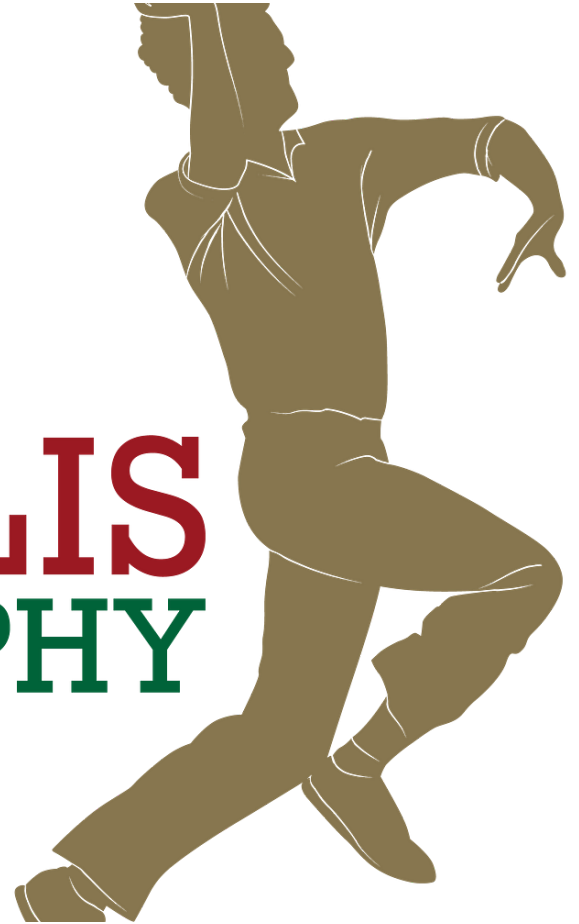


BOB WILLIS TROPHY



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Bob Willis Trophy fixtures announced; Women's 50-over domestic competition confirmed

- All 18 First-Class Counties will be in action when Bob Willis Trophy starts on 1 August
- A five-day final will decide the Bob Willis Trophy champions
- Women's 50-over domestic tournament to be played this summer
- Vitality Blast fixtures to be announced next month
- Men's red-ball trophy set to feature design of Bob Willis painted by his wife Lauren

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has confirmed that this summer's shortened domestic season will include a 50-over women's competition in addition to the Bob Willis Trophy and Vitality Blast.

Fixtures for the Bob Willis Trophy were released today with all 18 First-Class Counties (FCCs) set to be in action when the one-off red-ball competition begins on Saturday 1 August.

The Bob Willis Trophy will hold first-class status, but is a separate competition from the County Championship, and will comprise three regionalised groups, consisting of six counties per group.

The FCCs will play five group-stage matches – one against each county in their group – with the two group winners with the most points set to progress to a five-day final.

A special edition women's domestic 50-over competition will also be staged this summer, featuring the eight new teams in the women's elite domestic structure.

The competition will also be regionalised, into two groups of four teams, with the group winners meeting in a final. The staging of this competition reflects the ECB's commitment to continue the journey to professionalise the domestic game for women.

Fixtures for the women's domestic competition are set to be announced alongside confirmation of the full schedule for the Vitality Blast next month. The Vitality Blast will commence on 27 August.

ECB Chief Executive Officer, Tom Harrison, said: “There has been a strong determination across the game to play men's and women's domestic cricket this summer and the fact that we will owe to the significant work and collaboration across the county network.

“The efforts to deliver a new one-off men's and women's competition, in addition to a shortened Vitality Blast, to meet the unprecedented requirements of playing professional cricket during a pandemic have been remarkable.

“It will be a fitting reward for all that work, and for the patience of all county cricket fans, when the first ball is bowled in the Bob Willis Trophy next Saturday. To have this year’s first-class competition named in Bob’s honour is a perfect gesture to a great man who is sorely missed.

“I am pleased that we have been able to schedule women’s domestic cricket and ensure competitive cricket following last month’s confirmation of the first cohort of players on Regional Retainer contracts.

“We will need to remain agile to the challenges that will await us during the shortened domestic season with the health and wellbeing of our players, staff, officials and fans continuing to be our first priority.”

The domestic competitions will be staged under strict health and safety protocols with the Bob Willis Trophy also set to feature ECB Board-approved changes to playing conditions to help ensure the wellbeing of players, most significantly fast bowlers, following the long lay-off due to COVID-19.

The playing conditions have been put in place following extensive medical research and in collaboration with the First-Class Counties and the Professional Cricketers’ Association, and include:

- A reduction from a minimum of 96 overs to a minimum of 90 overs in a day’s play.
- Each county’s first innings of a match can last no longer than 120 overs
- The follow-on will increase from 150 to 200 runs
- The new ball will be available after 90 overs rather than 80 overs

Performance Cricket Committee Chair, Sir Andrew Strauss, said: “For all fans of the county game, it is fantastic news that domestic cricket will get underway at the start of August.

“It goes without saying that everyone wants to see competitive red and white ball cricket but in these unprecedented times it is crucially important that we recognise that the fitness and wellbeing of players is the top priority after a long lay-off period.

“Following appropriate medical consideration these measures have been put

in place for the Bob Willis Trophy to help to protect players from the risk of long-term injury and any impact that could have on their careers.”

Bob Willis’ name will adorn the one-off men’s red-ball tournament after his former England team-mate, and close friend, Sir Ian Botham proposed the idea as a tribute following his death in December last year at the age of 70.

Willis claimed a then record 325 wickets, from 90 Test caps, during an international career which was highlighted by his fierce determination – most significantly against Australia at Emerald Headingley in 1981 – and an endearing persona that won him admirers across the world.

Durham County Cricket chairman, Sir Ian Botham, said: “As a player there was no better person to turn to in a crisis and as a man there was no-one more capable to make you smile and realise the beauty in life.

“He was an ardent advocate for the longest form of the game and, at a time when all of his great virtues have been needed by us all, I can think of no better person to name this tournament after.”

A special trophy is also set to be minted for the champions and will feature a cuboid design of Willis in his iconic bowling action, as painted by his wife Lauren.

Lauren Clark said: “Anything that keeps Bob’s memory alive is as beautiful as the man I married. This would mean so much to him.

“Shortly after his death we were all cast into lockdown due to this pandemic and during that time I have turned to art as a means of expression.

“I am truly humbled and honoured that one of my paintings of Bob, in that wonderful bowling action of his and which so many cricket fans immediately recognise, will be featured on the trophy when it is presented to the winning county at the end of the summer.”

ENDS

Editors notes:

BOB WILLIS TROPHY

The Bob Willis Trophy will hold first-class status and is a separate competition to the County Championship. Changes to playing conditions and guidance is for the Bob Willis Trophy only and will only affect that tournament.

Bob Willis Trophy groups:

NORTH GROUP: Derbyshire, Durham, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire.

CENTRAL GROUP: Glamorgan, Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire, Somerset, Warwickshire, Worcestershire.

SOUTH GROUP: Essex, Kent, Hampshire, Middlesex, Surrey, Sussex.

Playing conditions

The Bob Willis Trophy will have first-class status with some alteration to playing conditions, for this season only, to accommodate circumstances due to COVID-19. This guidance is highlighted below and follows extensive medical research and consultation with the First-Class Counties and Professional Cricketers' Association to mitigate the risk of injury, most significantly to fast bowlers:

- A reduction from a minimum of 96 overs to a minimum of 90 overs in a day's play
- Each county's first innings of a match can last no longer than 120 overs
- The follow-on will increase from 150 to 200 runs
- The new ball will be available after 90 overs rather than 80 overs

Loans

The loan system has been relaxed this summer so that FCCs can loan a player from another FCC for a minimum of one week.

Points system

During the Bob Willis Trophy points awarded for a draw will be increase from five (in the County Championship) to eight points. All other points scoring will remain the same as in the County Championship. This change in points awarded for a draw is to help mitigate against the impact of weather during a shortened competition.

Tie-breaker in final

In the event of a drawn final there will be one tie-breaker option. That option is that the county that leads on first innings, as long as there were two fully-completed first innings, would be deemed the winner of the final. In any other circumstances a drawn or tied final will result in the trophy being shared by the finalists.

County Championship

The Bob Willis Trophy is a separate competition to the County Championship. Results in the Bob Willis Trophy will have no bearing on the divisions for next summer's County Championship.

WOMEN'S 50-OVER COMPETITION

Format

This summer's 50-women's domestic competition will be staged as a special-edition tournament and feature the eight teams that will launch the new Women's Domestic Elite Structure next summer.

It will be a regionalised competition with two groups, containing four teams per group. The two group winners will play in a final to decide the champions.

Further details of the one-off competition, including fixtures, will be announced in August.

ENDS



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