

Paddock club stumped by spiralling rents

Over and out, says crisis club

By DOUGLAS THOMSON

CASH-STARVED Paddock Cricket Club, which once included West Indies Test stars Gary Sobers and Wes Hall in its line-up, could pull stumps on top-line competition at the end of this season.

The Drakes Huddersfield Section B club which produced England cricketers Chris Balderstone, Percy Holmes and Willie Watson faces a £1,500 increase in its £2,000-a-year rent for the Church Street ground from Kirklees Council.

Cricket chairman Bob Battye, who has already sent a letter of resignation to league chairman Roger France, says Paddock can no longer afford to run senior sides.

Both Mr France and Kirklees estates services valuer Robert Halstead, who has been dealing with the case, hope a compromise can be reached.

But Mr Battye, whose club is in the unusual position of having to pay rent on its clubhouse as well as the five acres of land on which the ground is situated, insists the outlook is bleak.

"Most of the expense of playing cricket is at a senior level, so resigning from the league means that we can ensure the survival of the club," he said.

"We will continue to run junior sides in midweek and hire the ground at weekends. When our financial situation is healthier, we can then resurrect our senior sides."

Paddock's problems began in 1985 with the expiry of the old 50-year lease which had allowed the club to rent the ground at a peppercorn rate.

At that point ownership of the clubhouse passed to Kirklees, which negotiated a new 30-year deal with the club. This included three-yearly rent reviews.

Originally set at £1,500, the rent rose to £2,000 in 1988. Under the

terms of the agreement, Kirklees' new demand of £3,500 is now being assessed by an independent chartered surveyor.

"While we might not have to pay as much as Kirklees is asking, a clause in the lease means that it can't fall below the old value, so we're still going to face a hefty bill which in our current circumstances we simply can't afford," added Mr Battye.

Mr Halstead said: "We sympathise with Paddock, but we must implement an agreement reached between Kirklees and the club back in 1985."

"This is not a closed book. We are still in correspondence with Paddock and willing to listen to anything they have to say."

Mr France is optimistic that the 120-year-old club will continue to play league cricket in 1993.

"I took Paddock's letter as a personal note sent to advise me that things were not going well in their negotiations with Kirklees," he said.