

CAUGHT BETWEEN THE GOALPOSTS AND THE STUMPS OR WHERE TWO SPORTS CROSS THE BOUNDARIES

By Ian Hirst

Sportsmen are always put in tricky positions and not just off the field of play. There are club versus country rows and whether or not to play despite carrying an injury. These situations arise in one individual sport. What happens if they cross into two different sports that sportsmen or sportswomen love?



This is the case in Huddersfield. For some people the love for football and cricket has no boundaries. However, players of both sports face a tricky decision come May time. This is the dreaded cross over. This is the point where the cricket season starts whilst the football season is coming to its climax.

At this time it can put teams, both cricket and football, under immense pressure. The challenge that the clubs face are to raise a team with enough players. Put yourself in this situation. You are playing for a football team that you love and fighting relegation. The cricket season starts and you are one of the star players and get paid to smash the ball to all parts and skittle batsmen over. What team do you play for?

Sean Mee, a cricket player for Broad Oak and a football player for Linthwaite finds himself in this situation. "The season overlaps two weeks around May. It means some teams suffer from players like me who have to play one or the other and are vital pieces in both sides. Really it should be changed. I don't know what could be done. Possibly playing more Sunday games in cricket and mid week games in football."

There is a current ruling in place that has been in place for many, many years. The cricket season would finish on the second Saturday and the football season would start on the third Saturday. This rule is fine at the start of the season but difficulties arise come May. There is small glimmer of hope for players and teams who are caught up in this situation when they lose players to cricket.

Frank Beaumont, President of the Huddersfield and District Association Football League, who has been involved with the League for over 40 years, knows all about this problem and explained a current rule that still exists.

“If both teams agree to switch their match to a mid week game and before the match was scheduled for then there is no problem with that. There were discussions in the 70’s about having the midweek games at the start of the season but there were still problems and difficulties.”

This seems like the perfect situation. Two football teams containing a high number of cricket players can just reschedule. It is the perfect situation, or is it? There is a huge down side to it. If one team who has no cricket players and the other team have a lot of cricket players and want to switch the match are they going to agree? Of course not. They are going to take full advantage of the depleted team to get three points.

“All we can say is that once a player, whether it is cricket or football, starts a season then they should finish it. It is difficult though for those players who get paid to play for their cricket clubs to stay and play for their football teams,” said Beaumont.

This view is echoed by Roger France, the chairman of the Drakes Huddersfield Cricket League. He has encountered the same situation where the football season crossed over to the cricket one.

“When I played football it was nowhere as serious as it is now. Some coaches think they are managing Man United. They organize friendly matches on Saturdays, still knowing that many players will be playing cricket.”

“Truthfully there is not a lot we can do. There is pressure on me to make the season longer but that would just cause more problems. We can’t expand the season and we can’t reduce the season either, as there is just not enough dates. There are already enough Saturday and Sunday matches and teams, especially the second string struggle to pull a side together.”

The situation still isn’t helped if the either a cricket team or football club has got nothing to play for. Players are usually keener at the start of the season so will revert to the other sport. This doesn’t help the team they have just left as they will be struggling to raise a team.

“In an ideal world players would honour their commitments with the clubs they are playing for. However there are other factors that effect individuals and it is down to them at the end of the day,” said France.

Away from the amateur side of sport, clubs can suffer with players having other commitments or leisure pursuits. Some will want to watch the home side, such as Huddersfield Town and Leeds United, at the start of the season. They want to feel they have got their moneys worth at the start of the season and at the end.

For sportsmen in Huddersfield, the dilemma is a tricky one. Do they wield the willow or belt the leather ball?

There seems to be no solution to the cricket and football crossover. So the sportsmen of both of these sports will have to choose and make a decision. The only consolation is that there are people out there who love the world of sport. They are willing to put their bodies on the line all the year round.

They may miss a couple of games of each season but without these people many amateur clubs would not exist without the passion and commitment of these players. Certainly the amateur world of sport would be a quieter place without them.