

RED TAPE STOP PLAY?

New Home Office Guidelines

By Rob Hardie

In a meeting arranged for Arrow Huddersfield Central and Drakes Huddersfield cricket league clubs, Meltham were only one of a number of teams handed a blow in terms of signing foreign players. Sheffield Home Office representative Andrew Carter, of Border and Immigration Control, laid down the new regulations at a meeting at the Cedar Court Hotel in Huddersfield.



After a government review into immigration control, it has been decided that a new points-based system will be put into place by the Home Office, although it was stressed that the new system would not be operational until around April 2009. This means the system would be up and running just in time for the 2009 cricket season - and the 2008 season will definitely be unaffected. This new system is being replicated from systems already used in a sporting context in countries such as Canada and Australia.

Meltham CC will have to register with the Home Office before signing any players, but the club will also have to pay themselves if they need to issue any work permits for overseas players. Not only this but heavy fines and punishments will be dealt out to any club found to be abusing or manipulating the system. It was, however, pointed out by Carter that the rules and regulations are still to be properly defined and finalised, but they will be ready for the season after next.

Under the new rules for overseas players coming into the country to play, the definition for sportspeople and coaches is as follows. "Internationally established at the highest level, whose employment will make a significant contribution to the development of their sport at the highest level in the UK." Clearly, the Home Office are tightening regulations.

If Meltham wish to sign a player who would be suitable under this definition, then the club would have to be registered formally with the Home Office and must also obtain special clearance to sign the player from the ECB. Should the player remain at the club for more than a single year then they must have a basic knowledge of the English language. This must be sufficient enough for

them to be allowed to remain in the country. If the player is found to be under-qualified or registered under false pretences then fines and other sanctions could be handed out by compliance officers from the Home Office.

However, players who are aged under 30 will be classified differently under the new system. These players can be classed as “working holiday makers”, although countries of origin can be restricted by the Home Office if they classify the home country of a player as “high risk”. The rules on this, however, have changed three times in six years and they look like changing further. Clubs in the Drakes League are only allowed one overseas player per season and the “working holiday maker” rule could open up a new avenue of players, especially as clubs are not allowed to pay these particular players.

If Meltham choose to look into the idea of signing an overseas player, then they must follow the new stringent guidelines to the letter. The answer could well be to just stick with homegrown players and in so doing save the club a lot of time, effort and money.