

A Survey into a Test Championship and Bilateral Structures

April 2016

**Conducted by Russell Degnan
russdegnan@idlesummers.com**

Executive Summary

The future of cricket and the structures that underpin it are of key importance to fans of the game. As the ICC is meeting to discuss these issues, it is of great importance that those same fans are given a platform to express what they would like, and to ensure that the ICC makes the best informed decisions. This report is the result of a three-month process of fan engagement to help determine how to best proceed with any reforms.

Finance and Logistics

From wide-ranging research into existing proposals, five requirements, relating to logistics and finance, were identified as follows:

- The schedule needs to accommodate differences in climate and season
- Player workloads must be kept to a reasonable level
- Players must be available for their national side
- Cricket must be better structured and marketed to fans
- Nations must be able to fund the cricket they play

An assessment of the current structure and playing seasons of test cricket concluded that nations can play up to twelve tests per year, although most nations currently play far less than that. It was also concluded that a championship final series, were it required, could be achieved across September and October in any pair of nations.

Recommendation 1: Structure a championship so that teams play up to 6 Tests at home, and 6 Tests away per season.

As a product, cricket is currently poorly served by its structure. The need to host bilateral series with Big-3 teams has warped the schedule and left too many fixtures of little meaning or financial worth. The ICC has recognised this in raising discussion of the bilateral structures and a Test championship.

Recommendation 2: Reduce the number of trophies cricketers play for, by reducing bilateral contests in favour of global contests.

To properly reform the structure and create the most marketable and profitable product, members ought to move away from a structure of dependence on bilateral tours. To achieve this, the existing bilateral calendar should be halved, preserving marquee tours, and leaving the remainder of the calendar for an ICC event. The rights to this event should be sold collectively, with the profits distributed, removing the disincentive to play a global championship because of the risk of relegation and missing major tours.

Recommendation 3: Construct a global Test championship that can be sold collectively by the ICC for the benefit of its members

Aims

Ten aims were identified from past proposals and discussions.

- The schedule should allow expansion of Test matches to more nations
- All players/teams should have the opportunity to reach the highest level of competition
- Movement from lowest to highest tier should be possible within an elite player's career (6-10 years)
- Games and series should be meaningful - minimising dead matches
- Matches should be scheduled between teams of similar ability
- A championship should build to a conclusion/champion
- The competition winner should reflect the best team, not the luckiest
- A championship should reflect Test cricket's traditional schedule of series played home-away
- Marquee series (such as the Ashes) should be protected
- Regional/traditional rivalries should be built upon

Many of these must be balanced against each other. As we have seen in the limited-overs formats, the opportunity for smaller teams to play the best must be balanced against the competitiveness of the competition. Expansion of Test cricket to new members - so vital to its future - conflicts with the protection of marquee fixtures, and the financial benefits of those matches. A league that provides the clearest measure of the best team is less entertaining than a competition that builds to a champion. Any structure must choose how frequently it wants to designate a champion, and how quickly teams move between tiers when they win and lose.

The relative importance of the identified aims, answers to the questions posed above, along with further questions relating to status and T20 cricket, were assessed with a survey published

at the beginning of 2016 and completed by 1,070 people spread across cricket's global audience.

The aims were assessed against a five-point scale. Either essential, important, preferable, indifferent or opposed. A summary of the responses is shown in figure 1.

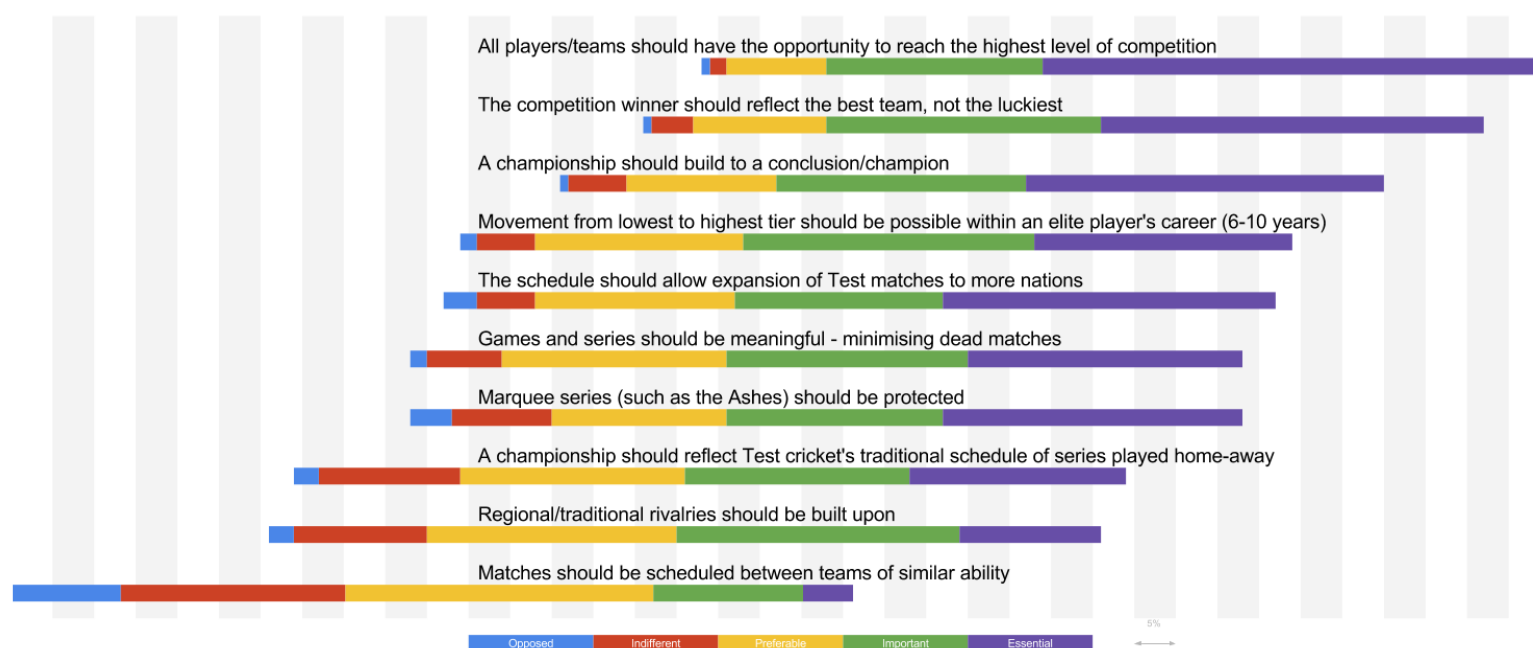


Figure 1: The ten aims of a potential test championship and bilateral structure, ranked by response.

Opportunity

Respondents were also asked to assess between conflicting aims to determine which were of the most importance. Overwhelmingly, the most important aim was the opportunity to compete. Respondents, both in survey responses and in comments (see Appendix B) were adamant about the importance of expansion; both to support emerging nations, and to ensure the primacy of Test cricket by making it available to all.

Recommendation 4: Expand the opportunities for associate nations, eliminating the competition barrier between the lower-ranked full members and the top associates.

Competition

Many of the questions posed about specific formats - for example, whether to create a larger tournament or a more competitive one, or over the importance of marquee fixtures - received a mix of responses. There was strong support for creating an expansive Test championship over a short tournament, and supporting home-and-away fixtures over neutral matches. Creating space in the Future Tours Programme is the only way to allow for an expanded Test championship, regardless of the format chosen.

Recommendation 5: Reduce the Future Tours Programme, constructing a championship from the time made available

More than 50% of respondents supported a four-year cycle for a Test championship, which likewise, would fit within a reduced bilateral / FTP program.

Recommendation 6: Structure a championship that works within the 4-year cycle of matches

Tradition

Marquee fixtures found strong support with more than 50% of fans in England putting it down as an “essential” element of any championship. Relegation would threaten the scheduling of an Ashes summer; it would therefore be advisable to set aside part of the calendar for those fixtures, reserving the rest for the global Test championship.

Recommendation 7: Set aside a part of the calendar for marquee fixtures, reserving the remainder for a global Test championship

Regional cricket is not currently an integral part of ICC, except at associate level. The poor level of competition in existing ICC regions outside Asia is one of the reasons. It is recommended that the ICC look at reforms to create three super-regions for the purposes of qualifying and competition: Asia, Northern Hemisphere (Europe and North America), and Southern Hemisphere (EAP, South America and Africa).

Recommendation 8: Restructure the ICC Regions to allow meaningful and competitive regional tournaments to take place.

T20 Cricket

Fans expressed considerable concern about the absence (or potential absence) of key players, considering it the number one threat of relegation. When asked about windows for T20 cricket they were overwhelmingly in favour. The possibility of forcing all T20 domestic leagues into the same window was less well received but still received a slightly positive response.

Recommendation 9: Create windows for T20 Domestic tournaments to ensure player availability. Encourage nations to align global schedules to reduce conflicts.

Status

Attitudes to the status disparities between members were also surveyed. A large majority of respondents believed that cricket should follow the lead of football and rugby union and apply full status to all Test, ODI and T20 internationals.

Recommendation 10: Recognise all matches played under ICC laws by ICC member nations as Test, ODI or T20 internationals.

Other responses to questions of status and Test cricket were more mixed, but there was a strong belief that Test cricket needed more teams, that the ICC structure was too rigid and hierarchical, and that pathways to Test cricket needed to be made available to all member nations.

Recommendation 11: Introduce a meritocratic playing structure within ICC tournaments that is independent of a nation's governance status.

Constructing a balanced championship that adheres to these aims is difficult but achievable. There are four key decision points for the creation of a Test championship with a variety of scheduling requirements depending on which are chosen:

- How much of the schedule will be devoted to bilateral matches, and how much to a Test championship (see figure 2)?
- How many stages will the championship be?
- How will teams qualify from stage to stage?
- How many teams / matches at each stage?

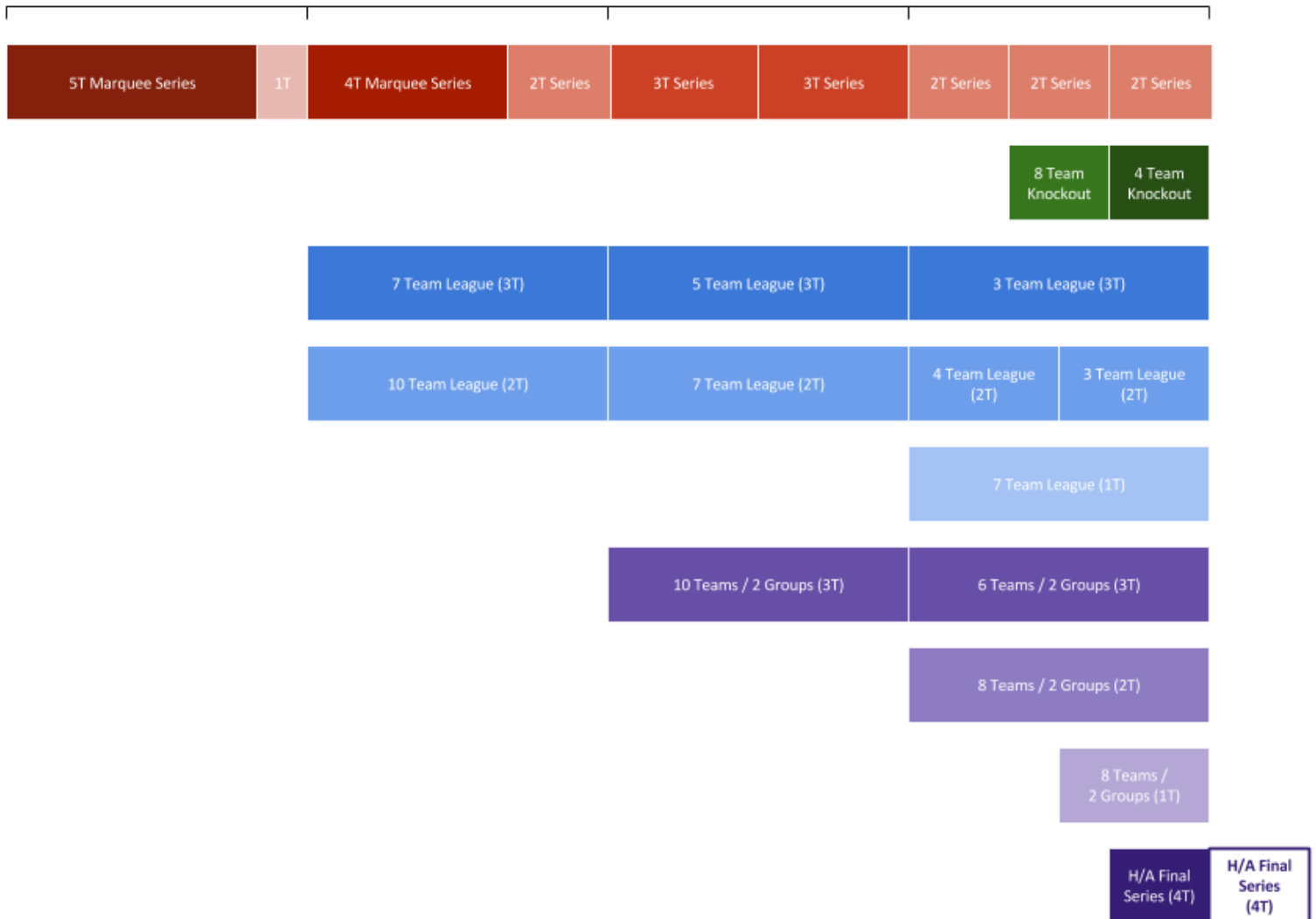


Figure 2: Time requirements for series and competition structures of different lengths. Groups and league overlap, boxes to the right included in the total time needed to play a format.

Once the decision points are addressed, the questions then become about transitions from stage to stage.

There are four theoretical paths that can be created for entry to a particular stage (see figure 3):

1. Via a qualification group, whereby the top teams are promoted
2. Via a repechage system, whereby the next best placed teams in each group are offered a second chance
3. Via a system of promotion/relegation from previous iterations of the tournament
4. Via some membership or ranking criteria that allows a bye to that stage

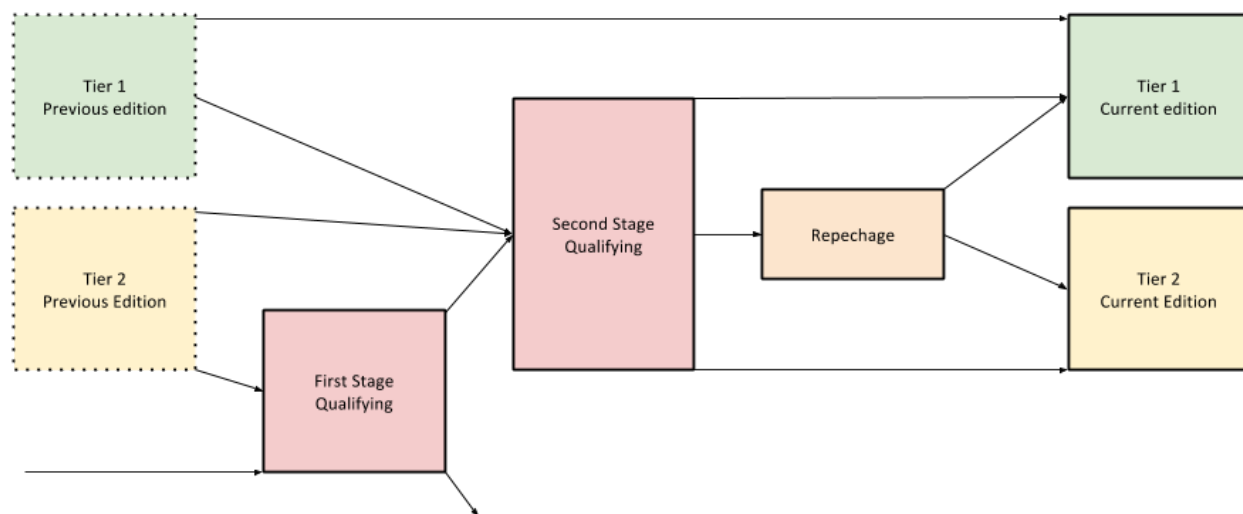


Figure 3: Theoretical pathway for a two tier tournament with multiple qualifying stages

There are innumerable possible methods of constructing a Test championship. The best combine multiple stages with increasingly long series against more competitive teams to create competitions that offer opportunity and have meaningful and competitive matches. As this will also create both long-term market growth and the the most popular and valuable Test championship, it is recommended that the ICC consider a balanced Test championship format.

Recommendation 12: Formulate a championship structure that strikes a balance between the many potential aims.

Introduction

There are few issues in cricket that are as long standing or contentious as the need for reform of bilateral structure and the creation of a test championship. Additionally, there are probably few issues that have generated as much comment and discussion on potential solutions. An irregular beat of proposals have been published for more than a decade, from the great and the good.

Many, unfortunately, are logistically or financially unworkable. But most contain the seeds of good ideas and worthy aims. As the ICC is presently considering the future structure of bilateral cricket and a possible revival of the test championship, it is appropriate that fans of the game have an opportunity to present those varied ideas, and their preferences.

This report is the result of a three-month process of fan engagement to help determine how to best proceed with any reforms. From wide-ranging research into existing proposals five requirements, relating to logistics and finance, were identified as follows:

- The schedule needs to accommodate differences in climate and season
- Player workloads must be kept to a reasonable level
- Players must be available for their national side
- Cricket must be better structured and marketed to fans
- Nations must be able to fund the cricket they play

In addition, ten aims - usually implicit to proposals made - were identified. Many of these must be balanced against each other. As we have seen in the limited-overs formats, the opportunity for smaller teams to play the best must be balanced against the competitiveness of the competition. Expansion of Test cricket to new members - so vital to its future - conflicts with the protection of marquee fixtures, and the financial benefits of those matches. A league that provides the clearest measure of the best team is less entertaining than a competition that builds to a champion. And any structure must choose how frequently it wants to designate a champion, and how quickly teams move between tiers when they win and lose.

The relative importance of the identified aims, answers to the questions posed above, along with further questions relating to status and T20 cricket, were assessed with a survey published online between the 10th February and the 10th April 2016¹. To promote the survey, a summary

¹ The list of questions and the survey can be found at Survey: Test Championship / Bilateral Structure Aims and Ideals, Google Forms, goo.gl/forms/IK0Qt5DVwC

article of the aims², and a discussion article relating to potential methods for resolving draws³ was published on the blog *Idle Summers*, and a further summary article of the complexities of reform on the Cordon blog at ESPNcricInfo on 28th March 2016⁴. Further promotion of the survey was done via social media, and by interested parties⁵.

In total, 1,070 people responded to the survey. The nation of origin and age of the participant, where supplied, is shown in figures 0.1 and 0.2 below. The majority of respondents reached the survey via the article published on ESPNcricInfo, and therefore hail from a broadly representative sample of cricket's global audience.

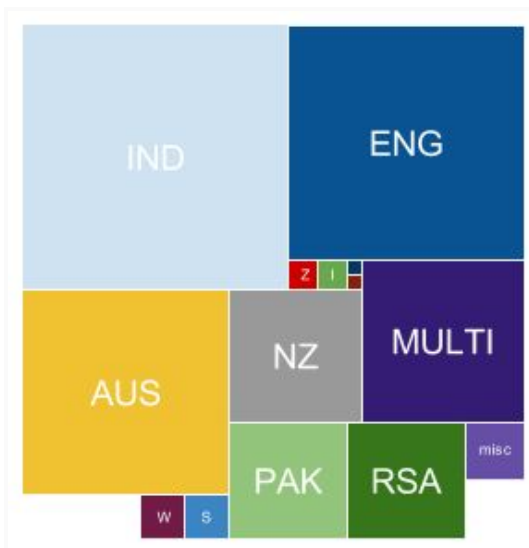


Figure 0.1: Respondent nations

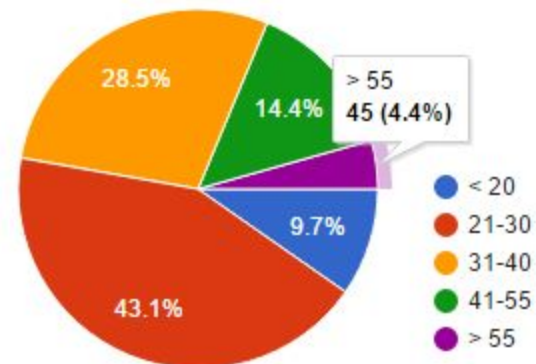


Figure 0.2: Respondent's age

² Russell Degnan, "Test Championship / FTP Survey / Aims and Ideals", *Idle Summers*, 14th Feb 2016, idlesummers.com/post.php?postid=1943

³ Russell Degnan, "Possible methods for deciding test match draws", *Idle Summers*, 2nd Feb 2016, idlesummers.com/post.php?postid=1941

⁴ Russell Degnan, "How do we devise a Test championship that satisfies everyone?", *ESPN CricInfo*, 28th Mar 2016, www.espncricinfo.com/blogs/content/story/988631.html

⁵ James Morgan, "World Test Championship Survey", *The Full Toss*, 16th Feb 2016, thefulltoss.com/england-cricket-blog/world-test-championship-survey
 Peter Miller, "Some men just want to watch the world burn", *Geek and Friends*, soundcloud.com/geek-friends/geek-friends-120-some-men-just-want-to-watch-the-world-burn

The aims were assessed against a five-point scale. Either essential, important, preferable, indifferent or opposed. A summary of the responses is shown in figure 0.3 below.

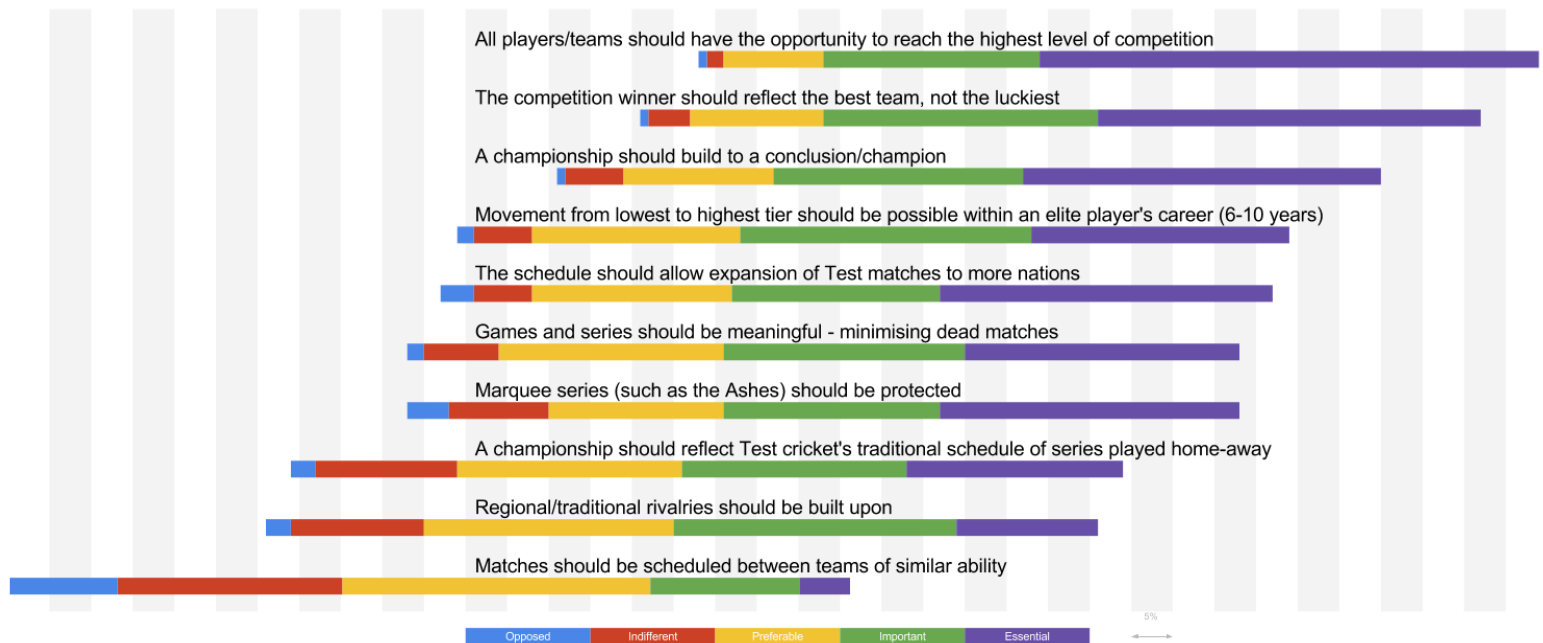


Figure 0.3: The ten aims of a potential test championship and bilateral structure, ranked by response.

Few fans were outright opposed to any particular aim. The only aim that received a significant negative response was that related to scheduling for competitive matches between teams of similar ability. A preference for meritocratic opportunity for players and teams was clearly ranked as the most important aim, with more than 50% of respondents labelling it as “essential”.

A lengthier discussion of the survey responses is contained in the following sections of this document:

Section 1 looks at the logistical requirements of structural reform and a championship, drawing on data showing when nations have traditionally scheduled their Test matches, and the current workload of various sides.

Section 2 discusses the importance of creating a stable and workable financial system as part of any scheduling reform, and the challenges within the context of uneven tour revenues. It concludes with comment on the need for the ICC to promote the “product” of Test cricket and suggests a remedy to problems related to uneven fixturing and the financial concerns related to any potential relegation.

Section 3 examines the fan response to questions related to opportunity. It found an overwhelmingly strong preference for nations and players to be given the chance to qualify for and compete at the highest level. This section also includes a digression on historical performance and the problem of rigidity and separation.

Section 4 looks at the issue of competition quality, and argues that this is what makes a tournament marketable. Attitudes to competitiveness, dead matches, neutral matches and the structure of a competition are discussed, with ambiguous results in many cases. A digression is made on the meaning of “context” and how to assess it.

Tradition is examined from many angles in section 5: the importance of marquee series and regional rivalries is looked at both globally and in particular markets where each has more fans. The “threat” of T20 cricket is considered and questions relating to its status vis-a-vis test cricket are examined. The question over which format has primacy revealed that a significant proportion of supporters believe T20 is currently perceived as the more prestigious format. Finally, fan attitudes to status and the means by which matches and nations are awarded it is discussed, with many expressing the view that it needs reform.

In section 6, the balance that must be reached between competing aims - whether those of opportunity, tradition or competition - is discussed and related to fan responses. Excepting the importance of opportunity and growth, there was no clear preference for most aims. Where possible, the ICC ought to balance and work to achieve multiple aims through creative scheduling.

The previous discussions are put together in section 7 to examine the various championship models: leagues, cups and ranking systems, and how to combine them. Some formats are suggested that meet the aims put forward in the survey.

At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were offered the opportunity to express their broader concerns about cricket to the ICC. These are listed and briefly discussed in section 8. Appendix B contains the survey comments, and are presented for reading by the relevant members of the governing body.

The report concludes with a list of recommendations. Primary amongst these is the importance of giving opportunity to all nations to compete for a place in a test championship, maintaining cricket’s traditions - particularly those relating to home-and-away series - and creating a marketable product that all fans can enjoy.

1. Logistical Requirements

The bulk of this report will be engaged with the various issues pertaining to a Test championship with reference to the fan survey, and the compromises that must be made between competing aims. The logistical challenges listed in this section however, are a fait accompli in the scheduling of international cricket. Regardless of preference, there are two overriding requirements that must be accommodated in any future scheduling.

Requirement 1. The schedule needs to accommodate differences in climate and season

It might seem an obvious requirement that England not schedule matches in the winter snow, nor India in the summer heat, but one missed in many utopian schemes. In a championship format, it is particularly important that matches are not ruined by rain, allowing every nation the opportunity to decide their fate on the field.

The past 16 years of scheduled Test matches show some distinct features, as depicted in figure 1.1. Firstly, the big-3 tend to have more focused seasons than smaller nations, who often play on the shoulder of the season. Fans in big-3 nations have benefitted from consistent schedules, and traditional fixtures (such as the Boxing Day test). Whereas fans of smaller nations have suffered from their boards need to take the fixtures offered to them. Any future schedule should aim to play all Test matches in blocs with less variation.

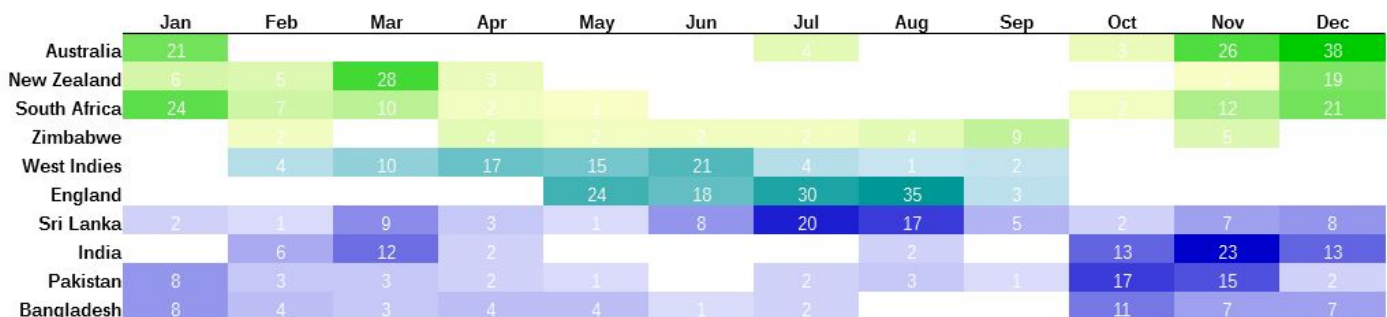


Figure 1.1: Months in which test matches have started, by home team, since the start of the 2000 season

Secondly, there are two overlapping periods, in March-May and September-October, that have (or could have) had a scheduled match in every nation. If a test championship final was to be played contiguously and home-and-away, one of those two blocs would need to be used. As the former is firmly in the middle of the IPL, while the latter is in the space formerly reserved for

the Champions League, the September-October period remains the most likely space for a series of that type.

Requirement 2. Player workloads must be kept to a reasonable level.

A definition of the term "reasonable" here is outside the scope of this report, but recognised as an issue for discussion between players, their associations, the ICC and its member boards. From a fan's perspective, the absence of star players from the field of play - whether resting, injured, prematurely retired, or burnt out - detracts from the match and the integrity of the contest.

Two corollaries follow. Firstly, that it is better that players participate in matches that attract fan interest: that have context (see section 4) and will be more financially fruitful. And secondly, that the "right" number of matches is as many as possible without impacting on the health or longevity of the players involved.

Since the turn of the millennium, the average matches per year of the top-8 nations has been ten Tests (see figure 1.2). However, both England and Australia have tended to play around twelve Test matches a year, and there is flexibility in the schedule of other nations. It is reasonable to conclude that six matches at home and six matches away, played over around 18 weeks, is a good working limit for structuring a schedule around.

	Home	Away	Total	Per Year
Australia	92	90	182	11.4
England	110	93	203	12.7
South Africa	79	79	158	9.9
West Indies	74	83	157	9.8
New Zealand	62	67	129	8.1
India	71	91	162	10.1
Pakistan	57	74	131	8.2
Sri Lanka	83	63	146	9.1
Bangladesh	51	42	93	5.8
Zimbabwe	30	26	56	3.5

Figure 1.2: Test matches played since the beginning of the 2000 season

In the 2010s to date, nations have played between 15 and 27 ODI matches per year, down from 18 to 30 in the previous decade. There are roughly half as many T20 matches played. This translates to 12-15 weeks of ODI/T20 cricket per year. Purely from the perspective of workload, 18 weeks of Test cricket, 15 weeks of ODI/T20 international cricket, and 16 or more weeks of T20 domestic cricket is unsustainable. For this reason, rationalisation of the ODI and domestic

T20 schedules must also be achieved as part of any scheduling reform. Appendix A discusses a plan to reduce the total amount of ODI cricket, while enhancing it as a product. The impact of T20 cricket, and fan attitudes to T20 domestic cricket and scheduling are discussed in in Section 5.

Recommendation 1: Structure a championship so that teams play up to 6 Tests at home, and 6 Tests away per season.

2. Financing World Cricket

Funding is a key issue in the construction of any schedule and in the format of a Test championship. The survey did not directly ask fans about funding, although several views were put forward on the importance of revenue being distributed in a manner that supports the game in as many nations as possible, and of the potential financial windfall that the Olympics would offer to members.

The difficulties in constructing a sensible schedule, and moreover, a schedule that maximises the possible revenue available to cricket, are exacerbated by two key components of the current structure of world cricket. Firstly, the major sources of revenue for most members are either the ICC or the market value of tours from the Big-3 (particularly India). Secondly, as Test cricket lacks an ICC-owned championship, the ICC provides no source of income, and has no means to market a championship in a format that would maximise value.

It is in the best financial interests of cricket to produce contests that maximise the number of fans watching, both amongst the fans of the participating teams, and amongst neutrals, particularly those in potential new markets.

Three requirements, in addition to those in the previous section, were identified in comments and survey questions regarding the financial structure of cricket.

Requirement 3. Players must be available for their national side.

When questioned about the possible effects of relegation, the possibility of players losing desire to play for the national team was rated as the second most concerning outcome (slightly behind losing marquee tours). Those nations cannot be competitive unless they are able to retain the services of their best players, and cricket is a poorer sport for the absence of more competitive teams.

A significant number of nations lack the local fan-bases required to support professional structures. While T20 domestic cricket offers the possibility that, like football, players will derive the bulk of their wages from domestic leagues; unlike football, cricket continues to schedule international and domestic matches against each other, dividing the loyalties of its cricketers. A fuller discussion of this issue is contained in section 5.

Requirement 4. Cricket must be better structured and marketed to fans

From a product perspective, Test cricket suffers from a form of "Dutch Disease" - the phenomenon whereby a nation with copious natural resources does not develop other industries. Almost universally, fans believe it is - or ought to be - the pinnacle of the sport, but they offer two responses to its future. On the one hand, a single test match, or series, offers sufficient drama as to not require external context; on the other, one-sided matches and series with little history need to be more than "friendlies". The depth of meaning in test cricket has obscured the value that could be obtained from better structures.

“ Test cricket neither needs nor 'fits' a championship. Any such competition designed to do the game justice will take too long to complete and generate no additional interest and indeed may be counterproductive to interest levels. Test cricket does not need context to be interesting to watch.”
- Anon., England

A key problem across cricket is "trophy fatigue". It is not unusual for a player to play several bilateral series in three formats, as well as in multiple domestic leagues, and one or more ICC tournaments. It is nearly impossible for a fan to care

about a dozen or more competitions at a time, and naturally their focus tends towards specific high profile events: the marquee test tours and ICC events. Putting bilateral tours into a structure that allows fans to place most matches into the context of a single trophy is essential, both for their interest and to develop the product for greater financial rewards.

“ It's time to do more than pay lip service to the notion that Test cricket is the sport's "pinnacle," and at last organize an exciting Test championship structure.”
- Anon., England

Requirement 5. Nations must be able to fund the cricket they play

Cricket is not a for-profit operation. The more money is generated, the more ways can be found to spend it, whether on player salaries or investments in stadiums, grass-roots, and marketing. Not all matches, as currently fixtured, have the media or crowds to be profitable - particularly in small markets. In order to develop those markets, and to ensure that cricket (particularly Test cricket) is being played some level of subsidisation from nation to nation, or format to format, must occur.

Contrary to what is sometimes stated, there is no free market in cricket schedules. Administrators are

“ Most important thing is the ICC runs the Test championship centrally and that nothing is left to bilateral agreement between certain boards. Equitable distribution of television revenue from a central pool is also essential or it simply will not work.”
- Anon., England

responsible for the cricket being scheduled, and the market merely purchases the product being sold. If cricket administrators want a robust and expanded Test schedule, then they are able to do so; likewise, if they wish to corral test cricket in order to bring in larger sums from other formats or competitions, then that, too, is their prerogative.

Bilateral Structure and Distributions

The current financial structure of ICC members is based around three sources of income: their local revenue, which in many cases is negligible (20% or less); ICC funding from the profits of global tournaments in which they participate; and off-shore television rights to bilateral tours they host. The latter is largely drawn from tours from India, and to a lesser extent England and Australia.

As the other seven full members have a combined GDP less than the Big-3 combined, it is highly unlikely that any but the Big-3 will significantly increase their local revenue.

Test cricket, which is currently confined to bilateral tours, is predominantly funded from the rights to overseas tours. This has three effects contra to good management:

- A disincentive to play unprofitable tours, resulting in relatively few matches between poorer members
- Limited opportunities for context, as the Future Tours Programme is structured around the Big-3 touring schedule and tour guarantees.
- The schedule is unable to accommodate more teams as there are a limited number of tours that the larger nations can make.

Reforming the Test calendar will require financial reform to accommodate more matches and a schedule that is not guaranteed for any particular member. The financial loss to the Big-3 members from revenue sharing could be significant, as they currently capture a large percentage of cricket's global revenue. As such, it is *not* recommended that the ICC institutes revenue sharing.

In recent years, the total number of matches being played by the Big-3 against each other has been close to 50%, and this represents the majority of their revenue. Cordoning off these marquee tours, and maintaining 50% of the calendar for bilateral fixtures, will ensure they are insulated against the loss of one of these tours.

The structure of the FTP for other tours is largely a funnel for money from the Big-3 markets into smaller markets. As such, if the rights to these tours were collectively sold by the ICC to be

redistributed as per an ICC determined, the total revenue obtained would be similar, while freeing the schedule from the obligation of an otherwise meaningless tour.

The ICC will then be able to schedule matches for a Test championship, with the rights collectively sold and distributed addressing the three concerns above in the following ways:

- Unprofitable tours can be subsidised from ICC revenue, and no member would suffer a financial loss from the absence of a Big-3 tour.
- Context can be created within a Test championship, which, if well marketed, ought to obtain substantially higher revenues than otherwise meaningless bilateral tours.
- The schedule can be made meritocratic and exclude or replace some teams from the top tier of Test competition, without disadvantaging them financially. A broader number of teams can be included as the financial distribution will be an issue for the ICC, rather than a function of scheduling.

Recommendation 2: Reduce the number of trophies cricketers play for, by reducing bilateral contests in favour of global contests.

Recommendation 3: Construct a global Test championship that can be sold collectively by the ICC for the benefit of its members

3. Opportunity

Opportunity to play and compete was one of the three core components of the survey, along with competition and tradition. It is also the most politically charged area of ICC governance amongst fans, with issues of Test status and the size of world events regularly making headlines. Respondents to the survey were overwhelmingly in favour of increasing opportunities for cricket's developing nations. Three aims were directly or indirectly related to increased opportunity.

Aim 1. The schedule should allow expansion of Test matches to more nations

Test match cricket has been confined to a small handful of nations throughout its long history. While respondents had mixed answers to questions around status (see section 5), there was strong support for the playing of Test matches to be open to more nations (see figure 3.1).

Despite there being frequent calls in the media over the past 17 years for there to be fewer test nations (sometimes as few as four), less than 5 percent of responses indicated that they would prefer this option to expansion. Moreover, almost 40% of respondents thought that it was essential that any future bilateral structure and championship would allow more teams to be included.

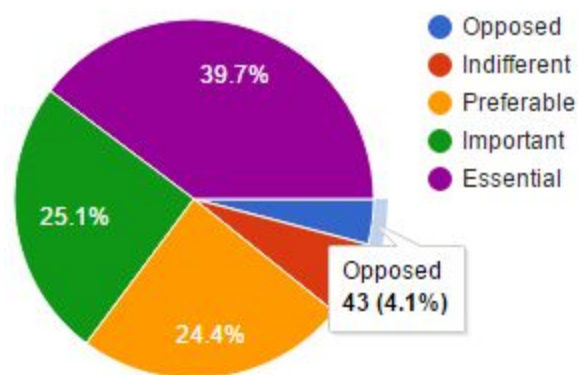


Figure 3.1 The schedule should allow expansion of Test matches to more nations

“ The Inter-Continental Cup should be regarded as "Test" cricket, albeit at [a lower] tier.”
- Anon., England/Scotland

This was backed by a further question regarding match status (see figure 3.2). More than two-thirds of respondents believe that Test, T20 and ODI matches should be granted full match status, regardless of the level at which they are played. A minority of respondents disagreed with a blanket status, implying that around one-sixth of survey respondents believe

there should be an expansion of the number of Test-playing nations, while maintaining some form of status classification.

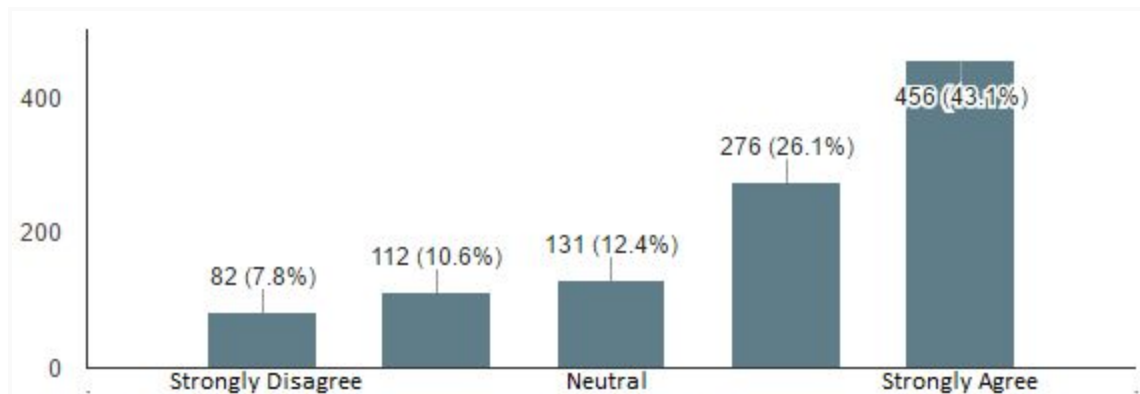


Figure 3.2: All Test/ODI/T20 international matches should have full status, as in football or rugby

In practical terms, as very few nations play multi-day cricket, this would mean granting Test status to matches played in the Intercontinental Cup. From a scheduling perspective, status is less important than whether nations are granted the opportunity to play international multi-day cricket; particularly at the highest level. As seen over the past decade, ODI and T20 status is not valuable if it does not lead to more fixtures.

Aim 2. All players/teams should have the opportunity to reach the highest level of competition

To the extent that modern sport retains vestiges of its aspirational roots, the response to this aim shows that those watching are the primary believers. Three-fifths of respondents believe that it is essential that all players and teams are given the opportunity to work their way through the structure and reach the highest level of competition (see figure 3.3).

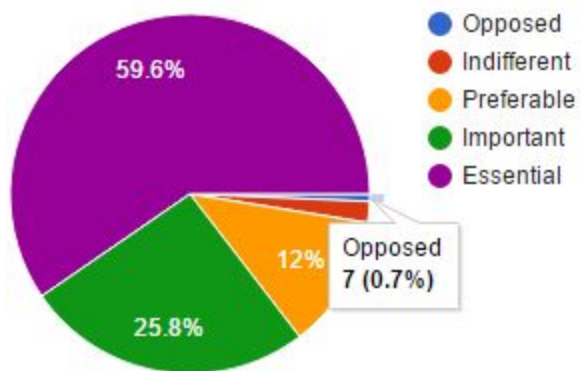


Figure 3.3: All players/teams should have the opportunity to reach the highest level of competition

Cricket has abjectly failed to support this aim in the past, whether from the lack of opportunities afforded to associate teams at their peak - such as Kenya - or from players shifting allegiance to play Test cricket for larger, established nations that needed their services far less than their place of origin.

“ In no other sport are teams/nations prevented from playing a form of the game.”
- Anon., England

A structure that supports the ambitions of players is essential if nations are to retain their players. This is particularly true for Test cricket, which is currently both exclusive to a small circle of nations, and restrictive of

the ambitions of players amongst many full members. A related question on the relative prestige of T20 domestic cricket versus Test cricket indicated that many observers now consider the former to hold greater allure for players than Test matches (see figure 3.4). That a minority believe that Test cricket remains the more prestigious format demonstrates clearly the lack of importance attached to bilateral series outside a few nations, and the need for a more coherent format.

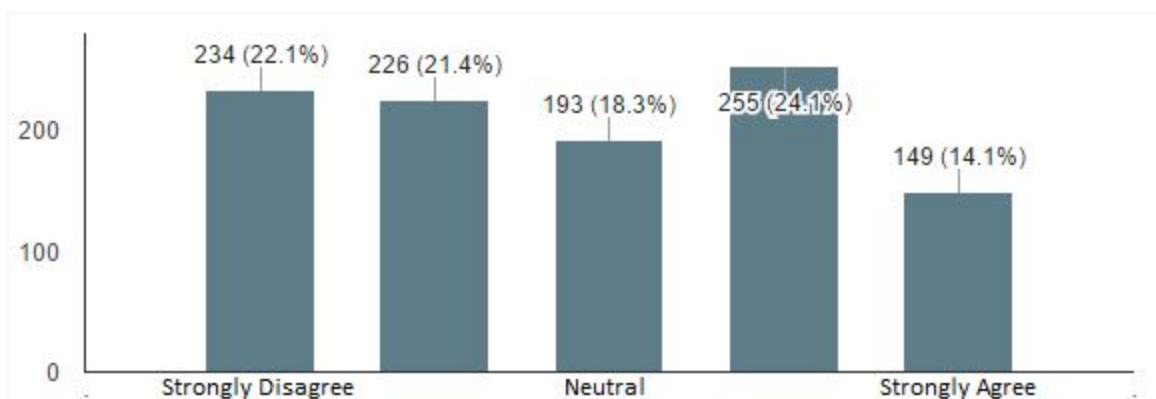


Figure 3.4: As currently structured, for most players, there is more prestige playing T20 domestic cricket than Test cricket.

Historical Competitiveness and Hierarchy

Competitiveness amongst full members, particularly new full members, is a contentious issue. It is indisputable that the ascension to full member status in the past has led to poor results by the newly formed Test teams. What is less well recognised are the dual reasons for this occurrence.

The ODI performances of Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, and Bangladesh were all inferior in the half decade after attaining full member status to the performances they put up in the years immediately prior to their ascension. Indeed, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were repeatedly beaten by associate members in this period. By promoting a side after an extended period of good performances, the ICC assumed that those performances would continue. In all cases, a “golden generation” had artificially boosted the fortunes of the side, and it would take many years of development to return to that standard. Moreover, because the players involved had peaked and were now waning, the immediate performance trajectory of the team was backwards.

Promoting a team to permanent full member status on a performance basis will see a recurrence of this effect. The recent promotion of Afghanistan and Ireland to the ODI rankings table - both older teams - shows a similar short-sightedness.

When the ICC participation statistics are examined against a team's T20 rating⁶ it can be seen that organised participation (senior and junior club players) provides a close fit with the final rating. Nations can substantially overperform or underperform this prediction as (largely by luck) they attain high quality performers, but in the long term, the playing base of a member is a sound prediction of future success.

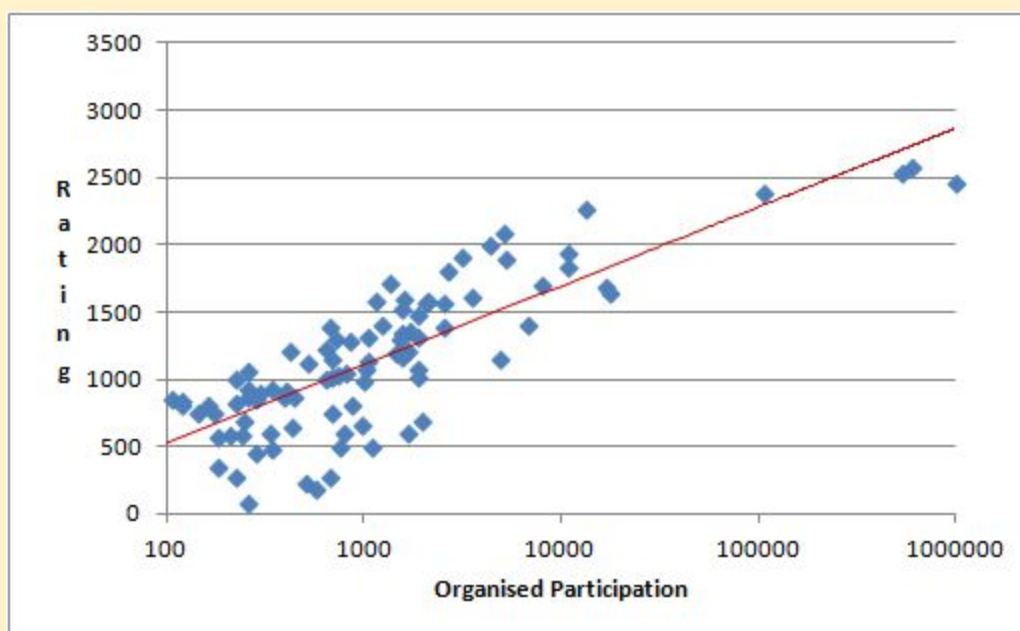


Figure 3A: Organised participation against T20 rating amongst ICC members

Afghanistan and Ireland have made great strides in increasing their playing base, but they are still a few years from seeing the fruits of those endeavours. In the meantime, it is likely that other nations will surpass them, as they attain their own “golden generation”.

Historically, although we like to think of full members as being evenly matched, certain teams have consistently dominated, while others (notably NZ and Sri Lanka) have been only periodically competitive. Historical Test ratings remain in a band for developed teams, rather than increasing, as they have already attained maximum development.

Given the population and wealth of its playing nations, both full and associate members, cricket cannot expect to have a large number of permanently strong teams - nor can any sport, including football, which has had only eight World Cup winners in 80 years. But cricket can expect to have many teams - perhaps twenty - fluctuating between the current top associate

⁶ The rating system used for this section is documented extensively at idlesummers.com

level and the historical performance of New Zealand, whose limited population provides a ceiling to long-term performance.

This would provide for large, competitive global competitions, where the mid-ranked teams are strongly competitive, but the winners come from a relatively small circle. But to achieve this, the ICC must be open to fluctuations in form and performances. Competition structures need to be designed to accommodate short bursts of high performance, and not expect long periods of success.

Aim 3. Movement from lowest to highest tier should be possible within an elite player's career (6-10 years)

Granting a team or player the opportunity to play against the best teams doesn't necessarily correspond to a fixed set of matches. All sports have some level of hierarchy (see section 6) that requires a process of qualification, or a system of promotion and relegation.

For a player to have an opportunity to compete at the highest tier, it needs to be possible to move from the lowest tiers to the top within the time-frame of their career, and preferably while they are playing to the peak of their abilities. Typically an international career lasts from 6-10 years, while a player peak could be as short as 2-3 years.

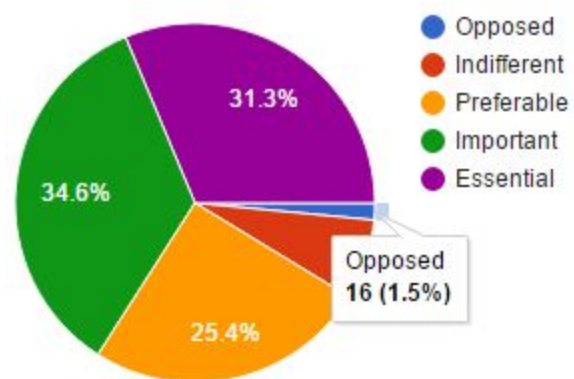


Figure 3.5: Movement from lowest to highest tier should be possible within an elite player's career (6-10 years)

“ A test championship must include many nations and aim to add context to test series. Countries not in the Test championship should want to aim to get in it and they should be allowed to realistically achieve it in a short time (1-4 years).”
- Anon., Australia

Two-thirds of respondents ranked movement between tiers as “important” or better, making it the fourth most important of those stated. In some areas, cricket is successful at promoting this aim. World T20 qualifying is responsive to players having a good few months at regional and world level, as Oman showed in the most recent tournament. Whereas despite Afghanistan’s rapid ascent through the World Cricket League, it takes a healthy dose of luck to continually place in the top two positions. Test cricket, being

entirely rigid in its hierarchy, needs reform to meet this aim. Scheduling reform of Test cricket is a necessary requirement to meet the needs of not only full members, but all aspiring teams.

Recommendation 4: Expand the opportunities for associate nations, eliminating the competition barrier between the lower-ranked full members and the top associates.

4. Competition

To create a great competition is to create a marketable and profitable competition. The two key components of a competition structure that makes it great (or not) are *meaning* and *competitiveness*; with meaning defined as “the likelihood that the result will impact on the result of the competition”; and competitiveness defined as “the likelihood that the match will be closely fought”. No format is able to guarantee that every match has either meaning or competitiveness, as there is always an element of randomness in results. But there are ways to measure and predict them. Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of these concepts in judging whether they would watch a tournament. By a significant margin, respondents rated meaning as a more important component than competitiveness.

Aim 4. Games and series should be meaningful - minimising dead matches

Meaning is a slippery term in a sporting context. A great rivalry can hold meaning regardless of the broader structure the match is being played within but not all matches are great rivalries. Most people would agree that the fifth match of an already lost series lacks meaning, and that it is similarly lacking in the latest round in a bilateral contest played only for ranking points and profit. Within a tournament, matches that won't impact qualification for the next round (either because a team has qualified, or cannot) are similarly meaningless; while knockouts, or those that act as effective knockouts bring a greater sense of drama.

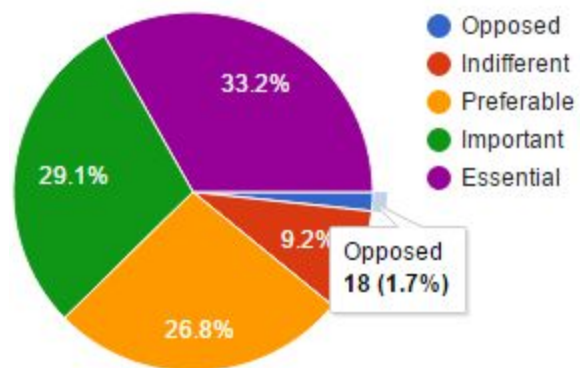


Figure 4.1: Games and series should be meaningful - minimising dead matches

A third of all survey respondents rated meaning as essential to a competition. In the context of Test cricket, which is played almost entirely as “friendly” matches, the response indicates a clear call for matches to be placed within a broader structure. For marquee series, the context brought by the rivalry make this a moot point, but the vast majority of full members - and none of the associates or affiliates - play in marquee series. For the future of Test cricket in those nations, a competition that enhances the value of their fixtures is essential.

Context: Formats, Meaning and Competitiveness

Meaning as a concept has been thrown around loosely in cricket for many years. At times, it is conflated with historical context, at others with competitiveness. Within the specific context of a competition, however, “meaning” ought to be understood as the likely chance that a match affects the final outcome.

Probabilistically, this makes meaning measurable for a particular tournament format. To be precise: the meaning attached to a particular match is the expected change in probability that a team will progress to the next stage of a tournament following the match.

In quantitative terms, a single match knockout between even teams will result in one qualifying, and one not, changing their probability from 50% to 100% and 0% respectively. Adding those differences produces the highest possible meaning of 100%.⁷ In larger groups, or during longer series,⁸ each match will have a smaller *meaning percentage*.⁹ Between unevenly matched sides - in other words, uncompetitive matches - the likelihood that one team is guaranteed to qualify reduces the meaning further. For example, in a knockout where one team has a 90% chance of winning (typical for full members in ODIs against associates) the meaning is reduced to 36%.¹⁰

The probabilistic measure is, therefore, the best single measure of the quality of a competition, as it defines both competitiveness and competition context. In assessing the quality of formats in section 7, it is this measure that will be referred to.

⁷ Specifically: $0.5 \times 0.5 + 0.5 \times 0.5 + 0.5 \times 0.5 + 0.5 \times 0.5 = 1.00$

⁸ The first match of an evenly matched three match series reduces one team from 50% to 25% and the other from 50% to 75%. A 50% meaning. Subsequent matches are equally (50%), then more important (100%).

⁹ A full mathematical discussion on meaning is outside the scope of this document. For details see Russell Degnan, "Quantifying World Cup formats", Idle Summers, 5th Jul 2011, idlesummers.com/post.php?postid=1572

¹⁰ Specifically: $0.1 \times 0.9 + 0.9 \times 0.1 + 0.1 \times 0.9 + 0.9 \times 0.1 = 0.36$

Aim 5. Matches should be scheduled between teams of similar ability

The closer a match result, the more likely it has been an entertaining match, and by extension, a match that will attract viewers and advertisers. Nevertheless, survey respondents were ambivalent about competitive scheduling. Competitive scheduling was the only aim that received more opposition than essential votes, with almost two fifths of respondents being either indifferent or opposed.

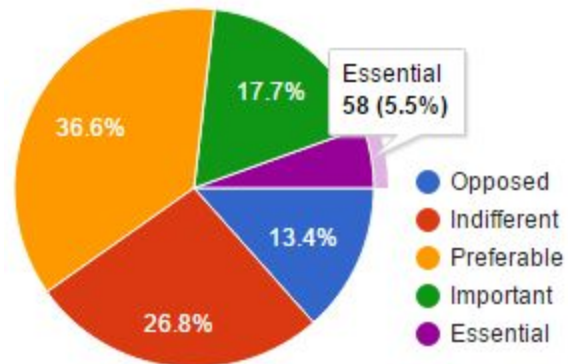


Figure 4.2: Matches should be scheduled between teams of similar ability

The results indicate that fans are willing to forgo competitiveness for other factors, such as tradition, or uniqueness of fixtures. The small pool of teams currently contesting top-tier international cricket has, over the past two decades, become humdrum and repetitive.

“

So many teams but yet we continue to play the same teams.”
- Anon., New Zealand

Competitive fixturing received a more positive response when respondents were asked the extent to which they'd prefer each of three aims: opportunity, marquee fixtures, and competitive match-ups. While balanced against opportunity (+0.1 in favour of competitive matches; up to a maximum of 2), the choice of competitive matches or marquee fixtures

was marginally weighted in favour of competition (+0.4). Opportunity/expansion was considerably more popular than marquee fixtures (-0.7). Regardless of the form chosen, a balanced approach to competition and opportunity must be sought. This will be discussed further in sections 6 and 7.



Figure 4.3: Preference comparison of opportunity, marquee fixtures and competitive match-ups. Edge colours refer to a five-point scale between individual choices. The central triangle shows the weighted response of each choice. Opportunity and competitive match-ups were strongly preferred over marquee fixtures when compared.

Aim 6. A championship should build to a conclusion/champion

There are broadly three means of conducting a championship, each more structured than the last: *rankings* as the ICC Test Championship is at present; *leagues*, in which every team plays one another and the winner is determined at the end of the cycle; and *cups*, in which teams play a final. Each of these will be discussed in depth in section 7.

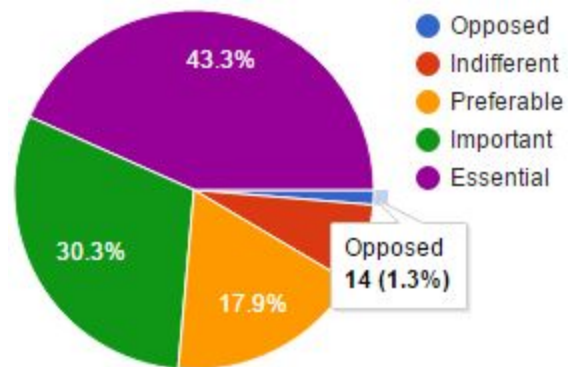


Figure 4.4: A championship should build to a conclusion/champion

Each format produces a differing amount of drama as it reaches the conclusion. A ranking system, with an arbitrary end-point, produces very little, particularly if the rankings are obtuse, or most teams are not playing in the lead-up. A league produces more, both at the top and around relegation, but risks both of these outcomes being decided well in advance. A cup format, leading to a trophy final or series will naturally produce the most interesting finale.

In American sports, the growing length of playoff formats and relative diminishment of the league reflects the commercial value of matches with more *meaning* played between the best remaining sides in the competition. On average, television ratings for NBA Finals are five times

that of regular season matches.¹¹ A similar effect is found in cricket world cups.¹² Survey responses to whether a finale should occur were strongly in favour, with more than two-fifths of respondents considering it essential. However, the extent to which this aim is preferred to others is arguable.

Aim 7. The competition winner should reflect the best team, not the luckiest

The converse argument to a knockout competition is that a single game, or even a single series, may not adequately reflect the best team. This is particularly true where matches are played in one nation, as Test cricket displays vast gaps in home and away performance.

Respondents were strongly in favour of a competition that allowed the best team to emerge, indicating that the sort of knockout competition the ICC proposed for 2013 and 2017 would not have been well received.

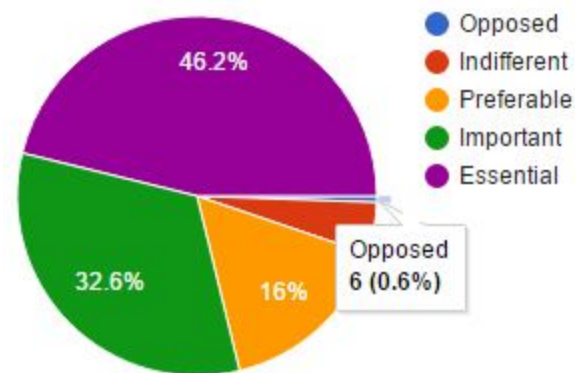


Figure 4.5: The competition winner should reflect the best team, not the luckiest

When compared with the previous aim, the responses showed a substantial preference for a competition structure that allowed the best team to emerge, while retaining the meaning of a knockout competition (see figure 4.6). Various structures are possible that allow both to occur: a “Davis Cup” style approach that places series into a tournament context; or multi-staged events with league/group qualification for successive parts. Both of these will be discussed in section 7.

¹¹ Wikipedia, "National Basketball Association Nielsen Ratings", en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Basketball_Association_Nielsen_ratings

¹² Russell Degnan, "Leaving Money on the Table", Idle Summers, 27th Feb 2015, idlesummers.com/post.php?postid=1888

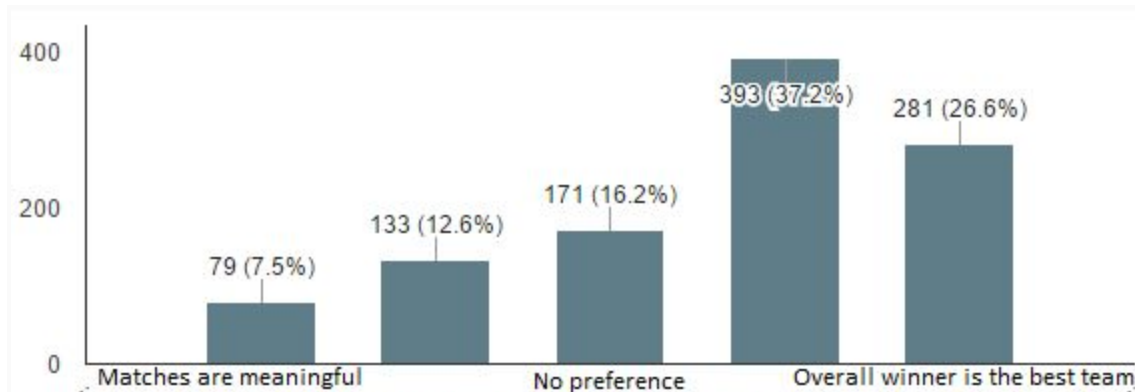


Figure 4.6: Preference scale for the emphasis placed on competing Test championship aims

Aim 8. A championship should reflect Test cricket's traditional schedule of series played home-away

The series, particularly those over three or five matches, is not unique to cricket. Many American team sports play their playoffs over multiple matches, but the Test series, played over a month or more, is unique in the length and breadth of drama that can accompany a good one.

Tradition is looked at in more depth in section 5, but in the context of a competition, a series combines the tension of the previous two aims, neither knockout nor necessarily the best team, but finding elements of both.

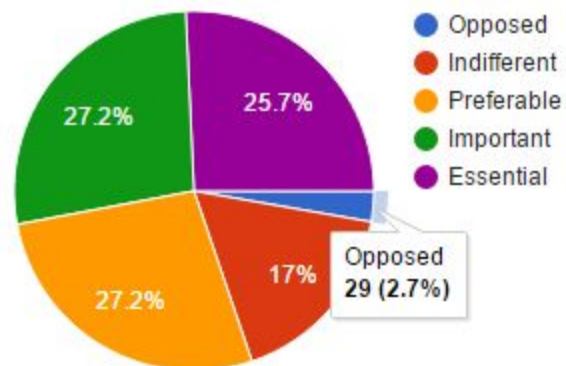


Figure 4.7: A championship should reflect Test cricket's traditional schedule of series played home-away

“ The idea of letting nations arrange their own tours was great when there were three Test nations and one format. That time is long past. We are an international sport and need to be structured like one.”
- Josh Habel., Australia

The contradictory nature of many aims is borne out in the responses to this question, which received a broadly favourable response - over three-quarters of fans consider it preferable or better - but didn't carry the importance of others, with a relatively low 25.7% marking it as essential. It bears mentioning that a championship structure that included home-and-away series would be well received, as long as it also met the other more important aims.

There is an equally strong preference not to hold any championship as a neutral tournament, as opposed to series (see figure 4.8). More than three-quarters of respondents wanted a longer series, either strongly, or as a preference. By contrast, only 11.3% expressed a preference for a neutral tournament, indicating that the now defunct ICC Test Championship should *not* be reconsidered.

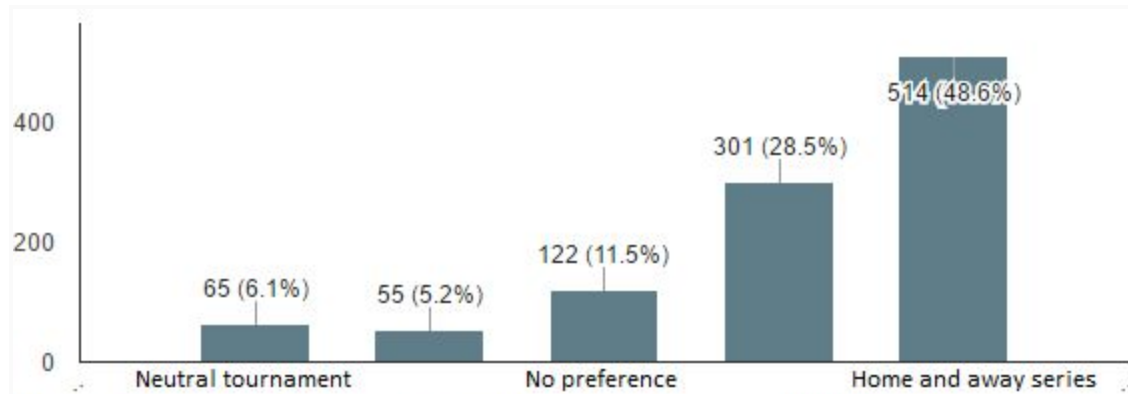


Figure 4.8: Responses to the question "I would prefer a test championship to be held as a..."

Regardless of the format chosen, there will be some measure of disagreement from fans. The most polarising question about formats reflected a schism between those who would like to see a final, and those who prefer a league format with a winner crowned at the conclusion. Almost exactly half the respondents preferred a championship final or series (presumably home-and-away), but 37.8% of respondents believe a league table or ranking system would show the best side (see figure 4.9). While some people will be unhappy with any format, a balance of league and cup tournament formats with a final series would most likely produce the most favourable response from fans, and by extension the greatest market value for the ICC.

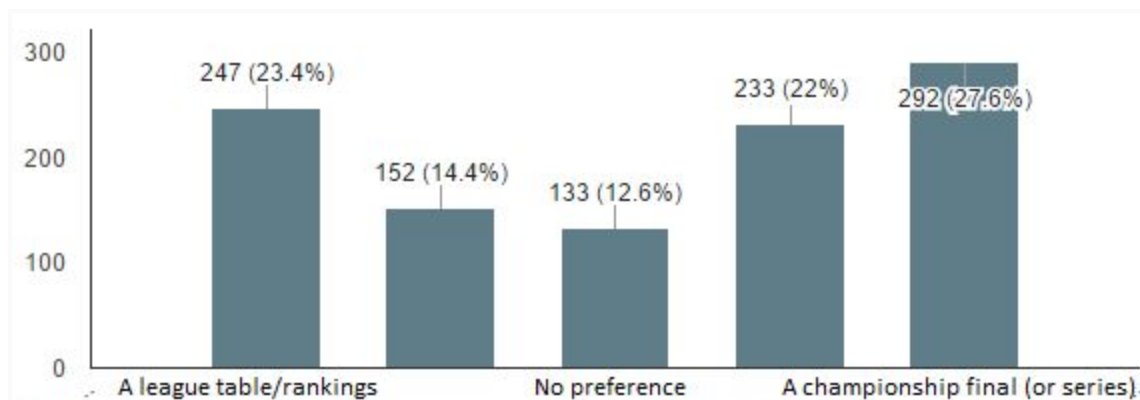


Figure 4.9: Responses to the question: "A Test championship is best decided by..."

Competition length

The nature of any competition structured has two time components. Firstly, there is the question of how often a winner is produced (see figure 4.10). Respondents' preference was for a winner on what might be termed the "traditional" or "Olympiad" cycle of four years, with over half the responses preferring that cycle. The next most popular was for half that number, with almost a quarter of fans preferring a two-year cycle. The next

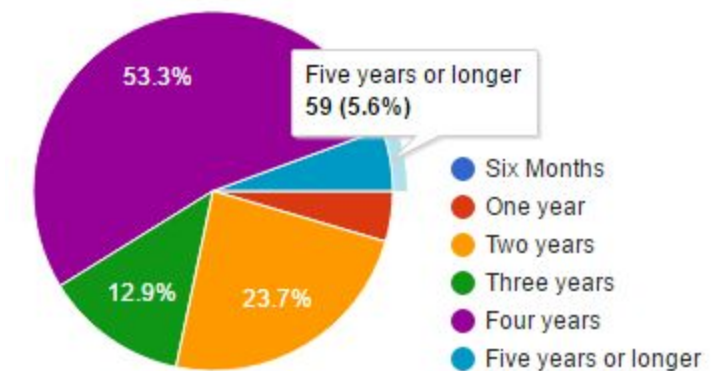


Figure 4.10: Optimally, how often should a test championship produce a "winner". Every...

most popular response split the difference (3 years). Somewhat surprisingly, despite being the normal cycle for domestic sports, the idea of an annual champion was the least favoured of the five options that received a vote. The international character of Test cricket *and* the length of Test matches and series make a compressed annual title a logistically difficult premise, and few fans are in favour the idea.

Secondly, there is the question of whether the competition only forms part of the schedule or applies to all Test cricket. Unequivocally, respondents would prefer that the Test Championship, once created, is an all-inclusive part of the Future Tours Programme, as opposed to a short tournament (see figure 4.11). As with the preference for home-and-away series, over three-quarters of responses preferred the longer tournament, and only 11.6% a short tournament.

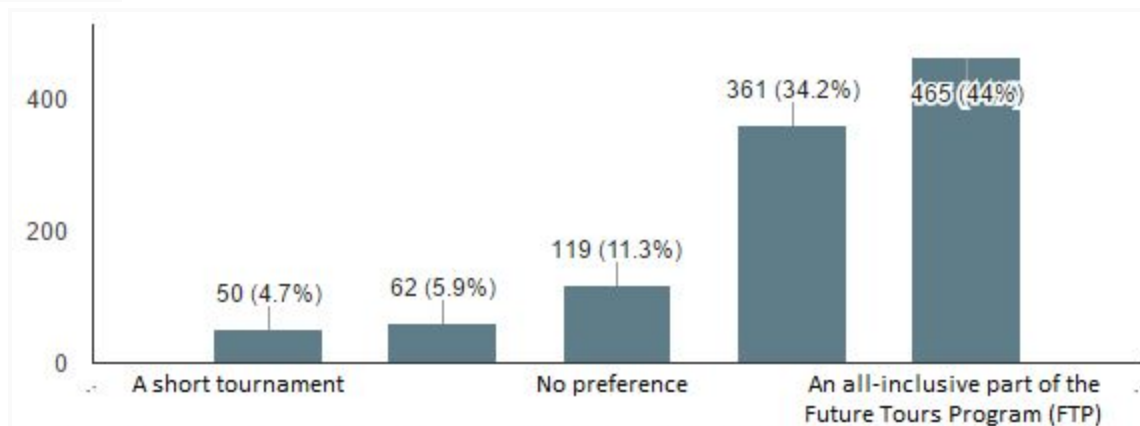


Figure 4.11: Response to the question, "I would prefer a Test Championship to be..."

While there was a strong preference for an all-inclusive tournament - presumably comprising 100% of the schedule - the total was less than half, indicating that a longer tournament that still left room for other fixtures will also find many advocates. The nature of those fixtures will be discussed in the following section.

Recommendation 5: Reduce the Future Tours Programme, constructing a championship from the time made available

Recommendation 6: Structure a championship that works within the 4-year cycle of matches

5. Tradition

Tradition, like context, can encompass many meanings. Test cricket's 139 year history has built up a huge stock of rivalries and contests that matter to fans. In addition, many nations have particular teams with which they share geographical proximity and/or rivalries across multiple other sports. Commercial opportunities exist for cricket to capitalise on if schedules that build on and enhance these rivalries are constructed.

Conversely, the tradition of having only a few Test playing nations has undoubtedly restricted the growth of cricket, and particularly Test cricket. Belief in the sagacity of these traditions has been tested through a series of questions on status and its role in playing and administration. Finally, the advent of T20 cricket has eroded much of the prestige of Test cricket, amongst fans and amongst players (see figure 3.4 above). The importance of scheduling in a manner that allows both formats to thrive is discussed below, along with fan responses to these ideas.

Aim 9. Marquee series (such as the Ashes) should be protected

Arguably, no property in the world of cricket is more valuable than the Ashes. It carries not only the weight of tradition and (occasionally) great contests, but-- with larger crowds and domestic TV audiences, and significantly larger media interest--it also has an outsized commercial importance for both Cricket Australia (CA) and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). However, the Ashes also acts as market competition to other series, as they are invariably placed in the context of future Ashes tours. This reduces the total financial value of Test cricket, because those series lack the weight of tradition and competitive context that would allow them to thrive on their own.

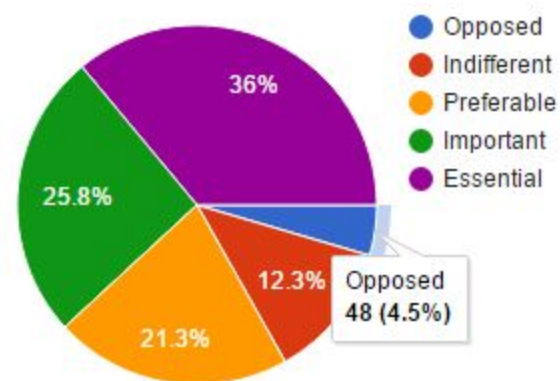


Figure 5.1: Marquee series (such as the Ashes) should be protected

From a political and financial perspective, the Big-3 have a dominant position in the market - both the Border-Gavaskar and Pataudi Trophy are equally successful, if not more-so commercially as the Ashes. The three nations have a strong incentive to play each other more frequently to maintain that position. The effect on schedules has been increasingly restrictive of other contests, with roughly half the home fixtures of those three nations consisting of those

“
Given its fragile current condition, the absence of marquee series like the Ashes or India vs Australia could be even more disastrous to the sustenance of interest in the game.”
- Gautham Ram., India

contests over the past six years.¹³ Retaining these series within a Test championship would require a substantial restriction of the available time to play - particularly if they are maintained as four- and five-Test series - with up to 50% of the potential schedule to be set aside for marquee tours (though less if they are partially integrated into a championship).

For most respondents, the importance of these series does not seem to justify putting aside that amount of time, as this aim received both the second largest number of opposed responses, and a middling number of essential. While Australian respondents were largely in line with these results (39% essential, 26% important, 28% preferable), English respondents ranked the Ashes as the second most important aim (50% essential, 24% important, 18% preferable). While their recent frequency may have taken away some of the allure, at least amongst the nations participating, marquee series are a core component of the cricket calendar and need to be maintained within any new schedule.

Recommendation 7: Set aside a part of the calendar for marquee fixtures, reserving the remainder for a global Test championship

Aim 10. Regional/traditional rivalries should be built upon

Whereas the Ashes has a long history, regional rivalries in Test cricket have come in fits and starts. The most prominent, between India and Pakistan has (for political reasons) been played frequently at times, and not at all at others; while other Asian rivalries with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have taken up some of the slack, without ever reaching the same heights. In the Southern Hemisphere, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia have struggled - with their overlapping summers - to produce the same rivalry seen in rugby union. Yet their fans

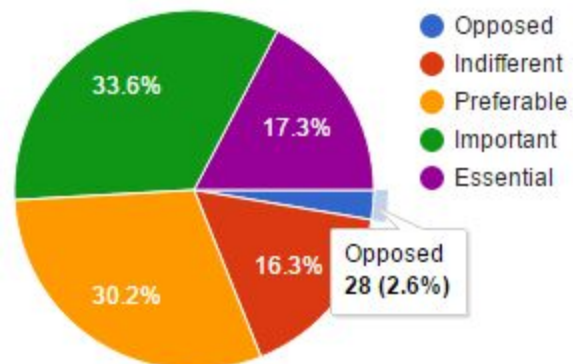


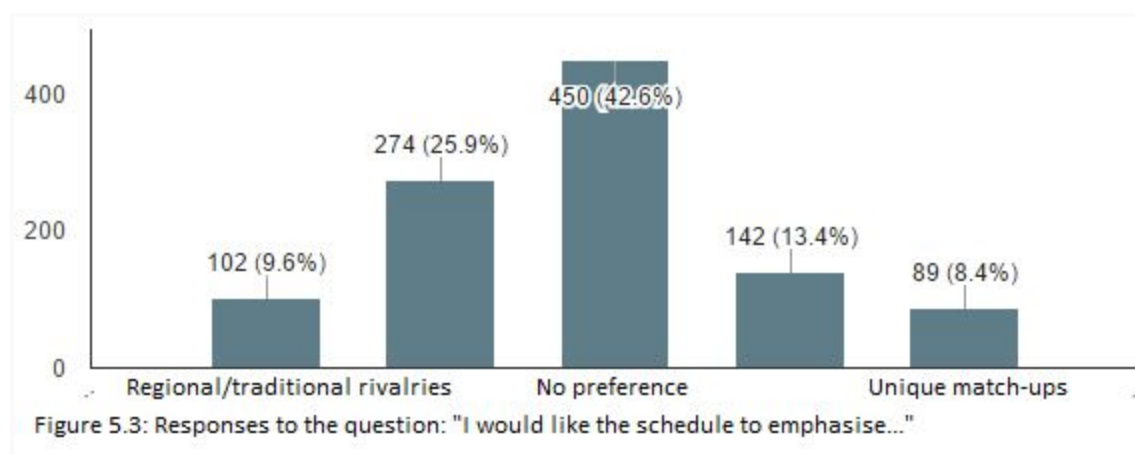
Figure 5.2: Regional/traditional rivalries should be built upon

¹³ Bertus de Jong, "Testing times, tables and divisions", Cricket Europe, 1st Feb 2016, www.cricketeurope4.net/DATABASE/ARTICLES8/articles/000030/003085.shtml

generally acknowledge that they make some of the better series. While in the north, the emergence of associates in Europe has not yet translated to more significant fixtures against England.

Respondents, while acknowledging a preference for more regional cricket, did not regard these fixtures as essential (see figure 5.2), with perhaps one exception. Pakistani respondents (while small in number), were substantially more in favour of regional cricket (38% essential, 31% important, 18% preferable), reflecting the importance of their local rival to their cricket history. It was impossible to determine the answers amongst other smaller nations because of the limited number of responses from those places.

With scheduling reform, and any expansion in the number of teams playing Test cricket, it is likely that the opportunities to play an individual team will be reduced. Whether to emphasise regional fixtures or to play a random cross-section of other members is a key decision in that type of reform. In regionalisms favour, matches will be easier to travel to, and tap into traditional rivalries. Against that is the novelty value of unique opposition. Respondents to this question were mixed, with most having no preference (or wishing for a balanced approach), but a slight overall preference for regional match-ups (see figure 5.3).



ICC Regions

While regional rivalries amongst full members are not well formed, at associate level and below regional and sub-regional tournaments proliferate. A large number of these exist outside the confines of official ICC tournaments, organised around low-cost transport routes and the availability of amateur players. Official ICC regional tournaments are much reduced from a few years ago, and many of the rigid barriers to opportunity that exist between full and associate members are reflected in the regional structures at lower levels.

At all levels, the opportunities lost to teams from a smaller World Cup and two-tier World T20 could be reinstated through better regional (and sub-regional) qualifying tournaments, allowing a broader base of teams to experience cricket at the highest level, without compromising the competitiveness or length of the global tournament.

However, there is substantial variability in the competitiveness and depth amongst the ICC regions, as shown in the table of full members, high performance associates, and World Cricket League teams below:

Asia	East Asia/Pacific	Americas	Africa	Europe
India Pakistan Sri Lanka Bangladesh	Australia New Zealand	West Indies	South Africa Zimbabwe	England
Afghanistan UAE Hong Kong Nepal	PNG		Namibia Kenya	Ireland Scotland Netherlands
Oman Malaysia Singapore	Vanuatu	Canada USA Bermuda	Uganda Nigeria Tanzania	Denmark Italy Jersey Guernsey

Only Asia has the breadth and depth of nations to support a vibrant regional competition at each of those levels. European associates are strong, but England has no other full member competition. The Americas has been dire for several years, although the top three nations each have potential to perform better. Both Africa and EAP have a good spread of teams, but shallow competition.

While regional development offices are best placed amongst their closest geographical neighbours, there is a substantial case for creating larger and more diverse regions to enhance the competition and allow for competitive regional tournaments. In both the northern and southern hemisphere there exists long-standing rivalries that could be brought into the cricket fold. England has strong links with the West Indies, USA and Canada via the Ryder Cup, and have relatively contemporaneous summers. Likewise, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia play the tri-nations together, and the Super-12, exhibiting close cultural links. Some nations in the East-Asia region currently playing in Asia might benefit from a shift (notably, China, Hong Kong,

Malaysia and Singapore) as the region is currently split. Restating the table above as three regions produces the following:

Asia	Southern	Northern
India Pakistan Sri Lanka Bangladesh	Australia New Zealand South Africa Zimbabwe	England West Indies
Afghanistan UAE Nepal Hong Kong*	PNG Kenya Namibia	Ireland Scotland Netherlands
Oman Malaysia* Singapore*	Uganda Vanuatu Tanzania Nigeria	Canada USA Bermuda Denmark Italy Jersey

Regional events could work at both Test and ODI or T20 level. A World Cup or World T20, with eight regional qualifiers/championships (3 x Asia, 3 x Southern, 2 x Northern), would produce three intriguing eight or ten team events. Each with the possibility of an upset, but with second chances via global qualifying to come. Most importantly, each event would grant opportunities (and the exposure to sponsors, domestic T20 leagues and fans) to many more teams than even the broadest global events have done to date.

Recommendation 8: Restructure the ICC Regions to allow meaningful and competitive regional tournaments to take place.

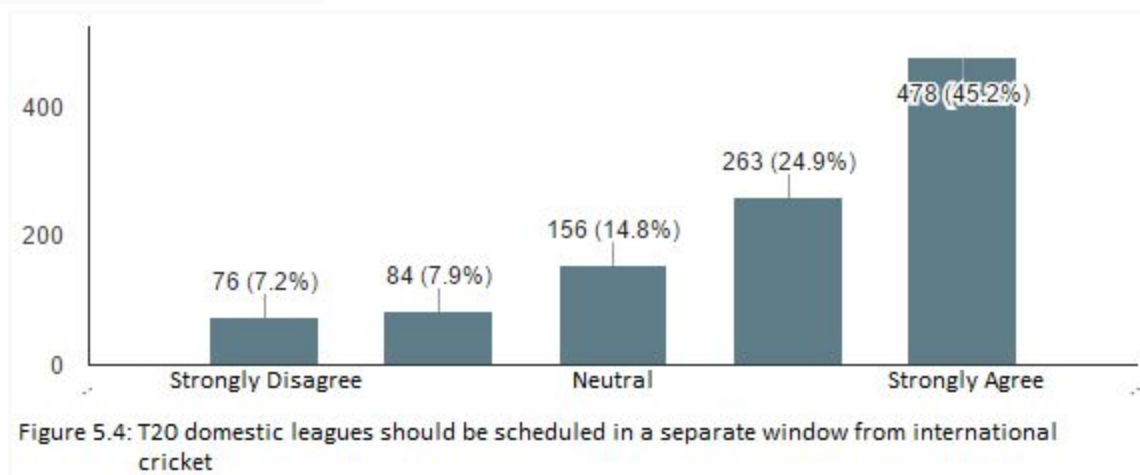
Twenty 20 Cricket

It is often remarked, if not necessarily accurately, that T20 cricket presents an existential threat to Test cricket. The venerable game is, apparently, too slow, too hard to market, too difficult for a fast-paced younger generation to pay attention to, and nearly impossible to introduce to new markets. It is likely that none of these are true. The modern media market, saturated with

channels and split amongst traditional and social media, is harder to market in a traditional manner, but better suited to Test cricket than often acknowledged.

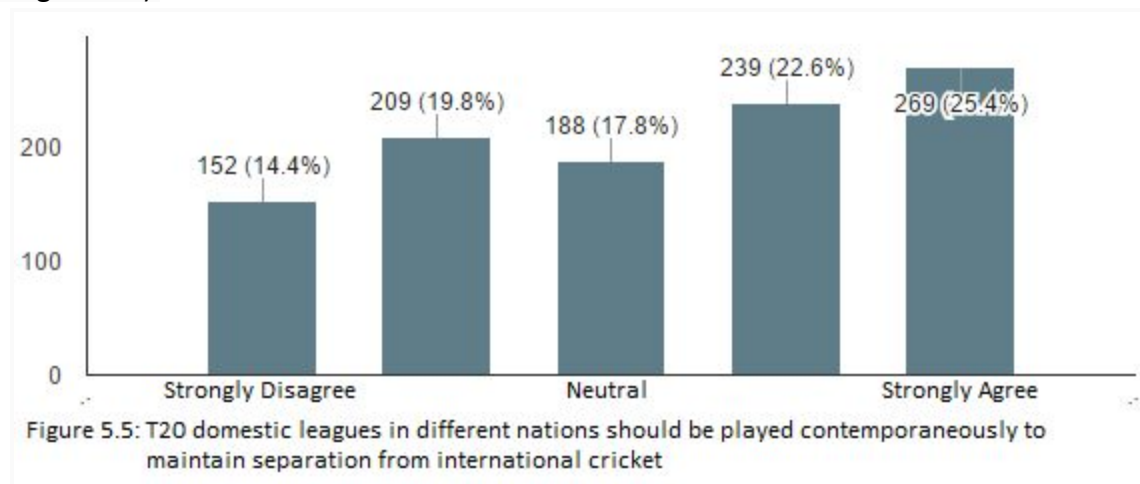
A sport that fills channel content, that people can drop in and out of over the course of days while working or performing other tasks; and that lends itself to snippet highlights - wickets, close calls and boundaries - is perfectly aligned with current consumer habits. Rather, it is traditional television - from which the current majority of cricket revenue derives - that depends on uninterrupted viewing and event hype that is out of step with modern consumers. As a matter of urgency, cricket boards need to adjust to new media. They are years behind their American counterparts in streaming - whether highlights, on-demand or pushed content; in their approach to social media where NBA highlights are nearly ubiquitous and unrestricted; and in their narrative constructions. T20 domestic leagues (particularly the BBL and IPL) have been at the forefront of the attempts to breach this space; however, the format is not the cure for those ills, and a successful approach cricket needs across all formats.

Where T20 cricket is a threat to Test cricket is that the schedules of prominent T20 domestic leagues often lie in conflict with Test matches, leading star players to opt out of poorly paid national contracts to take up substantially better paid domestic contracts. It is a situation rarely encountered in other sports, which separate their international and domestic commitments. Survey respondents, accustomed to how other sports operate, believe strongly in the need to separate these two formats.



Separating T20 and international cricket is not necessarily as simple as it sounds. Giving a window to every T20 domestic league would cause a rapid reduction in the amount of international cricket as players toured the world to tournament after tournament. In this scenario, players who are independent of their national boards would receive fewer international payments commensurate with the reduction in international cricket, which may reduce the current burden on boards. However it is likely that most T20 leagues would need to

be played at the same time, to ensure a sufficient window for international cricket was available for the various formats and competitions. On this, survey respondents were mixed (see figure 5.5):



While slightly in favour of forcing domestic league to be played at the same time - 48% agreed versus 34.2% opposed - the ICC and boards will need to weigh up the relative benefits and costs. Commercial advantages to be had include streamlined scheduling, having stars available to international teams and the possibility of a Champions League played within a T20 season. The potential difficulties include international stars only being available for a single T20 league and the investments made in existing windows.

Recommendation 9: Create windows for T20 Domestic tournaments to ensure player availability. Encourage nations to align global schedules to reduce conflicts.

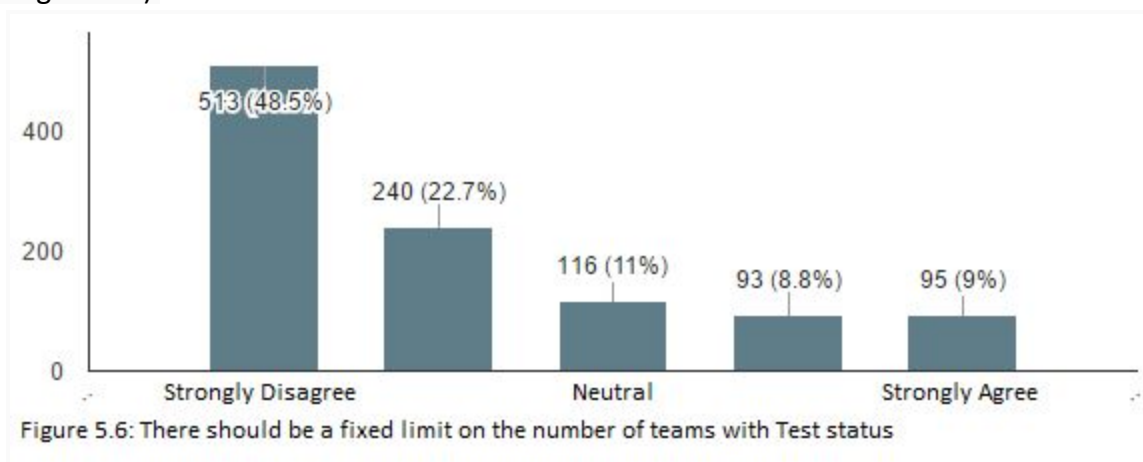
Status: Administrative, Test Match and Rights

The member status of ICC nations is a contentious issue, and unfortunately interconnected to the construction of schedules and competitions. As full membership brings certain playing, voting, and financial rights, the earning of full membership has been, or should have been, obtained through a combination of administrative, financial, and playing capacity. Recently, the difference in those three areas between the bottom full members and the top associates has been minimal. Much of the difference in capacity that remains is itself

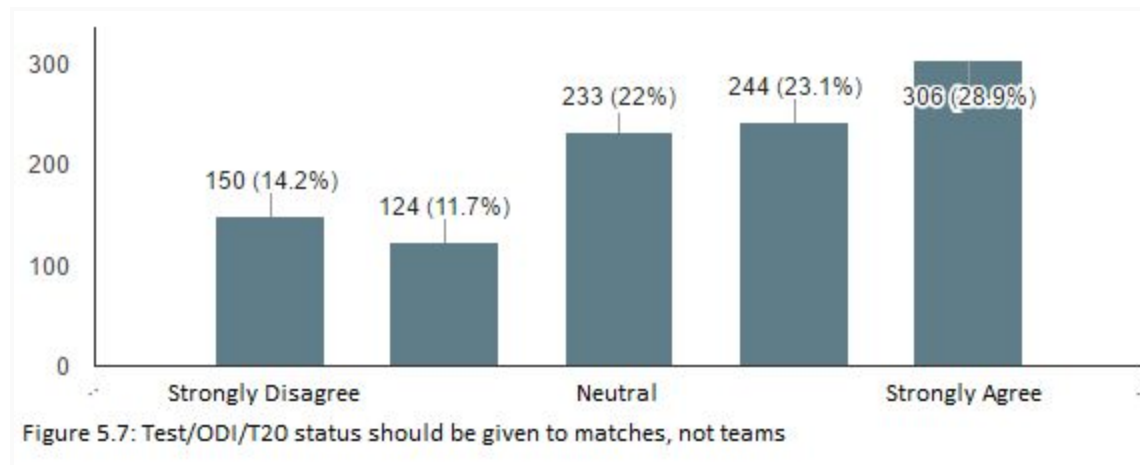
“ Status per se is not necessarily a problem. I don't particularly like it, but given the current structure of the ICC membership I think unpicking it completely would be extremely messy. Instead, the ICC should move to a membership model similar to the EU - a set of clear, consistent and achievable criteria for entry, and assistance to prospective members in reaching those goals.”
- Mikolaj Kopernik., Canada

derived from the benefits of full membership - financial grants from the ICC and touring privileges and the benefits of greater funds - rather than any inherent differences. Many fans are incensed by both these differences and the continuing reluctance to promote associate teams to full membership.

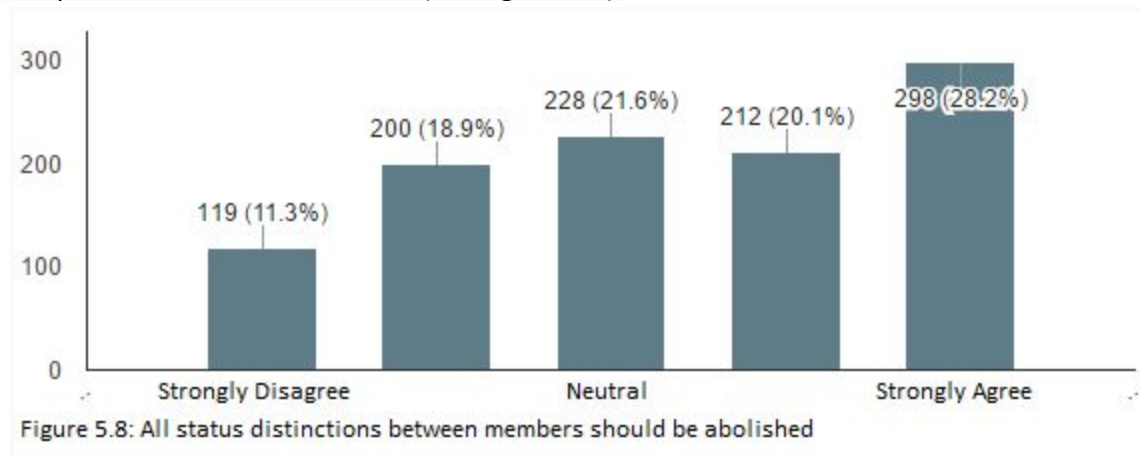
The restriction on playing Test cricket to full members reserves the most prestigious form of the game for the few. Instead of expanding Test cricket's reach as far as possible, it has become a very aspirational goal for very few. Less than one in five respondents believe that this state of affairs should continue, with almost half *strongly* disagreeing with the current restriction on Test match cricket, or future restrictions whereby only a limited number of nations can play (see figure 5.6).



When combined with the positive response to giving all international cricket full status (see figure 3.2), there ought to be a strong case for arguing that the playing status of nations be opened and expanded. There are several methods by which this could be achieved, with varying responses to the posed survey questions. One option, is for nations to receive status based on their playing tier, but not their member status. This would avoid some of the oddities of recent associate qualifiers, whereby playoff matches have not had official status but eliminated teams did, without compromising some of the statistical record. While respondents were in majority agreement (52.0% to 25.9%) to this concept (see figure 5.7), a substantial minority would prefer status to remain with teams, not matches.



A second option is for there to be no member distinctions at all, with nations either part of the ICC or not. This also had a majority in favour (48.3% to 30.2%) but less distinct than that offered by the questions over match status (see figure 5.8).



The primary difference in these two approaches comes down to whether status should be derived from administrative capacity or playing ability. A majority of respondents disagreed that the former should be the only consideration (45.3% to 31.8%), although the mixed response indicates that either approach to expansion would have its adherents and detractors (see figure 5.9).

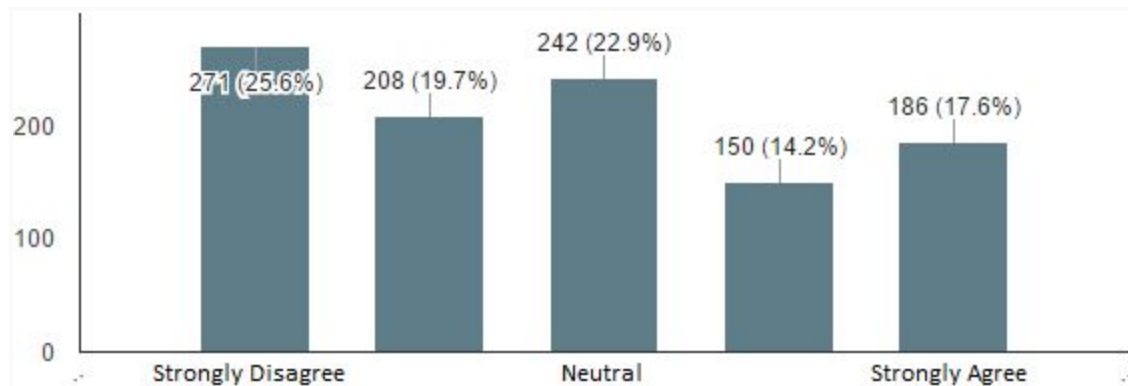


Figure 5.9: Status should only apply to a member nation's administrative capacity, not playing ability

As currently structured, associate members can both gain and lose their ODI and T20 status depending on their performance in global tournaments, and all members are subject to ICC sanctions if their administration fails to meet certain standards. Full members, in particular, are given a wide variety of rights: to vote at board level, to participate in global tournaments without qualification, and to receive member dividends from the ICC. As with other questions, whether these rights should be permanent or dependent on performance is contentious. A majority agreed with a team being able to lose status rights (47.1% to 34.2%), indicating a slight preference for meritocracy, offset by pragmatism and a belief that all nations should have those rights (see figure 5.10).

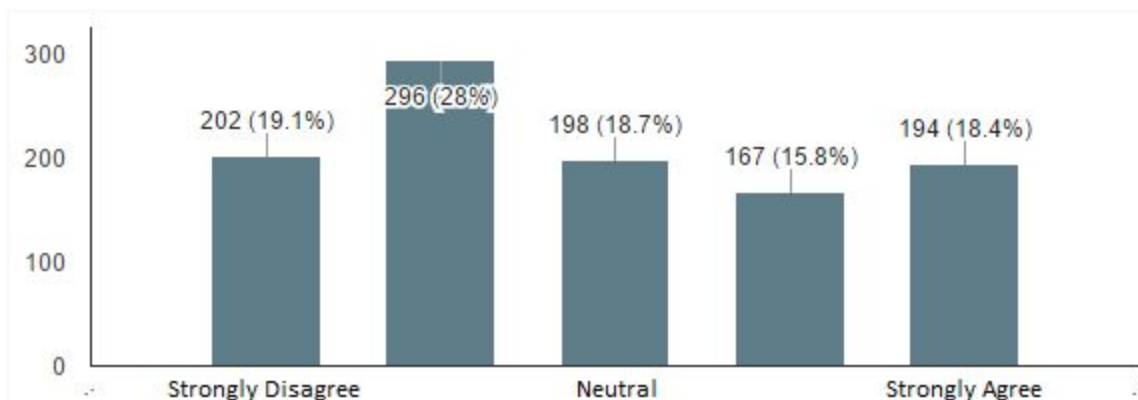
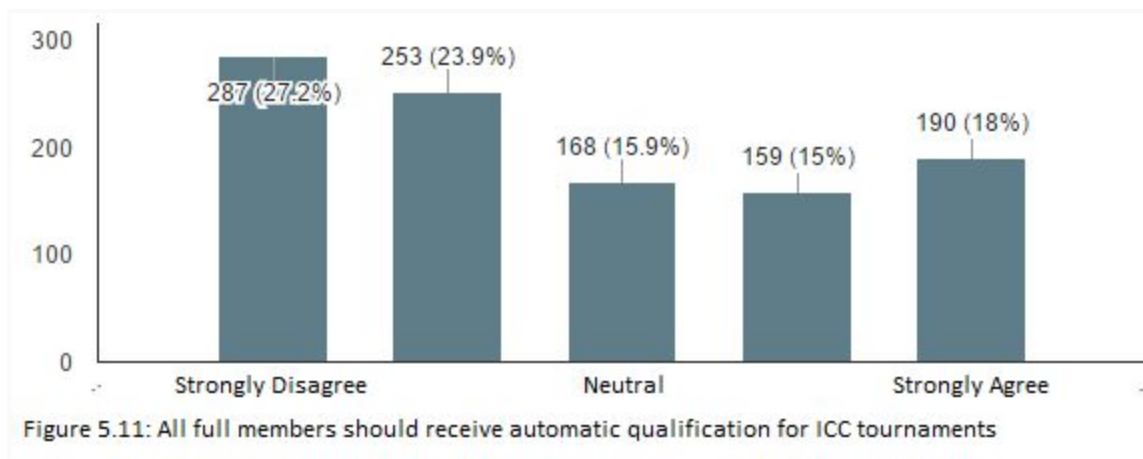


Figure 5.10: Once earned, no team should lose status rights

The most significant of those full member playing rights is the right to participate in the World Cup and World T20 without needing to qualify. The ICC's recent push for a meritocratic qualifying process has many adherents, but a smaller majority than might be imagined, given the responses to other questions. Just over half of respondents (51.2% to 33.0%) believe full members should have to qualify for ICC tournaments (see figure 5.11).



Some level of self-interest is often at play amongst fans here, with many undoubtedly wary of qualification process and a small World Cup. There are lessons to be learnt here of FIFA, whose

“
The ICC has to make qualification for competitions meritocratic rather than a members club.”
- Anon., England

rapid early 90s expansion and 24 team world cup saw several significant markets miss the 1994 tournament (notably England and France). They have seen few major nations miss out since, as subsequent tournaments were expanded to 32 teams, and future expansion is likely.

Ultimately, the ICC might need to ask whether tradition - in the form of playing opportunities that have heretofore existed - is easier to maintain by continuing to exclude and protect those rights, or by expanding opportunities to the challengers. From the many passionate comments from fans (see Appendix B), the latter approach, creating a larger and more vibrant world of cricket, is substantially better and more popular.

Recommendation 10: Recognise all matches played under ICC laws by ICC member nations as Test, ODI or T20 internationals.

Recommendation 11: Introduce a meritocratic playing structure within ICC tournaments that is independent of a nation's governance status.

6. Balancing aims

The previous three sections covered a wide variety of issues, and introduced the ten core aims that a reform of bilateral structures and the introduction of a Test championship should look to achieve. But they are not all possible. The opportunity for smaller teams to play the best must be balanced against the competitiveness of the competition. Expansion of Test cricket to new members - so vital to its future - conflicts with the protection of marquee fixtures, and the financial benefits of those matches. A league that provides the clearest measure of the best team is less entertaining than a competition that builds to a champion. And any structure must choose how frequently it wants to designate a champion, and how quickly teams move between tiers as they play well or poorly.

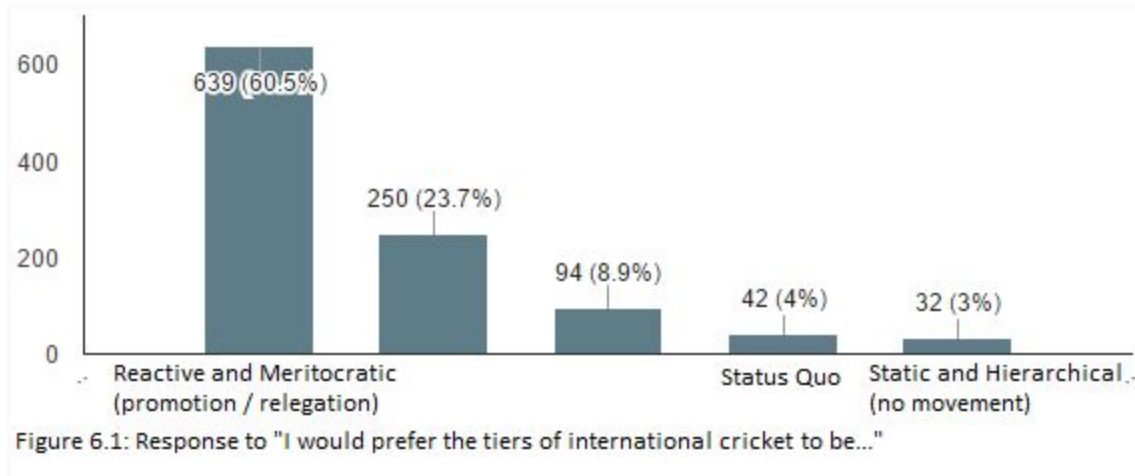
But nor do most aims lie directly in conflict. A balance can be achieved, rather than hard choices. Addressing each of these apparent conflicts in turn, will demonstrate some possible solutions to achieve both.

Opportunity vs Competitiveness

The key to balancing these two issues is to recognise that competitions are long. The World Cup begins with qualifying tournaments at regional level, running through multiple layers of the World Cricket League and into global qualifiers. Even within the final tournament there are group stages, followed by knockout finals. The World T20 follows a similar pattern. The broader the base of teams *participating* in a segment of the competition, the more opportunity there is. Participation is a key concept, as while the ICC has pathways for most members to reach a higher level, in very few cases are they in competition with teams of varying standard.

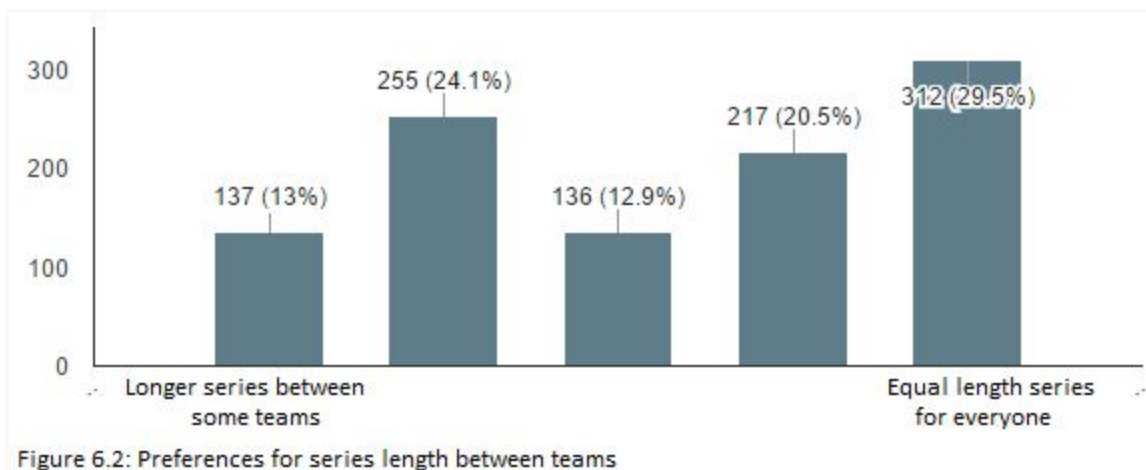
When questioned about the type of competitions the ICC should run, survey respondents overwhelmingly felt the current system was too rigid and hierarchical. Only seven percent of respondents would like the ICC to maintain the status quo, or become more hierarchical. Three in five respondents wanted ICC tiers to be as reactive and meritocratic as possible, indicating a strong desire to reform and open up competition (see figure 6.1).

“
Cricket cannot survive as a three-nation game, no matter how many times the Big Three play each other. A global game requires global participation.”
- David Rhys-Cole., England



The easiest method of balancing opportunity and competitiveness is to construct competitions that begin with a broad base of participating teams, that are relatively easy for major markets to qualify from, and end with stages that are narrow, competitive, and meaningful. If series are being played, the opportunity arises for early stages to include shorter series, and later stages to be longer, in line with expectations that more matches will be competitive.

Survey responses were mixed to the possibility of uneven series length. There is a strongly held belief amongst some fans that all teams should play each other, and all series should be the same length. At any particular tier, this is probably the best option. But there is a mixed response (50% to 37.1%) to the idea overall (see figure 6.2). It is unlikely that, in a competition with broad participation, most fans would want to see long series between uneven contestants.



Expansion vs Tradition

It would be easy to look at the current structure of international cricket, examine the consequences of additional full members, and conclude that it is impossible. It most likely is. Reform must precede expansion in order to address the glaring issues with the Future Tours Programme (FTP), ICC funding and bilateral structures. The FTP was constructed with the aim that all members would play one another over some cycle. It has never worked like that, as teams have regularly dropped tours, and most likely never will. Moreover, the schedule is already “full” in the sense that no team is willing to drop matches to include new participants.

“
Test cricket is the most incredible form of cricket devised - a true pinnacle of hard-fought elite competition that is just about unrivalled in any sport for the extraordinary narratives it can tell across a summer. Let us aim not just to defend it for future generations, not just to preserve its extraordinary history and traditions, but to expand its reach and appeal to as many new Test-playing and Test-watching nations as possible in an accessible, competitive format.”
- Lee Rodwell., England

Removing the requirement that every team must play every other, playing a subset of teams instead, opens up a much wider array of schedules. Similarly, tours have traditionally been arranged with a combination of Test, ODI and T20 fixtures. This has also broken down recently, in the interests of easier scheduling, and would best be dispensed with entirely, to create structures for each format that reflect their differences and strengths. Dropping these hurdles to reform would allow the ICC to focus on creating marketable competitions, growing total revenue, and easing issues around ICC funding.

“
Long series are wonderful, but only when competitive - the series could get longer as the tournament progresses.”
- Mark Tamlyn., England

The fragmented approach to cricket scheduling that has characterised past efforts - whereby nations look to their short-term interest rather than cooperating to create a strong schedule that benefits all - needs to cease. It is possible to both set aside time for bilateral contests and construct a Test championship; to include both high profile competitive matches with qualifiers

and other opportunities; and to protect teams in lower tiers from financial losses by growing the overall pie. Respondents to the survey were at times frustrated, and at times weary with the inability of the ICC to make cricket the game it should be. It is incumbent upon the administrators to enact the necessary reforms to make it so.

Relegation: Opportunity or Disaster?

Invariably, moving to a system that is more meritocratic and reactive to playing performance will cause some nations to miss out on opportunities they previously had. How this is managed - and the opportunities that they offered instead - is paramount in ensuring the cricket in those nations is not damaged. To assess which were the biggest potential issues for fans, five potential problems with relegation were identified and survey respondents were asked to rank them in order of most to least worrying. Another four were identified from related comments.

“
If they deserve to be relegated, they must be relegated. And they must strive and fight back to get back to the higher tier by proving themselves anew.”
- Nitesh Chandra., India

1. Loss of marquee / popular fixtures (average ranking: 2.4)

As seen from previous responses, the possibility of certain series not going ahead is of paramount concern to many fans. Ultimately, what matters to all fans, no matter their team, is the opportunity to watch them play cricket against their favourite opposition.

2. Players losing desire to play for the national team (average ranking: 2.6)

As with fans, so with players. If shorn of opportunities, players may (and already do at associate level) choose domestic cricket, either county or T20, or opt for another nation. Any structure must work to keep players at lower levels engaged with cricket at international cricket.

3. Loss of prestige (average ranking: 2.8)

Apart from opportunities to play and watch players, fans want to be proud of their team's accomplishments, and that means being the best. A second division title is also second-rate. The competitiveness of the competition may be less important than the prize.

4. Loss of official match status (average ranking: 3.4)

Status may be a red herring for fans. What matters to them is what happens on the field: who they play, and how. It might be more significant an issue for cricket boards as it may affect image, sponsors and records. But less so for fans.

5. Financial loss (average ranking: 3.6)

This was by far the least concerning for fans, as most, even those engaged with club cricket, will see little funding from the central body. But it does matter to the extent it affects players and tours. And it obviously matters to boards.

Three other themes came through in the open responses to this question, though obviously, each is unranked.

6. Loss of public interest

In many ways, attending cricket is a social event, and a crowd is essential. A loss in public interest, apart from the financial implications, could further erode the standing of cricket in relegated nations, with run-on effects for youth participation and development.

“

I fully support meritocracy however a team running through one poor generation of players shouldn't be at risk of losing out hugely financially. Lets say NZ have a poor generation of players and fall down a division, the drawback of going down a division could lead to less players picking up the sport, less money going into cricket in NZ and potentially a domino effect.”

- Anon., Ireland

7. Quality of competition

Superficially this relates to the first response: the absence of popular fixtures. But there is a potential problem with relegated teams finding they dominate a weak competition (or vice versa when promoted), depending on the relative gaps in performance. A team could easily find itself in limbo: too good for one division, unable to make the leap to another.

8. Switching focus away from Test cricket

It is natural to expect nations and players to focus on the formats they perceive the best opportunities to succeed, whether financially or competitively. Relegation from Test competition could lend both players and nations to switch to shorter formats. At

associate level, the best opportunities already lie in T20 cricket, and the focus of most nations is in that sphere. Keeping Test cricket exclusive will, in the long-run, make it more-so.

“

My main concern for the future of cricket is that the ICC exists only to further the best interests of the Test Nations, and that over time, this slowly constricts and narrows the scope of cricket, until it becomes irrelevant as a major international sport. The elitism of cricket terrifies me- no other sport actively denies international teams opportunities because they do not have the required 'status' to play an official game.”

- Anon., England

None of these potential issues with relegation need be devastating. A recurrent response to this question touched on the time-frame for promotion. There is a substantial difference between playing a second-tier competition for four years and for two. The former involves a long string of low profile opponents and reduced financial wealth. Similarly, a qualification process that includes larger nations rather than rigid leagues would ameliorate potential losses by offering

some (but not all) of the opportunities available in the higher tiers.

Relegation need not be a disaster for any side. Provided the schedule - and the competition structures that fit within that schedule - provide a suitable balance between expansion and tradition, between opportunity and competitiveness, and provided nations are able to move up and down tiers in line with current performance. Cricket, as structured, is too rigid, lacks meritocracy, and restricts the ambitions of members - full, associate and affiliate - by raising barriers to progression. There are many ways to structure a schedule that achieves the majority of these aims. This will be addressed in section 7.

Recommendation 12: Formulate a championship structure that strikes a balance between the many potential aims.

7. Constructing a Schedule

While schedules are complex to construct, they are largely mathematical solutions. The real questions are political and have already been addressed in previous sections. The schedule is an outcome of the constraints posed by the decisions being made. To construct some possible schedules we will outline each of the decision points, and the consequences on the schedule.

While many of these decisions and principles apply to ODI and T20 cricket, they are not the subject of this section. Appendix A contains a discussion of a potential championship structure for these formats.

Decision 1. How much of the schedule will be devoted to bilateral matches, and how much to a Test championship?

The structure of a Test championship determines the minimum possible time required to complete it; leaving bilaterals to fill what is left over. The minimum period needed for bilateral fixtures depends on how many series are marked as “marquee”. If a single marquee home-and-away series (the Ashes, for example) was to be cordoned off, then one season in four must be devoted to bilateral contests. If two - all the big-3 series for example - then two seasons in four. Although marquee series are long, both one and two-year windows would leave some time for 2 and 3 Test series against other nations.

Figure 7.1 shows the effect of different length tournaments and bilateral obligations on the available home schedule of a team on a four-year cycle. Each season is assumed to comprise twelve matches, but it is reasonable to assume that, in certain cases, an extra match or two could be added to a particular season. A home/away final series in September/October, for example, would need to sit outside any normal season, as an addition to the normal competition structure. It is also likely that a league format would integrate bilateral matches rather than keeping them completely separate, by playing some of a series as part of the league structure, and some as only bilateral fixtures.

“
Test cricket is the pinnacle of cricket as a sport and should be nurtured. There is no better way than having a meaningful and competitive test championship. I have a big circle of cricket crazy and knowledgeable fans and we are waiting for the day when we will have this started. I hope it is done in my lifetime.”
- Anon., India/Australia

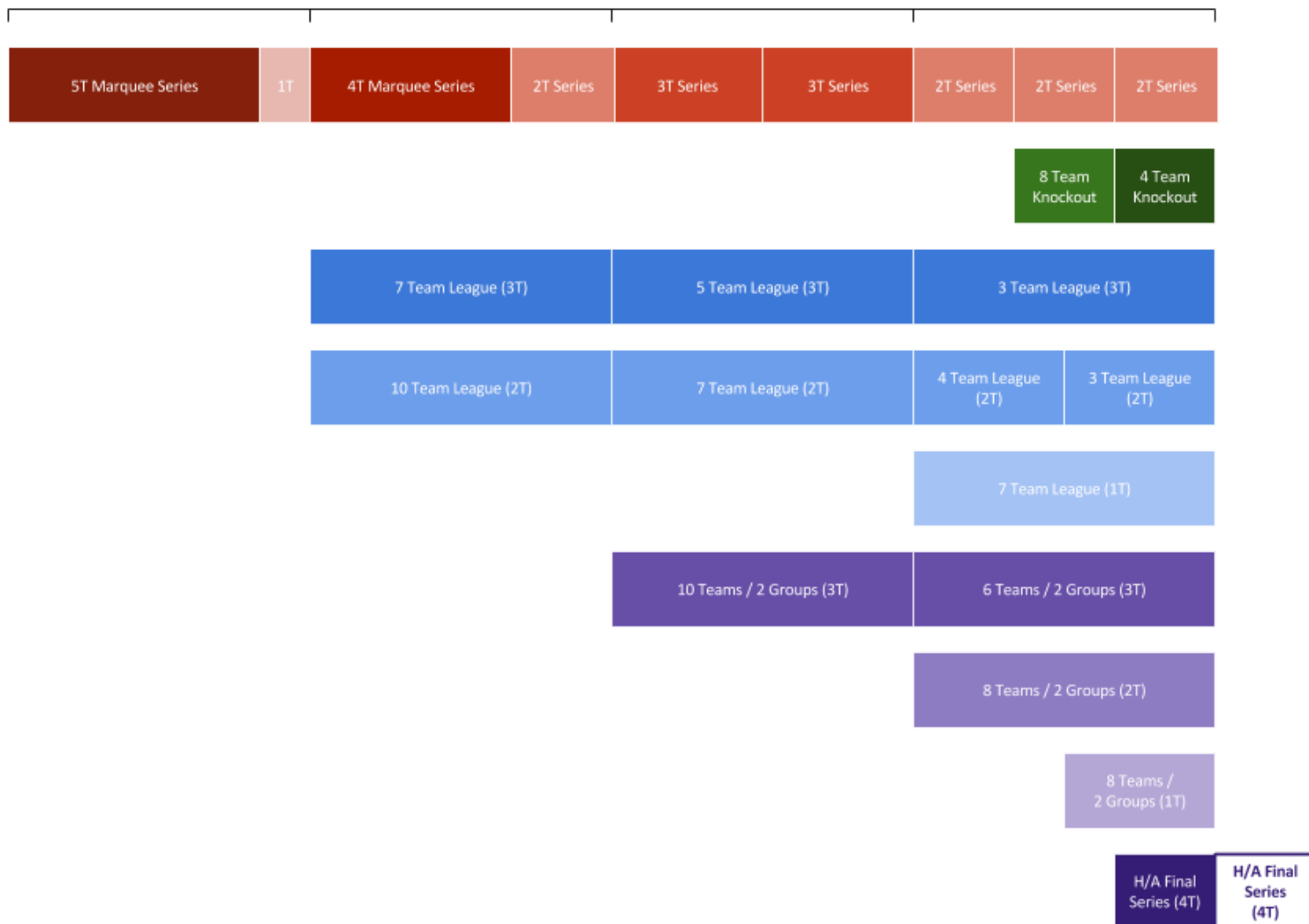


Figure 7.1: Time requirements for series and competition structures of different lengths. Groups and league overlap, boxes to the right included in the total time needed to play a format.

In theory, bilateral fixtures can consume as little as half a year of the schedule, to all but a short period for a knockout tournament. But bilaterals are largely meaningless. If the purpose is to add meaning to most matches in the calendar, then most matches in the calendar should be part of a Test championship. Only a handful of series actually survive on the merits of the contest and surrounding traditions. Absorbing the remainder into a championship that meets a wider range of aims is the easiest way to satisfy all parties.

Decision 2. How many stages will the championship be?

Eventually, a championship has to coalesce into a single group. But this can vary from a group of ten or more teams playing a long series of matches, to a group of two - in other words, a final. Before reaching the final stage, a tournament can have multiple groups, and multiple pathways to advancement. Multiple groups can also operate in parallel, creating more opportunities for teams to compete, taking less time to complete a stage of the tournament, and generating meaning by creating a series of hurdles rather than a single end-goal. Conversely, a single group allows a more competitive set of matches, and plays to the idea of every team having the opportunity to meet those at their level.

There is no requirement that every team compete at every stage. Qualifying tournaments in cricket currently take this to extremes, allowing teams byes through multiple qualifying stages, and giving relatively few teams a chance to progress from the lower stages to those above. This increases the quality of competition, at the cost of opportunity, and plays into the excessive rigidity discussed in section 6.

Concerns About Cricket in a Competition Context

A Test championship might require various changes to how cricket is currently played or conducted. Five potential changes were listed, and survey respondents asked to rank them from most to least concerning. Two more responses were received in comments, unranked.

1. Contrived results - in drawn knockouts (average ranking: 2.4)
2. Short series - 1 or 2 tests (average ranking: 2.6)
3. Uncompetitive fixtures (average ranking: 2.7)
4. Home fixtures on edge of season (average ranking: 3.5)
5. Venue / date uncertainty (average ranking: 3.7)
6. Negative / defensive game play by teams
7. Increase in the number of doctored pitches

A number of respondents expressed the view that none of these was a particular concern. Contrived results (see below) ranked as the primary concern, but none stood out as being markedly important. The lack of concern about competitive fixturing expressed in the aims and its relatively high ranking here indicates that those comments are a reasonable summation of overall concerns.

Decision 3. How will teams qualify from stage to stage?

There are four theoretical paths that can be created for entry to a particular stage:

5. Via a qualification group, whereby the top teams are promoted
6. Via a repechage system, whereby the next best placed teams in each group are offered a second chance
7. Via a system of promotion/relegation from previous iterations of the tournament
8. Via some membership or ranking criteria that allows a bye to that stage

Figure 7.2 Shows a theoretical pathway combining all four elements. In this contrived example, the best teams are excluded from first or second stage qualifying, leaving them free to play bilateral fixtures. Teams at lower levels would enter the competition in line with previous performance, increasing the amount of tournament cricket for teams most in need of meaningful cricket.

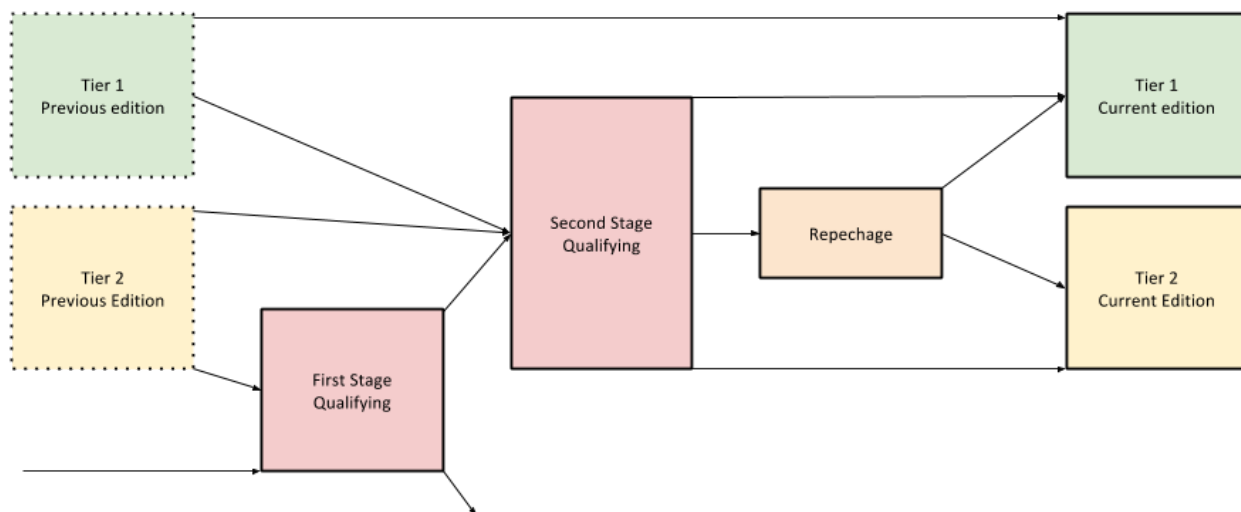


Figure 7.2: Theoretical pathway for a two tier tournament with multiple qualifying stages

Decision 4. How many teams / matches at each stage?

Once each stage is marked as some part of the calendar, there are normally several options as to how many teams will take part. As seen in figure 7.1, a single group playing over a year could consist of three teams playing 3-Test series, four teams playing 2-Test series, or seven teams playing single Tests. The latter options are more open, but will involve more luck; the former options allow teams to participate in more traditional Test series. As usual, a balance is possible, and there is a good case for creating a multi-season tournament with larger, open groups in early stages, and smaller groups towards the end.

There are numerous possible combinations of groups/leagues and stages that could be constructed from arranging these elements. A brief taxonomy will follow, highlighting some combinations that have been proposed, and their relative merits against the aims outlined earlier.

Resolving Draws in Knockout Competition

In many tournament formats, notably knockouts or knock-out series, the tournament may require a winner from a match that cannot provide one. To assess the best means of resolving that impasse, survey respondents were asked to rate seven possible solutions.¹⁴

1. Average (runs/wickets) for the series (average ranking: 2.9)
2. Count back - ahead on runs at last wicket lost (average ranking: 3.3)
3. A timeless Test (average ranking: 3.4)
4. First innings totals (average ranking: 3.6)
5. Limiting the total overs - 1st and 2nd innings combined (average ranking: 3.8)
6. Higher ranked team (average ranking: 4.4)
7. T20 / super over or equivalent (average ranking: 5.2)

For single match knockouts, there is no difference between the first two options, each of which would provide the most excitement as the contest concluded. A timeless Test received the highest number of first preferences, but the third highest number of sixth and seventh preferences, pushing it back to third on average. It may be worth considering an extra day - or at least a reserve day - in instances where a match requires a winner. Neither rewarding the higher ranked team, nor a shortened match to reach a conclusion were well received, and were the only two that ought to be outright rejected.

Taxonomy of Proposals

Shown below are a series of popular proposals. Each has been designed to be scheduled within a two year period (excepting repechage tournaments and associate qualifiers), for ease of comparison. Every proposal can, in theory, include a final as listed above. For simplicity that has been excluded from the diagrams unless necessary (from a group structure, for example). Each stage of each proposal has been assessed against eight of the aims above, excluding those dealing with tradition. The assessment of meaning has been simulated with the calculator outlined in section 4; time prohibits creating a metric for each of the aims.

¹⁴ See Russell Degnan, "Possible methods for deciding Test match draws", Idle Summers, 6th Feb 2016, idlesummers.com/post.php?postid=1941 for more detail on each method.

Two Division League

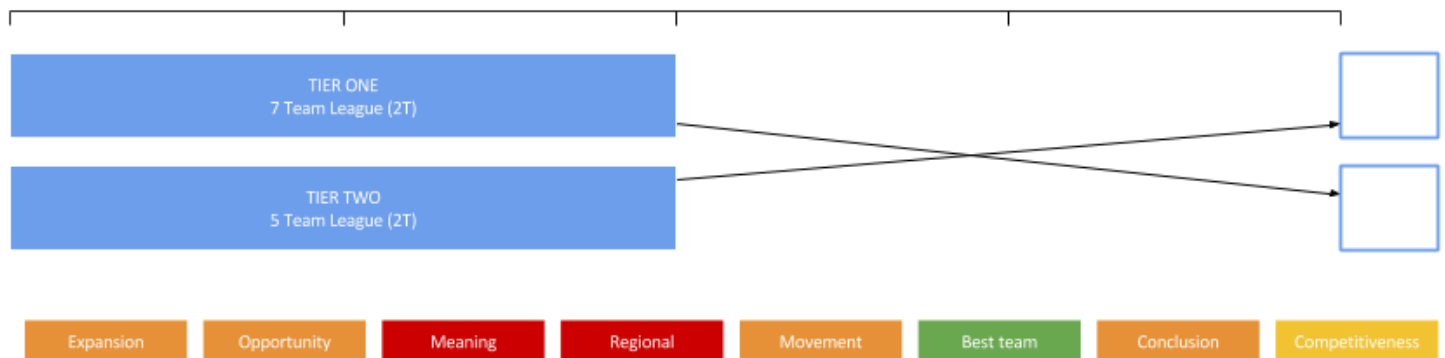


Figure 7.3: Two Division proposal with seven team top tier playing 2-Test series

This particular format was included as it was reported that the ICC was considering this as an option. A league format ensures that the best team is likely to be found, but it performs badly on other measures. Because of the high number of games over a long period, it has an average meaning per game of 0.1%. The rigidity of the divisions lower opportunity and limited expansion (just 12 teams, though more can be accommodated) make it weak in those areas. This format is not as competitive as might be imagined because the top seven Test teams can still display large variations in ability.

Scissored Tiers

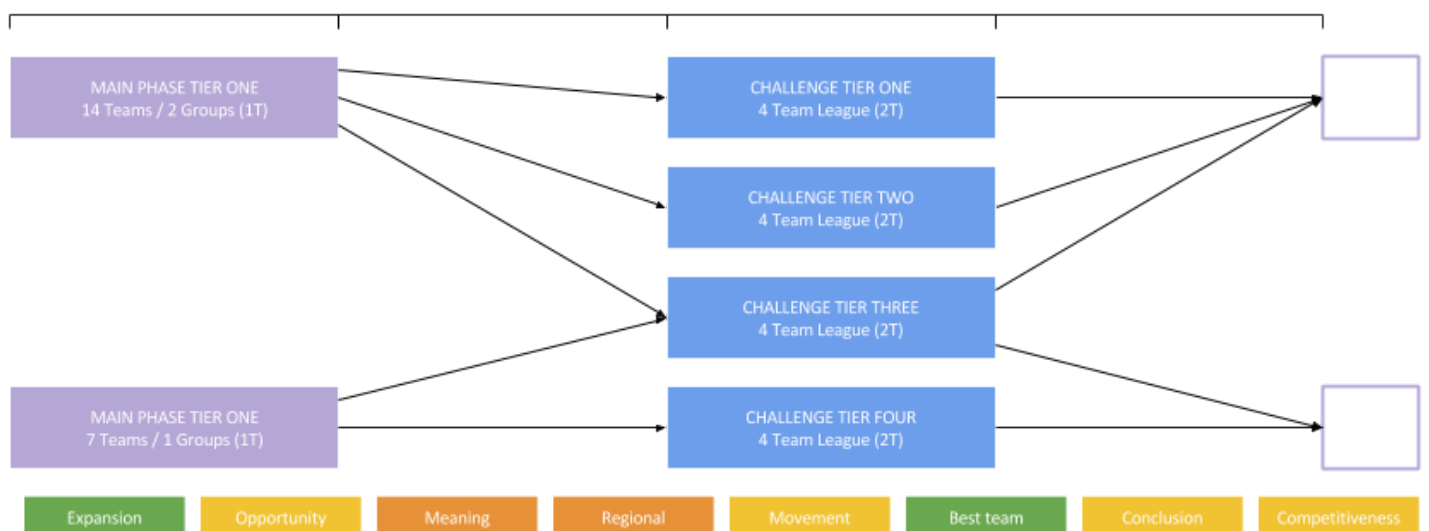


Figure 7.4: Multi-tier proposal with two phases

This proposal¹⁵ is a variant on normal relegation and promotion that contracts and expands the number of teams in different phases, with a larger, more inclusive group phase of 14 teams leading to a final series that is highly competitive. By including a large number of teams in the main phase, the competition promotes both expansion and opportunity - although a team in the lowest division would need to achieve eight years of promotions before it could compete in the challenge phase. Some regionalism is possible in the main phase. Competitiveness is high in the second stage, but low in first; similarly, meaning in the first phase is 0.3% and 0.6% in the second.

Cup competition

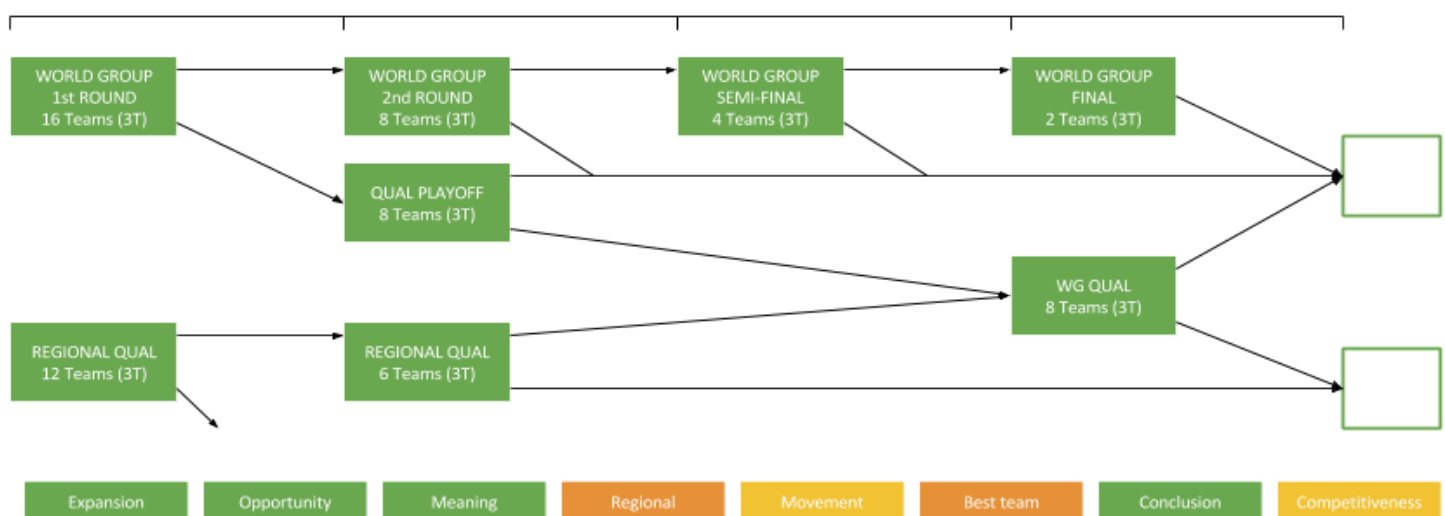


Figure 7.5: Cup competition with multiple phases

Based around the format used for the Davis Cup, this proposal works through a series of playoffs, most likely 3-test series played as part of a summer leading to a final. First round losers are forced down into a playoff against regional qualifiers, ensuring a competitive mix of matches in later stages. In terms of expansion, opportunity, leading to a conclusion, and meaning (scores of 4.8%, 9.2%, 10.7% and 11.3% at each world group stage), this format is unparalleled. However it is a difficult to schedule. Matches played in part of each season make scheduling bilateral fixtures more difficult. The knockout format won't find the best team and there is uncertainty over whether a team will have any fixtures in the third and fourth years of competition. As an overall reform to the bilateral structure, these limitations mean it is unlikely to be the best option.

¹⁵ For more details and variations see Bertus de Jong, "Testing times, tables and divisions", Cricket Europe, 1st Feb 2016, www.cricketeurope4.net/DATABASE/ARTICLES8/articles/000030/003085.shtml

Global qualifying - 4-Groups / 4 teams

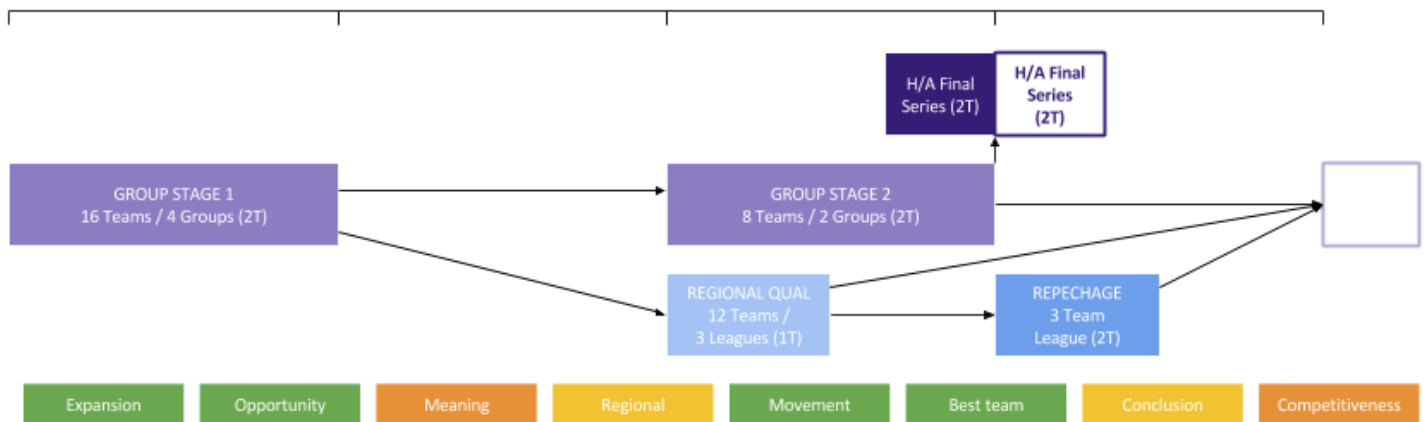


Figure 7.6: Two stage tournament with global qualifying, four team groups and a home and away final.

This proposal uses a similar format as for a sixteen team, four-group tournament. In the group stage, teams play home-and-away two-Test series, with two qualifiers moving on to a similar eight-team, two-group second stage. The winner of each group would play a home-and-away final, each team playing two matches at home in the September/October period.

The proposal receives high marks for expansion, opportunity and movement, and the final ensures that the best team would win. Neither group stage is very competitive, as there are a lot of teams involved at each point, with meaning achieving poor scores as a consequence (0.3% in stage 1 and 0.5% in stage 2). There is some scope for regional qualifying or groups, but less so than alternatives.

Regional qualifying - 2-Groups / 3 teams with repechage

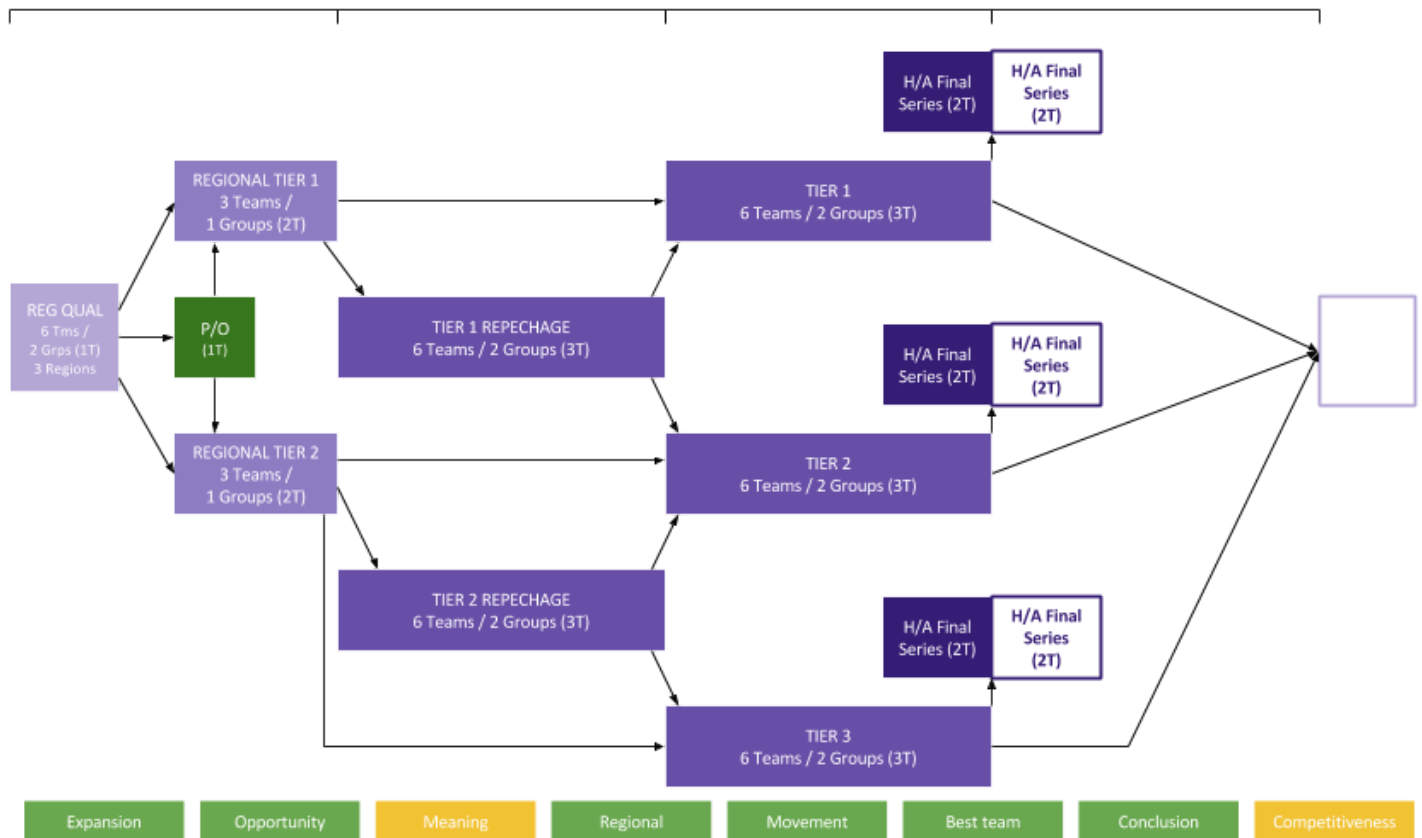


Figure 7.6: Two stage tournament with global qualifying, four team groups and a home and away final.

Like the previous format, this proposal has two main stages, but includes a regional championship that acts as a qualifier for the global tournament.¹⁶ It also includes fewer teams in the second stage, playing longer series and improving the meaning score as a consequence. The first stage of each regional championship includes two groups of four teams, with the top qualifier moving on to the second stage, and the second placed team a two-test play-off. Because the tournament is regional this can be played home-and-away. The second stage pits the three top teams against each other, with two qualifying places in the Southern and Asian region, and one in the North. An (optional) repechage in the third year is used to direct teams to different tiers, each with two groups of three, and a final (as above).

Because of its broad regional base and narrow upper tiers, the tournament is strong in almost all areas. Early matches are less competitive but dealt with quickly. Meaning is maintained throughout because of the small groups - scores of 1.2% and 2.4% at regional level (though

¹⁶ This proposal was discussed at length in Russell Degnan, "A Manifesto for World Cricket", Idle Summers, Mar 2010, idlesummers.com/manifesto

higher for playoffs) and 0.7% in the championship. The final ensures the tournament builds to a conclusion, doing so both regionally and globally.

Single Division league

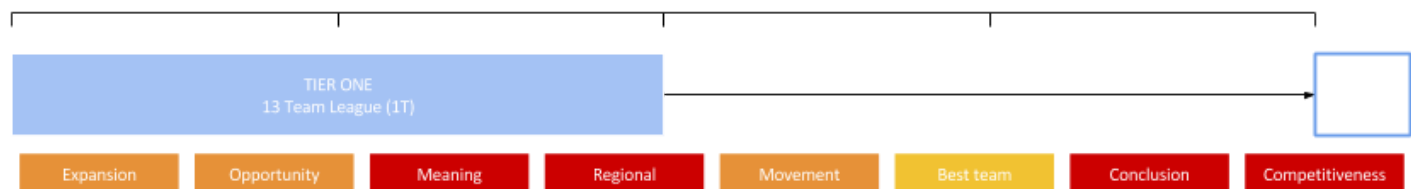


Figure 7.7: A single division league playing single home-and-away matches .

This format has been selected largely to demonstrate its flaws. A single tier offers limited expansion and movement, as fewer teams are involved than in group formats. There is more opportunity for teams that qualify but not overall. The drawn out nature of the league and limited competitiveness are not offset by superior meaning, which scored only 0.1% - though this was marginally higher than a seven-team league playing two-test series. Nevertheless, it is possible to devise a format whereby each nation would host six different teams per season, creating a thirteen-team two-season league.

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, there are many potential ways to construct a test championship. In this survey we deliberately avoided asking about specific plans, because the details are less important than the aims and the methods used to meet them. The above models show some templates for the construction of championships. The amount of time that needs to be set aside for different numbers of teams, stages and matches, and the means by which teams will qualify for each stage are all decisions for the ICC.

As shown throughout this document, there are ways of achieving key aims - such as competitiveness and meaning - that balance them with aims that matter to fans - like opportunity, tradition and building to a conclusion. It is hoped that the ICC will look at models beyond the simple idea of relegation and promotion, or a short tournament, and at multi-stage events that integrate teams in a way that enhances the tournament (and its value).

8. Other Issues Raised

Fans expressed a wide range of views in relation to the ICC and how it governs cricket. These are grouped and summarised in the following section without further comment. The full collection of fan comment is available in Appendix B.

Governance issues:

- Implement independent governance as per the Woolf report.
- ICC needs to be open to ideas and consultative with fans
- ICC's treatment of small nations leaves them at risk of external investor takeover.
- Reverse the Big-3 financial reforms
- ICC decision making is too slow.
- ICC needs to be more transparent in their decision making, and the reasons for them - including the release of internal documents.

“ Have faith in your fans. They are loyal but they feel very let down by cricket administrators who seem further and further away from the game and us.
- Anon., England

Scheduling/Competition issues:

- Reduce the number of T20 internationals.
- Player burnout needs to be addressed. Some teams play too much cricket.
- Rankings should consider away performances
- Rankings should cover all member nations
- Advanced scheduling for tournaments to allow fans to organise travel in advance

“ A board comprising of elite member boards have run the game like UN Security Council with 3 having the power to veto whatever they want. That has to change, if not well things would only get worse and one day some investment consortium would take the smaller nations away from ICC. Period.
- Anon., Pakistan

Promotion issues:

- Increase the number of day/night Test matches
- Putting cricket into the Olympics should be prioritised
- Digital subscriptions for content should be sold by the ICC

Development issues:

- More women's test cricket
- World Cup should be expanded, not shrunk.
- New markets should be invested into, as football and basketball are expanding rapidly in existing cricket markets.
- All matches in a particular development tournament should have the same status.
- First-class teams should tour developing nations in the off-season
- Associate players need to be given opportunities in full member first class/T20 competition
- Play full member matches (or domestic T20) in expanding markets - use old Olympic stadiums and other grounds to market game
- Better promote tournaments at ICC regional level with articles, live streaming and ball-by-ball commentary
- Invest in local pitches when WCL matches are played
- Adjust funding to encourage locals and juniors in expanding markets rather than expats
- Tours should include matches (with full status) against regional associates

“ Every sport is trying to expand its reach. Even the deeply American games of baseball and American Football made incredible inroads into the other continents. Why is the ICC planning to contract the World Cups? After the last WC, we can no longer argue that the Associates are not competitive against the top teams!”
- Dr. S Kaisar Alam, Bangladesh

Match issues:

- DRS should have smaller margins on umpire's call
- ICC needs to better control pitches to ensure they are sporting.
- Bowlers should be allowed more overs in ODI/T20s

“ Think it's time to do away with archaic "test series", many people want test expansion but still expect long series, two things that seem to be contradictory.”
- Anon., England

Radical ideas:

- Abolish Test series/tours in favour of fixtures.
- Abolish Test cricket in favour of other formats.
- Regional franchise Test cricket - removing national qualification requirements.
- Implement a multi-format championship - following the women's Ashes model
- ICC should fund players directly.

“ More important than a Test championship is for the ICC to have a bursary, so that all Test players can be paid a very competitive amount: so that a player should not go to T20 just for the financial incentive. I have no problem with T20: it has its own skills and a lovely market, and very apt for expansion into more geographies. But Test cricket is the highest quality: a Test player should make more money than a T20 player. ”
- Anon., India

Recommendations

The survey of 1070 people across the cricketing world produced a fascinating insight into what fans think is important, and how they want cricket structured and run. The following recommendations were made in relation to this feedback, and as a consequence of trying to meet the aims that fans wanted.

Recommendation 1: Structure a championship so that teams play up to 6 Tests at home, and 6 Tests away per season.

A season of six Test matches fits the logistical and commercial requirements of almost all members. In the past, most members have failed to play this many Test matches, but the increased commercial viability of a Test championship should allow this number to expand.

Recommendation 2: Reduce the number of trophies cricketers play for, by reducing bilateral contests in favour of global contests.

Marketing cricket across a range of formats and trophies reduces the brand value and focus. Combining these into a single Test championship that can be marketed as a single competition will increase fan engagement for both their own and neutral matches.

Recommendation 3: Construct a global Test championship that can be sold collectively by the ICC for the benefit of its members.

Restructuring the Future Tours Programme will cause a financial burden on sides if they are not able to access tours from India and other members of the Big-3. To move past this, members should sell the rights to Test championship tours to the ICC, and have access to collectively sold ICC revenues that are related to those tours. This allows two things: firstly, the ICC can schedule matches independently of the financial implications on the specific host; and secondly, the host will not be unduly affected if a scheduled tour is held elsewhere for competition reasons.

Recommendation 4: Expand the opportunities for associate nations, eliminating the competition barrier between the lower-ranked full members and the top associates.

The rigid construction of ICC member categories and competitions means that many potentially competitive matches are not being held, because of the different statuses of the members. Structuring tournaments to bring the most competitive members to play will produce the best, and most marketable cricket.

Recommendation 5: Reduce the Future Tours Programme, constructing a championship from the time made available

The Future Tours Programme (FTP) is an impediment to better championship models because of its preference for all members to play each other, and the lack of available time in the schedule for this to occur. Reducing the FTP to core matches would allow a more vibrant Test championship competition to take its place.

Recommendation 6: Structure a championship that works within the 4-year cycle of matches.

The four-year cycle has been a traditional cycle for cricket tours, World Cups and many other sports competitions for many years. A championship that fits that cycle would sit well with fans who expect a winner to be crowned on that cycle.

Recommendation 7: Set aside a part of the calendar for marquee fixtures, reserving the remainder for a global Test championship

The Ashes is a core part of the cricket calendar for many fans, particularly those in England. Limiting the time available for a Test championship to two years out of the typical four-year cycle will allow bilateral matches to be played without compromising the global tournament.

Recommendation 8: Restructure the ICC Regions to allow meaningful and competitive regional tournaments to take place.

The five ICC regions, while suitable for development, are insufficiently competitive outside of Asia to allow meaningful tournaments to take place. Reforming the regions into three - Asia, Northern, and Southern - would create vibrant regional areas to play regional championships and to conduct qualification for global tournaments.

Recommendation 9: Create windows for T20 Domestic tournaments to ensure player availability. Encourage nations to align global schedules to reduce conflicts.

The absence of players from international cricket is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed quickly. Few sports outside cricket actively schedule both domestic and international contests against each other. Creating windows to allow players to compete in both without financial loss would be an important step in reducing this problem.

Recommendation 10: Recognise all matches played under ICC laws by ICC member nations as Test, ODI or T20 internationals.

Unlike most sports, the ICC does not recognise the matches of its members. Many Test, ODI and T20 matches are played worldwide without recognition, reducing the marketability of those games, and relegating the contests as second rate. Allowing all members to conduct matches with official status will help promote cricket globally, correcting the absence of official cricket in the records of those nations.

Recommendation 11: Introduce a meritocratic playing structure within ICC tournaments that is independent of a nation's governance status.

In numerous ways, from automatic full member qualification for global tournaments, to the multi-layered pathway to playing Test cricket for associates, the ICC puts barriers to associate members that put them at a disadvantage. While status rights have their adherents at board level, far fewer fans believe these advantages should apply on the playing field. Leveling the playing field and allowing teams to rise or fall on merit, not status, is the sporting way of structuring cricket.

Recommendation 12: Formulate a championship structure that strikes a balance between the many potential aims.

Ten aims were surveyed for this project, covering the breadth of ideals that people may wish to apply to a Test championship. Some are in conflict, but many can be achieved through a balanced and creative approach to scheduling.

About the Author

Russell Degnan is an Australian with a background in computer programming, urban planning and teaching. He has blogged about cricket at *Idle Summers* for the past 12 years, writing about governance, statistics and associate/affiliate cricket. He is also the host of the Associate and Affiliate Cricket Podcast.

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Appendix A - A Format for ODI and T20 Cricket

By Russell Degnan

Whereas Test cricket can fall back on the context and history of its rivalries and the depths of its beauty as a format, ODI and T20 internationals are too often tacked onto a tour, or played merely to keep the financial wheels turning.

The aims for these two formats are much the same as for Test cricket - opportunity, competitiveness and marketable structure - but the logistical difficulties are substantially less taxing. Outlined below is a format that works towards an annual championship format, based around the touring structure used by tennis and golf: major and minor tournaments played in specific locations at the same time each year.

Structure

Thirty two teams are involved, matching the total number in the World Cricket League, split into four levels as follows:

Australasia	Africa	East Asia	West Asia	Europe	Americas
Australia New Zealand	South Africa	Sri Lanka India*	India* Pakistan	England	West Indies
PNG	Zimbabwe	Bangladesh Hong Kong	Afghanistan UAE	Ireland Scotland	
Malaysia Singapore	Namibia Kenya Uganda	Nepal		Netherlands	Canada
	Nigeria Tanzania		Oman	Denmark Italy Jersey	USA Bermuda

Major tournaments

Each region hosts a single 8-team tournament, consisting of a group stage of two groups of four; followed by a super stage of four qualifying teams and a final. Where possible teams should play in the home nation of participants. For example, in Australasia, Australia would host 6 home matches (3 first round matches, 2 second round matches and the final), as would New

Zealand (3 first round, 3 second round), while Malaysia and PNG would host two matches in the first round.

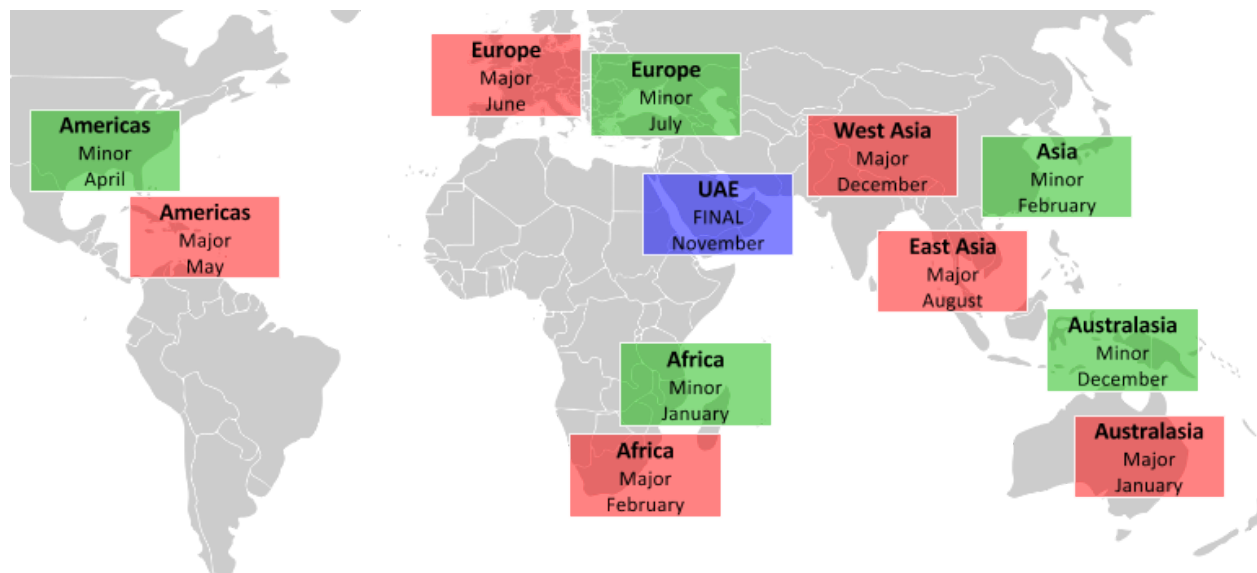
The top four ranked teams in each region would act as hosts if they are in the top-24 teams. Other teams will rotate as hosts of minor tournaments to be discussed. Each eight-team tournament will be played in just over two weeks: one week for each round, plus a final. Four top-8 teams will be allocated to each tournament: the hosts and others. At least one team ranked 9-16 will be present in each major tournament.

Minor tournaments

Each year there will be four minor tournaments consisting of six teams each, organised as per the existing WCL tournaments, played over a week. These will rotate, bid for and hosted by teams ranked from 9-24. Two teams from each tier will participate in each minor tournament.

Schedule

In each year, the top-8 will play in three tournaments - one at home, and two away. India, it will be noted, plays host to two tournaments; the teams ranked 9-16 will play two major tournaments - one at home, and one away - plus one minor tournament; the teams ranked 17-24 will play one major tournament and one minor tournament; the teams ranked 25-32 will play one minor tournament.



Final

At the end of each year the top-3 ranked teams will play a week-long tournament in the UAE, to crown the winner of the ODI championship. The schedule of tournaments from December to November each year will contribute to an overall championship in which teams must maintain their ranking to ensure they play the best tournaments in the following cycle, with the best

teams aiming to win the title. A team that won every tournament would play 24 matches over 9 weeks. In line with existing ODI scheduling. Teams ranked 9-16 will play 12 matches if they fail to qualify for the second round of major tournaments. Teams ranked 17-24 will play 9 matches; teams ranked 25-32 will play 6 matches.

Rankings

The place of a team at each tournament will determine their ranking points, as follows:

Place	Major Tournament	Minor Tournament
1st	70	25
2nd	45	15
3rd	30	10
4th	20	5
5th	10	3
6th	10	1
7th	3	
8th	3	
Match win	2 (1st round) 5 (2nd round)	1

This is designed to maintain a balance between teams on the verge of eighth and ninth place, where the second tier receives fewer opportunities, but slightly better ranking points than for a fourth placed finish should they win the minor tournament.

At the conclusion of each year teams are reallocated tournaments based on their rankings from the year before. Teams at the bottom will be subject to relegation back to regional level, with a global qualifier to determine the promoted teams. In this way, the elements of promotion and relegation that offer opportunity and better quality fixtures are preserved, while still offering teams an immediate opportunity to perform against quality opposition (teams ranked 9-16 would play 4 matches against top-8 opposition per year).

Financing

The aim of the tournament financial structure is to balance the value of different touring cycles and the existing commercial rights. To ensure the latter, each team will be eligible to sell their TV rights to their home matches to their home market. All global rights will be sold collectively and pooled for the ICC to distribute according to merit - performance, need and contribution - as they deem appropriate.