



Ryan ten Doeschate with the County Championship trophy in September 2017

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2018 fixture list unveiled

Essex will launch their defence of the Specsavers County Championship next April against Yorkshire at Emerald Headingley – an intriguing first domestic fixture as head coach of the county champions for Anthony McGrath, as it will mean returning to the club where he spent 18 seasons as a player.

“I was sort of expecting it,” said McGrath, recently announced as the successor to Chris Silverwood following his appointment as England fast-bowling coach. **“It feels like a long time since I left Yorkshire already, and the first time I went back with Essex last year to Scarborough, we had a good win.**

“It’s a good fixture to get first because Yorkshire will give us a nice marker of where we’re at. We’ve got a tough start with Lancashire at home, Hampshire away and then the return match against Yorkshire, so we’ll have plenty of focus in our preparations.”

The opening round of six matches, which begins six days later than in 2017 on Friday April 13, also includes away games for the two teams promoted from Division Two, with Worcestershire travelling to Hampshire and Nottinghamshire to Lancashire – while Jason Gillespie’s first competitive fixture on his return to county cricket as head coach of Sussex will be against Warwickshire at Edgbaston.

Royal London One-Day Cup

Notts Outlaws face another trip north when they begin their bid to retain the Royal London One-Day Cup on May 17 – against Lancashire Lightning at Emirates Old Trafford, meaning their head coach Peter Moores will also be returning to one of his former counties.

The group matches in the Royal London One-Day Cup will again be played in a block early in the season, with the 18 counties split into North and South Groups, and each playing eight matches between May 17 and June 7. The winners of each group will earn a home semi final, with their opponents determined by play-offs on June 14 between the teams finishing second and third.

The final will be played at Lord’s on Saturday June 30, clearing the way for the Kia Super League and T20 Blast to take centre stage in the domestic game for most of July and August – as announced yesterday.

Moores, who spent four seasons as head coach of Lancashire, said: **“I’ll always have a soft spot for Old Trafford, and it’s a good place for us to start in the Royal London. I’m pleased the competition is being played in a block again next year, because I thought it worked really well in 2017 for players and coaches, giving us something to get our teeth into in the first half of the season.”**

Pink ball Championship matches return

The 2018 fixture list, which is released in full this morning, also features nine day-night Championship matches, involving each of the 18 counties, which will again be played with pink balls – although unlike in 2017, when all nine matches were played in a floodlit round in late June, next summer they will be spread over four rounds, with one game in July when Sussex play Glamorgan, and another in August when Surrey face Lancashire at the Kia Oval.

Alan Fordham, the ECB's head of cricket operations, said: **“With England preparing to play their second day-night Test in Adelaide this weekend, and a third already arranged for Auckland next spring, the ECB's Cricket Committee has decided that it is important for us to continue providing experience of playing with pink balls in day-night conditions in the Specsavers County Championship.**

“Our first floodlit round earlier this year stimulated considerable interest, and we have again ensured that each of the 18 counties again plays one day-night fixture. The fact that the matches are spread from June to August should allow us to assess some different conditions.”

Tour fixtures

Essex have also been chosen as the only county opposition for India on their 2018 tour which includes three T20 Internationals, three Royal London One-Day Internationals, and five Tests. The champions will face India in a four-day match at the Cloudfm County Ground in Chelmsford from July 25-28, before the first Test at Edgbaston.

Kent and Northamptonshire will play four-day matches against Pakistan early in the season before their two Tests against England, with Pakistan also playing an historic Test against Ireland in Dublin followed by a two-day match against Leicestershire.

Australia are also touring next summer, and they will prepare for a five-match Royal London One-Day Series against England with List A matches against

Sussex at the 1st Central County Ground on June 7, and against Middlesex at Lord's two days later.

England Lions will play two games in Derby, and one each in Leicester and Northampton, in a 50-over Tri-Series against India A and West Indies A, in addition to a first-class four-day match against India A at Worcester from July 16-19.

England Under-19s play two four-day "Youth Tests" against South Africa A at Scarborough and the Emirates Riverside followed by a three-match 50-over series which also takes in South Northumberland CC.

Key county dates

March 27-30: MCC Champion County match – MCC v Essex (Barbados).

April 1-3: First round of MCCU fixtures.

April 13-16: First round of Specsavers County Championship matches.

May 17 – June 7: Royal London One-Day Cup group matches

June 14: Royal London One-Day Cup Play-Offs

June 17., 18: Royal London One-Day Cup Semi Finals

June 30: Royal London One-Day Cup Final (Lord's)

September 24-27: Specsavers County Championship final round

Day-Night Specsavers County Championship matches

June 20-23: Hampshire v Yorkshire, Northamptonshire v Gloucestershire

June 25-28: Derbyshire v Leicestershire, Durham v Warwickshire, Essex v Somerset, Kent v Middlesex, Nottinghamshire v Worcestershire.

July 22-25: Sussex v Glamorgan

August 19-22: Surrey v Lancashire

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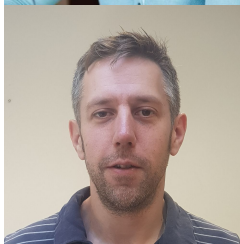
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