales should be a matter for cricket people in Wales and the ECB should and will respect those wishes.

## **Conclusion**

Sport is for players and supporters, both of whom strongly support the creation of a Welsh cricket team. There are some issues that must be negotiated to establish a Welsh team but there are no reasons strong enough to prevent such a move. A Welsh team can exist whilst securing Glamorgan's first class status and Sophia Gardens' test status and given our passion for cricket and the depth of our club scene it is likely that Wales will quickly move up the world rankings to become a team that qualifies for international competitions. At present Welsh people are the only people in the British Isles who play no international cricket and this must change. This paper is, therefore, aimed as a starting point in a debate about the future of Wales as a cricketing nation.

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<sup>i</sup> Michael Blumberg, former editor Cricket World

<sup>ii</sup> Professor Rod Lyall

<sup>iii</sup> Professor Rod Lyall

<sup>iv</sup> Professor Rod Lyall

<sup>v</sup> Richard Holdsworth, ICC Development Manager Europe