

Consultation on the Establishment of a Welsh National Team – Matthew Bumford – Principal Petitioner

Point 1. I think the action called for is both reasonable and feasible. It is currently the case that in the British Isles alone there are teams from Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Mann, Jersey and Guernsey. There is of course the England (and Wales) team also but no Welsh person has played for it in over half a decade. Given that Wales has a cricketing population on par with New Zealand, a full test playing nation, and more than four times the number of clubs as Ireland, who regularly appear in the World Cup, then I think it is self-evident that Wales would be a successful cricketing nation. In sum, if Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Mann, Jersey and Guernsey are all able to support national teams then it is clearly both reasonable and feasible to assert that Wales could also.

Point 2. As noted in point 1, cricketers from other nations/islands in the UK have a national team that they are able to play in. In Wales this is not the case. Instead cricketers must attempt to play for the England cricket team. This presents difficulties for several reasons. The first of these is that Glamorgan is not a fashionable county for selection for the England team. This may seem subjective but the facts speak for themselves; since 1921, when Glamorgan became a First Class county, it has produced just 16 Welsh Test players of the 650 players capped for England and only 11 One Day International players. This is a very poor return from almost a century of cricket. Furthermore, the lack of a national team for Wales means that a glass ceiling exists for Welsh cricketers that is very difficult to break through. At present, up until the under-19 age group players are able to play for a Welsh side, with Welsh women able to carry on after the age of 19. Good players are then fed into the Glamorgan system and hopefully end up playing for the Glamorgan first team. For most cricketers this is as high as they can get. Irish and Scottish cricketers are able to play in World Cricket League competitions, where they hone their skills against international teams of similar ability, whilst Welsh cricketers do not. Hence in the years since establishing their own teams Ireland have played 70 One Day Internationals and Scotland have played 49. They both now find themselves in World Cricket League Division One, regularly appear in World Cups and, in the case of Ireland, are now pushing for full membership of the International Cricket Council (ICC) and test status. This would be the case for Wales also had we chosen to set up our own teams when Ireland and Scotland did.

I also believe that the real question is not whether Welsh cricketers have the same opportunities as cricketers from elsewhere but whether they should have the opportunity to play for Wales. Some may argue that the England cricket team is sufficient representation for Wales but I vehemently disagree. The team is referred to as England in common usage (not England and Wales), the acronym for the England and Wales Cricket Board is the ECB, games begin with a rousing rendition of Jerusalem (the unofficial national anthem of England) without Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau nor God Save the Queen (as the anthem of the UK), and the team is represented by the English Flag of Saint George. In essence all of the symbolism and talk of the team is very English with no Welsh representation. It may be tempting for some to try and make the team more Welsh through something as irrelevant as a change in the ECB acronym but this will make no difference. By playing for England a Welsh person is being asked to dress up as an English person and represent England. This is distinctly different from the British and Irish Lions, where all four nations are represented in the badge and the Team GB, which reflects all of the nations that make up the UK. Welsh cricketers

should, therefore, be given a choice and given the opportunity to play for a team that represents them and not be forced to play for a team that most likely does not.

Point 3. The barriers to establishing a Welsh cricket team are Glamorgan and the Welsh Cricket Board because both believe that money from the ECB is more important than Wales representing herself and would rather see Wales being “represented” by the English team described above in which no Welsh players actually play and Wales gets no mention. This fixation with funding from England is in itself based on a fallacy because the ECB would continue to provide funding for Wales in the event of us establishing a team, as it does for Scotland, Ireland, Holland and the island teams of the UK. The International Cricket Council (ICC) would also provide funding and has recently announced new funding, such as the Bigger Better Global Game campaign, to encourage new nations to take up cricket, and there is also the Higher Performance Programme funding that is available to nations as they rise up the ranks of world cricket. It is, therefore, likely that Wales will not be financially worse off than before we had a team, meaning that rather than being reliant on English funds alone we will benefit from a mix of ECB and ICC funding.

The other major barrier is Glamorgan who seem convinced that they will not survive as a First Class county if there is a Welsh team, even though the ECB have made it clear that Glamorgan can continue to play in the English County League if a Welsh team is established. Again, Glamorgan’s view does not stand up to scrutiny. The first reason that they believe they will not survive is because they fear that they would lose players to the Welsh team when international competitions are being held. It is true that they would have to allow some players to play but it is also disingenuous to suggest that all Welsh players would come from Glamorgan. Many of Wales’s best cricketers do not play for Glamorgan and it is also likely that players from outside Wales, who have a connection to Wales, will want to play for the team, as is the case with Scotland and Ireland, for example.

The second barrier with Glamorgan is the possibility that Sophia Gardens will no longer be able to host England test matches. The first thing to be said about this is that it is financially irresponsible to base a county’s future on hosting English test matches. The test match system means that tests essentially go out to tender and counties/grounds then bid to host them. Such is the logic of Glamorgan that they bid a huge sum of money to host an England vs. Sri Lanka test match in 2011 that saw crowds of less than 1000. They have now failed to pay the ECB the £2.5 million debt that they owe for hosting that match, meaning they have been stripped of the 2012 West Indies test match that they were due to hold. This means the next test match in Wales will not be held until at least 2013. We, therefore, now find ourselves in a situation where Welsh cricket is in debt to the ECB rather than profiting from being a part of it.

It is also always assumed that there will be no money to be made from having a Welsh team. Again, I do not see why this should be the case. What we observe in rugby is that crowds at regional rugby are quite low, whilst virtually every rugby international in Wales is a full-house. I believe it likely that this would be the case for cricket. Whereas a person may not go and watch Glamorgan play Somerset it may be the case that they will go and watch Wales play home nations like England/Ireland/Scotland etc. and touring sides such as Australia and South Africa. So a Welsh team may open up cricket to an audience in Wales that did not follow it previously. This would then lead to merchandise and sponsorship deals that would mean that Welsh cricket starts to generate money.

Furthermore, with regards to economic exposure, Paul Russell, Chairman of Glamorgan CCC, has stated that the reason why they spent £3.2 million (including £1 million from the Assembly) to host the 2009 Ashes test match in Cardiff was to show off Wales. Surely, the best way to show off Wales to economic target countries such as Australia and India is not to have them play England in our country but to invite them to play Wales instead. Also, when Wales then go and play elsewhere they will be ambassadors for our country rather than England going to represent us without any sign or mention of Wales.

Point 4. I am not against England playing cricket matches in Cardiff. In cricket it is often the case that countries play in other countries (Pakistan and Afghanistan, for example, play their home games in countries such as the United Arab Emirates and England due to the security situation in their countries). What I am against is an England team arriving and claiming to play a “home” game in Cardiff when it is obvious to everybody that the England team is not a Welsh team. If it was genuinely an England and Wales team with Welsh players and Welsh symbolism then the case would be different, but as this will never be the case then it would be in the best interests of everybody if we set up our team. England will then be welcome to play in Wales but under the understanding that they are not representing Wales.

The final thing I think we should note is that several Welsh national teams do already exist. As stated earlier female cricketers in Wales already have their own team. There are also several male Welsh national teams up until the under-19 age group, after which players must suddenly forget playing under the Welsh Dragon and start playing under the Flag of St. George and the English 3 Lions. There is also the Wales Minor Counties team, which plays in a lower league than Glamorgan. Even Glamorgan have recognised the need for a Welsh national team by playing their games all over Wales and changing their name to the Welsh Dragons. Glamorgan, therefore, now has a confused role of claiming to represent Wales but only in the English county leagues.

It is clear that the Welsh public want there to be a senior-male national team, but one playing other countries not minor counties. The change that needs to be made is not a big one. All of the structures are already in place except for the team itself and it is clear where the sources of funding for a Welsh team will come from. Richard Holdsworth, when Regional Development manager for ICC Europe gave his blessing to a Welsh team and even wrote a paper on the matter (which has already been submitted), David Collier, the Chief Executive of the ECB, has also stated that the ECB does not oppose establishing a Welsh team and in Scotland and Ireland they are very keen on establishing the team so that they can begin playing Wales on a regular basis. So the only opposition to Wales becoming a team is emanating from the few individuals who benefit from the status quo. We cannot let fear and the vested interests of a few individuals stand in the way of the legitimate aspirations of Welsh cricket and so the sooner we set up our own team the sooner we can take our rightful place on the global stage, and in order to do that we must get the support of the elected representatives of the Welsh people in our National Assembly.