

SHOULD WALES BECOME AN ICC MEMBER?

**I am Mahendra Mapagunaratne - Barrister - at - Law from Toronto, Canada.
I am an independent cricket analyst and have been intrigued by the ongoing debate
in Wales on whether or not Wales should apply for membership of the International Cricket
Council (ICC)**

To the average cricket playing country the proposition of joining cricket's world governing body would seem non-negotiable. However the presence of Glamorgan County Cricket Club (Glamorgan) in the English County Championship and the upgrading of Sophia Gardens as SWALEC Stadium with a view to hosting Test matches complicates matters for Wales making this topic an emotionally charged issue between Glamorgan and the rest of Wales.

As an outsider I am in no mood to take sides but would like to rationally place herein facts and figures spiced with reasonable arguments on this subject for the consideration of the Welsh Assembly.

1) UNILATERAL ASSUMPTION

My first observation is that Glamorgan is a mere county of Wales and questions arise when Glamorgan unilaterally attempts to assume that it represents the 'whole' of Welsh cricket. I have yet to hear a satisfactory explanation given by anyone as to how Glamorgan could be considered the Spokesman of Welsh cricket. If the reasoning and logic is a case of 'money speaks' then one would similarly have to bear the bullying tactics of India as the wealthiest cricket playing nation at ICC level.

2) LACK OF CHOICE

Wales is a proud democracy and it is disturbing to note that Welsh cricketers have not been given the choice of which country to represent -Wales or England? On what basis does Glamorgan and Cricket Board of Wales (CBW) assume that the majority of Welsh cricketers wish to represent England and not Wales?

This conclusion by both Glamorgan and CBW is amazingly presumptuous considering no formal Referendum or Opinion Poll has been held among Welsh cricketers to decide as to which country they wish to represent.

3) PERCEIVED FEARS

The two greatest fears among Glamorgan and CBW officials when considering ICC membership for Wales is the stoppage of funding from ECB and drying up of international fixtures for the newly upgraded SWALEC Stadium.

Funding

I have personally communicated with Mr David Collier - Chief Executive of England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and he has assured that Glamorgan would continue playing in the English County Championship even in the instance of Wales becoming a member of ICC. That should assuage any fears held by Glamorgan on funding.

Who would fund the rest of Welsh cricket is the next logical question. The answer to that lies in several sources. Sport Wales apart one must not forget the fact that Wales has an excellent chance of directly becoming an ICC Associate Member and gaining valuable funding from ICC.

Besides with a Welsh national team playing international cricket there is every chance that benefactors in Wales - especially the business enterprises would come forward to sponsor Welsh cricket.

Commercial enterprises in Wales would be willing to sponsor matches by a Welsh international cricket team when they have the opportunity to advertise to billions of eyeballs on Television in the Indian sub-continent.

Just the other day a prominent figure in Scottish cricket informed me that should Wales becomes an ICC member they would be willing to stage an annual Celtic Cup among Wales, Ireland and Scotland under a lucrative Television deal. Television deals these days run into millions of dollars and I dare say Wales would gain none of these lucrative benefits if it takes the easy route and remain as it is - doing nothing.

Status of SWALEC Stadium

Anyone with an inside knowledge of international cricket would testify to the fact that third party hosts of international cricket is nothing unusual. Way back in 1912 England hosted the first Test Championship between England, Australia and South Africa. In recent times even Lord's has hosted Test matches between Pakistan and Australia. Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates have staged third party internationals for years.

There is no ICC regulation to the contrary that SWALEC cannot bid to host England's Test and One Day International (ODI) matches as long as Wales has the funds to outbid rival English venues.

Player Eligibility

Player eligibility is another fear expressed by Glamorgan and England. What would happen if someone plays international cricket for Wales? Would he be lost to Glamorgan and England? The answer is an emphatic NO. Those who express such fears do so due to ignorance and they should be advised to read the ICC Player Eligibility Rules linked below. There is no qualification or waiting period required for a player from a non Test playing nation (Welsh International) to play for England. However if that player turns his back on England and wishes to play for Wales again he would have to endure a waiting period of 4 years. What this means is that England is in an advantageous position due to its Test status.

Glamorgan may fear that Wales would grab all its players for Welsh internationals. This again is an unfounded fear considering international cricket does not encompass the whole English summer - especially for a non Test playing would be Associate nation as Wales and also due to the fact that Glamorgan is not the only county producing cricketers in Wales. There are plenty of other counties in Wales producing players of quality. These are mere details and petty concerns considering the larger picture. Suffice to say Glamorgan never complains when Glamorgan players are on England duty! I ask from Glamorgan - why this petty mindedness towards your own kith and kin?

4) SCOTLAND & IRELAND

If doomsayers in Glamorgan are to be believed, should Wales becomes an ICC member, Welsh cricket would collapse due to the cutting of funding from ECB. Scotland and Ireland - once part of the ECB set up proves otherwise.

No one denies the fact that Scotland and Ireland have not only gone on to become one of the 6 High Performance Countries in the ICC drawing millions of dollars but they have also competed at World Cups, enhanced their finances, player and spectator bases, improved infrastructure and

as if to taunt Wales even play against England under lucrative television deals. None of these achievements would have been possible if Scotland and Ireland remained under the control of ECB.

Ireland has played 70 ODIs and Scotland 49 ODIs on its own and cricket in neither country has collapsed nor their coffers rendered bankrupt by cutting ties with England.

Wales easily fulfils ICC Associate Membership criteria from an infrastructural and administrative stand point and has the ability to bypass the lower Affiliate Membership to directly become a higher ICC Associate Member just as Scotland and Ireland did.

Glamorgan CCC Chairman Mr Paul Russell has stated that the reason for Cardiff to stage England matches at considerable cost running into millions is to 'showcase' Wales. If that is the argument, would it not showcase Wales better had Wales played international cricket at Cardiff on its own? How can a team of eleven English players 'showcase' Wales?

5) AFGHANISTAN

As a means of discouraging Wales some opponents create a fear psychosis by stating that all Wales as an ICC member would be doing would be playing against the lower ranked ICC members. This is not the reality. War ravaged third world nation Afghanistan with no cricket stadium and proper funds and literally with no cricket tradition qualified from the lowly ICC Affiliate Membership Status to the ICC World Twenty20 Tournament in the West Indies in 2010 by winning the qualifying tournaments within a short span of 2 years.

What prevents Wales with a cricket tradition of more than 100 years and a first class infrastructure and an administration from emulating or doing better than Afghanistan?
Or is it that Wales is economically worse off than Afghanistan?
Or is it that Wales which feeds a first class county in English cricket is a lesser breeding ground of cricketing excellence than Afghanistan?

6) STUNNING STATISTICS

- 1) Is the Assembly aware that only 16 Welsh players have played Test cricket since the induction of Glamorgan into the English County Championship in 1921 (90 years back) and that just 11 Welsh players have played ODI cricket for England since the very first ODI in 1971?
- 2) Is the Assembly aware that if you take out the 6 years for the Second World War - in 84 years Glamorgan has produced just one Test player every 5.25 years and one ODI player for England every 3.63 years since the first ODI in 1971?
- 3) Is the above statistic worthwhile to have Wales in ECB from a playing perspective?

7) WALES PAYS MILLIONS TO ENGLAND

The popular belief is that England sustains Welsh cricket with funds. But how many are aware that hosting England matches at the SWALEC Stadium is the result of a competitive bidding process with bids running into millions of pounds?

While Glamorgan generated 3.2 million pounds (including 1 million from the Welsh Assembly) to pay England for the privilege of hosting the 2009 Ashes Test against Australia, it lost the bid to host the Test against West Indies in 2013 since Glamorgan was not able to pay the bid deposit of 2.5 million pounds on time for the Sri Lanka Test during the just concluded summer.

Winning bids to stage Test matches at Cardiff is a lottery and one wonders the long term sustainability of staging Test matches at Cardiff due to spectator apathy for Test cricket unless England's rivals are either Australia and possibly India.

It was estimated that crowds of less than 1000 per day watched the England - Sri Lanka Test at Cardiff this summer.

How often do you get an Australia or India match in Cardiff and what guarantee is there that Cardiff would get these blue riband matches when it has to compete against 7 or 8 Test match Stadia in England including the likes of Lord's, The Oval, Headingley, Trent Bridge and Old Trafford – all well established Test match venues with populations brought up on Test match cricket for generations?

No less a person than Glamorgan chairman, Paul Russell has questioned Cardiff's viability as a Test venue admitting to "conceptual difficulties" in marketing a venue in Wales as a home of English cricket.

See news item:

<http://www.espnricinfo.com/england/content/story/521382.html>

Is SWALEC Stadium therefore a good enough reason to block Wales from becoming an ICC Member?

8) TASK FOR WELSH ASSEMBLY

It is my considered view that the Welsh Assembly should:

[a] Request Sport Wales to stage a Referendum among ALL cricketers in Wales to gauge their allegiance if given the choice between Wales and England in ODI cricket

[b] Call for evidence from both Scotland and Ireland who have cut ties with ECB to become independent members of ICC to understand how they have managed to flourish devoid of funding from England.

[c] Request an official from ICC Europe to detail the financial benefits for Wales as an ICC member. (A similar request maybe made to Sport Wales)

[d] Request documentation from Glamorgan and ECB under Right to Information on the following:

- 1) Funds transferred to ECB by Glamorgan CCC to win bids to stage Test matches and ODI matches over the years
- 2) The number of Welsh players who have played Test cricket and ODI cricket for England since the establishment of Glamorgan CCC in 1921 and the corresponding number for England during that period

9) SUMMARY: EFFECTS OF WALES BEING AN ICC MEMBER

[1] Wales' primary objective as an ICC Member would be to play ODI and T20I cricket

[2] Glamorgan would remain within the English County Championship

[3] ICC regulations would certainly allow Cardiff to host third party Test and ODI matches between England and other countries

[4] England would be able to utilize Welsh international players according to ICC Player Eligibility Rules and no less Glamorgan would be able to do the same.

[5] Glamorgan would continue generating funds from ECB and Wales would be generating funds from ICC, Sport Wales, Television and Sponsorship deals, Gate attendance and Merchandise

10) ADDENDUM

1/ Interview by Glamorgan CCC Chairman Paul Russell -

<http://www.spinricquet.com/2011/07/14/spin-chat-to-paul-russell-chairman-of-glamorgan-ccc/>

2/ Glamorgan penalized for failing to pay the guarantee fee of 2.5 million pounds to ECB

<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/sports/cricket-news/glamorganccc/2011/07/01/cricket-swalec-test-match-loss-is-confirmed-91466-28974279/>

3/ List of Welsh players who have played Test cricket for England

http://cricketarchive.com/Glamorgan/Records/Miscellaneous/GLAM_TEST_CRICKETERS_STATS.html

4/ List of Welsh players who have played ODI cricket England

http://cricketarchive.com/Glamorgan/Records/Miscellaneous/GLAM_ODI_CRICKETERS.htm

5/ ICC Player Eligibility Rules

http://static.icc-cricket.yahoo.net/ugc/documents/DOC_5F00BDA78B77363CAE461644EC9C1688_1281866239978_416.pdf

6/ ICC Associate Membership Criteria

http://static.icc-cricket.yahoo.net/ugc/documents/DOC_9FDF982555EAB31CA424FBA08A631BB6_1296741767375_801.pdf