

County Championship Discussion

22nd November 2023, Teams

Chairs and Heads of Rugby Yorkshire, Cumbria, Durham and Northumberland

Andrew Soutar – RFU

- Thank you all for such a constructive and productive discussion yesterday evening which followed Northumberland sharing a note of concerns about how the County Championship does/ does not deliver benefits to our players, clubs and county. We also questioned whether the current competitions represent good value for money against our objectives of widening and growing participation in the sport. As promised below are notes of our conversation which will act as the brief for our respective Heads of Rugby to take the discussion further.
- It was agreed that the current structure works well for the female game as County representation remains an important and highly relevant route to elite and professional playing opportunities for all age groups.
- There is less confidence in the value of the competition for the male game given the academy structures run by the professional sides, the tight rules around representation as well as the cost and player welfare impact of travelling to games.
 - It was agreed the U18 competition was not fit for purpose given welfare and cost issues
 - There was more debate about the value of the U20s and adult competitions with Durham expressing satisfaction with the current set up. The three other counties question the value for these categories and believe there may be better ways of organising ourselves.

- Concerns about the competition focused on the following:
 - the very narrow representation it affords
 - what if any value it delivers to our clubs, does it aid player development, recruitment and retention?
 - whether County representation is actually perceived as a desirable goal by players
 - Inability to field multiple teams, thus restricting access to higher quality matches for a wider pool of players and potentially discriminating against 'good' players from smaller, lower division clubs
 - cost of distant away travel to play adjacent counties
- Possible avenues to explore
 - More regional competitions
 - Multiple 'county' sides
 - Regional/National Selectors use video/ small groups to assess players ie. They come to us, not the other way round
- Actions
 - Heads of rugby work up a couple of workable models for a regional approach
 - Aim to agree something ahead of December County Championship entry deadline
 - Consider different models for the different age groups – one size need not fit all
 - Have an open mind on experimentation – learn from experience and be willing to be a 'living laboratory' on behalf of wider RFU community.