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First-Class Counties agree 2021 Men's Domestic Structure

- County Championship set to return next summer in a group-stage format
- First-Class Counties agree structure for next season only to help mitigate against possible COVID-19 impact
- Counties have been placed into three seeded Groups of six teams
- The top two teams in each Group progress to Division One. The Division One winner to be crowned County champions and awarded the Lord's Taverners trophy
- The top two teams in Division One to compete for the Bob Willis Trophy in a five-day Lord's final

- **Review and consultation to be held during 2021 with counties and other stakeholders on the men's domestic structure for 2022 and beyond**

Essex is set to have the opportunity to defend two red-ball titles next summer following confirmation that the First-Class Counties have agreed to a revised structure for the 2021 men's first-class season.

The chairs of the First-Class Counties have agreed via a vote that next summer will welcome the return of the County Championship in a group-stage format. The men's first-class season is then set to end with a showpiece five-day Lord's final to win the Bob Willis Trophy.

Essex will seek to defend both titles after the county won the 2019 County Championship and this summer's Bob Willis Trophy final at Lord's.

Today's announcement follows discussions between the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the First-Class Counties to help restart the County Championship, whilst mitigating against the impact of COVID-19 next summer. The agreed revised structure is for the 2021 men's first-class season only.

The 18 First-Class Counties are set to play 14 County Championship matches each next summer across Group and Division Stages.

Each First-Class County has initially been placed into one of three seeded groups of six and will be scheduled to play five home, and five away, matches during the Group Stage.

The top two counties in each group, at the end of the Group Stage, will progress to Division One, with the other counties moving into Divisions Two and Three, where they will each play a further four matches.

The winner of Division One will be crowned the 2021 County Championship winners.

The top two teams in Division One will also earn the right to play in the Bob Willis Trophy final at Lord's.

ECB Chair, Ian Watmore, said: “Since starting in my new role last month one of my key priorities, as a huge supporter of red-ball cricket, has been to collaborate with the First-Class Counties so that we could confirm a structure for next summer’s men’s domestic season.

“I am delighted that the counties have been able to reach this agreement less than three weeks after Essex won the Bob Willis Trophy final at Lord’s.

“The success of that competition provides reassurance that this structure can help safeguard against any impact the global pandemic may have on next season while also ensuring the integrity of the County Championship.

“It must be stressed that this structure has been agreed for next season only and during 2021 we will review and consult with the counties and other stakeholders to decide the appropriate next steps for the men’s domestic structure in 2022 and beyond.”

Seedings for the Group Stage of the 2021 County Championship have been determined based on performances of the First-Class Counties during the 2019 County Championship and the 2020 Bob Willis Trophy.

A provision to accommodate derby matches, only where appropriate within the seeding structure, into the groups has also ensured that county members and supporters can look forward to some of county cricket’s oldest rivalries resuming home and away next summer.

2021 County Championship Groups:

Group 1: Essex, Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Worcestershire, Durham

Group 2: Somerset, Hampshire, Surrey, Gloucestershire, Middlesex, Leicestershire

Group 3: Kent, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Northamptonshire, Glamorgan, Sussex

Playing conditions for the 2021 County Championship and the 2021 Bob Willis Trophy final remain under discussion and will be announced in due

course.

ENDS

Editor's Notes

The review and consultation that is to be conducted into the men's domestic structure from 2022 and beyond will be undertaken with the (10,8) County Championship structure as the default position. (Ten First-Class Counties in Division One and eight First-Class Counties in Division Two of the County Championship)

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