



CRICKET VICTORIA

**SUMMARY OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO
CRICKET VICTORIA'S SELECTION AND CONTRACTING
PROCESSES**

**CONDUCTED BY MIKE HUSSEY
(FORMER TEST PLAYER)**

February 2022

A. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A very broad thank you to everyone consulted throughout this review process. Their honesty and willingness to be involved coupled with their passion to contribute thoughts and ideas in the best interests of Victorian Cricket. It was obvious that there are many passionate supporters of Victorian cricket and I am grateful for the contributions made to help me gain a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the game in this state – MH.

B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2021, CV stakeholders raised issues about Victorian Male State team selection processes and how CV High Performance functions to produce first class players. Further discussions amongst Members at subsequent Presidents' Meetings 2021, led to this independent review.

Independent review

Producing consistent and successful Victorian cricket teams requires strong foundations with key pillars of junior cricket, Premier Cricket and first-class cricket being sufficiently resourced to allow players to progress through the system well developed in order to succeed at the highest level. The importance of a strong junior structure with high quality coaching and competitions prepares players for senior cricket, while Premier Cricket offers the opportunity for players to further improve and push for selection in 2nd XI and then the State's first-class team.

The first-class cricket environment has significantly changed in the last fifteen years becoming more professional with millions of dollars spent on players and programs with the goal of producing successful Victorian teams and Australian players.

Cricket Australia developed a philosophy of focussing on pathway programs running beside or parallel to Premier Cricket. This philosophy was adopted by other major sports at the same time. This new thinking was designed to develop 'identified' players and ultimately become less reliant on Premier Cricket to produce first-class players. The philosophy of promoting talented or promising players by 'gifting' them opportunities before they may have been ready appears to have caused problems throughout the foundation pillars of the game, not just in Victoria but also in other states.

As a result, a disconnect between the work of State Associations and that of Premier Cricket appears to have evolved, creating a loss of respect for the Premier Cricket competition, and forming a self-fulfilling perception that the gap between Premier Cricket and first-class cricket was too big. Hence, a reliance was formed on pathway programs to produce the next generation of first-class players. This has only exacerbated the issue. Relationships have been lost, less communication and a lack of

visibility at Premier Cricket has caused much frustration. The 'grassroots' volunteer or Club official has begun to question their role in the pathway system.

Cricket Australia is currently challenging the pathway philosophy and is looking to make changes that include having less reliance on pathway programs and placing more importance on the Premier Cricket system by re-instating it as a key pillar in the pathway.

Women's cricket at state level has markedly improved around the country in the last few years but Premier Cricket lacks depth and is considered a poor standard. The opportunity now exists to learn from any mistakes and to develop a female structure using a 'blank canvas'.

Victoria, with its large population base should be an exporter of talent. Talent identification and junior development programs need to be of the highest standard, with the employment of the best available coaching resources, so talent is identified and developed throughout the pathway and remain in Victoria.

The solution

Cricket Victoria has an opportunity to strengthen one of its key pillars in the pathway by providing Premier Cricket a clear purpose of being an elite competition which develops first-class players and acknowledged as an important and valued part of the pathway. Cricket Victoria should challenge conventional thinking and look for ways to evolve.

Some of the key drivers to attain a strong pathway are:

- Deeper engagement between CV and Premier clubs.

Better reporting systems and communication strategies will help in developing a stronger relationship based on mutual trust and respect. Selection and contracting systems and processes can improve with a focus on communication, performance management and accountability helping to select the best players on merit and performance whilst also providing opportunities to stretch talented young players.

- Ensuring thorough employment processes with the aim of getting the most suited people in coaching and management positions along with accountability mechanisms to measure the performance of staff and players.
- An emphasis to be placed on strong communication and relationships combined with a focus on junior development programs, a thriving Premier Cricket and 2nd XI competition is the basis for the production of quality Australian players and the sustained success of Victorian cricket.

Recommendations for consideration

Recommendations for consideration by CV to improve and enhance high performance outcomes are discussed at Section E of this report. They include issues related to:

- the employment of the best available people in male and female HP programs;
- junior player development;
- coach development;
- improved communication between CV High Performance and Premier clubs;
- Premier Cricket's production of first class players;
- list management;
- selection and contracting processes; and
- women's cricket considerations and pathways.

C. SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

What

An objective and independent review of Cricket Victoria's ("CV") selection and contracting processes for Victorian representative teams and HP generally, for consideration by CV.

Purpose

To ensure that CV's selection and contracting processes are in line with best practice in order to provide the best opportunity for elite talent to be identified, nurtured and progressed to state and international level.

How

1. A review of current Cricket Victoria's ("CV") selection and contracting processes.
2. A discovery of other states' selection and contracting processes.
3. Providing recommendations, where appropriate, to ensure those processes are best practice.

Programs in scope

Men's and Women's State programs (excluding BBL and WBBL)

Timeline

1. Provide a draft written report for consideration by the CV CEO by 8 December 2021.
2. Presentation to the CV Board on 24 January 2022.

Particular questions to be considered

What is best practice for:

1. Assembling State Squad contract lists, including contracting players from interstate.
2. Selecting State teams, including:
 - (a) responsibility for selecting State Squads and individual teams
 - (b) structure of senior state selection panel
 - (c) appointment and review process of the selection panel
 - (d) process for assessing Premier Cricket performances relating to contract and uncontracted players

D.METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted with approximately 50 individuals made up of representatives of CV members, Club Presidents, Club Delegates, representatives of CV associates, CV High Performance staff including coaches, assistant coaches, spotters etc., representatives of women's cricket, current and past State players, Victorian Premier Cricket players (including players who previously played Premier Cricket who now play interstate), as well as representatives such as CEO's, HP staff and coaches from all other States and Cricket Australia.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions most of the interviews conducted were done via telephone, Zoom or Teams and where possible, face to face.

E. THEMES

I was tasked with a solution-focussed inquiry to evaluate and report on issues relating to the selection and contracting of Victorian players. Five main themes emerged from my discussions with members of the Victorian cricket community. I am grateful to the people who came forward to share their experiences and views. While Cricket Victoria will not release my full report due to the confidentiality guaranteed to participants, a summary of the themes is set out below. These themes give context to the recommendations and provide public accountability for the steps forward.

Theme 1: Cricket Australia pathway legacy

A former Cricket Australia regime introduced a philosophy of creating parallel pathway systems and programs to identify and select talented young players. This philosophy was adopted by other major sports around the same time. This new thinking was designed to

develop 'identified' players and ultimately become less reliant on Premier Cricket to produce first-class players.

In years gone by the pathway to a state's first-class team was based largely around performance in Premier Cricket. The CA philosophy, which also remodelled the 2nd XI competition into a Futures League where the majority of the playing XI had to be under 23 years of age, along with playing CA XI and other pathways matches created an alternative pathway to the first-class level believing a player could step around Premier Cricket by putting a greater importance in pathway program performances and less importance on Premier Cricket performance. The goal was to expose as many young players as possible to 'see if they are good enough' with the best making it through and the rest dropped to 'figure it out' and hopefully come back later in their career a better player.

While this philosophy has had some success, it has also caused problems such as:

- a loss of respect and relationships with Premier Cricket.
- lots of training and 'practice games'.
- Boys v Boys competition.
- a sense of entitlement with some players.
- players rewarded with contracts and selection without performing at Premier Cricket level

Premier Cricket is still a crucial part of the pathway. It has benefits such as:

- competition against men where the tactics and nuances of the game are learned on the field.
- young, talented players are a 'smaller fish in a bigger pond' and need to earn respect, build resilience and learn the game. All of which helps provide a base to set them up for success both on and off the field.

It must be noted that recently Cricket Australia discussions have commenced to challenge the previous CA thinking and a change in strategy is being worked on to find the best 'support' pathway, with more focus on the U/19 program, Australia A and Premier Cricket to help set players up for success both on and off the field and help to produce the best Australian teams.

Some states are now preferring to be less reliant on pathway programs, putting more emphasis on Premier Cricket performances and the Premier Cricket Clubs to produce first-class players for their state. They have publicly stated and rewritten structures to ensure that Premier Cricket is a core pillar within the pathway program.

Theme 2: Perceptions and respect for Premier Cricket

There were a number of perceptions and concerns raised about the status and respect for Premier Cricket. These included:

- eroding of the Premier club competition and integrity of selection.

- continual selection of pathway talent despite underperforming in Premier Cricket where others are performing better.
- Premier Cricket performances not holding much weight and selectors not watching or communicating effectively enough with clubs.
- senior players losing faith in the selection process, no longer believing they can be selected for Victoria and leaving Premier Cricket to play suburban cricket for more money, less training and less commitment.
- bias in selection and contracting, where certain clubs are favoured.
- enticing interstate players to move to Victoria at the expense of local players.
- Victoria not producing enough top-class Australian players.
- players in the pathway programs having a sense of entitlement with regards to selection who don't perform consistently in Premier Cricket.
- Cricket Victoria High Performance system and processes.
- The relationship between CV's High Performance Unit and Premier Clubs needs to focus on more communication and shared aims and values.

Theme 3: Gap between Premier Cricket and First-Class cricket

While everyone consulted in High Performance positions agreed that Premier Cricket plays an important role in the pathway, most felt as though the gap between Premier Cricket and first-class cricket has always been and still is significant. Many suggested the gap is as big as it has ever been.

There were strong views that Premier Cricket needed to evolve if it was to remain an important part of the pathway.

The 2nd XI competition is seen as a very important part of the pathway as it can expose young players and Premier Cricket players to the rigours of four-day cricket and better prepare players for first-class cricket.

Theme 4: Women's Cricket

It was consistently stated that there was huge scope to improve the structure and processes in women's cricket. Sharelle McMahon starting as Head of Female Cricket was a step in the right direction but much work needs to be done in all areas of the female game to build for long-term sustainable success. Themes to be addressed include:

- pathway selection.
- opportunities to play more competitive cricket.
- better structures both in country and metropolitan areas.
- more specific coaching.
- Premier Cricket is seen to be too young and better steps need to be in place for girls to progress at an appropriate rate.

- Speculative contracts are given as the talent pool is thinner. There are concerns that these girls who are in transition are not being set up for success and should develop secondary sets of skills through education, employment, community work to help develop them as a person, not just a cricketer.
- rookie contracts in the female game would be beneficial to allow young and talented players access to high performance coaching, training and other resources while still being able to commit to work or study or life outside the game.
- selection systems and structures need to be more accountable with use of depth charts, talent maps, identifying future leaders, character, rankings and ratings using a structured approach using documentation.

Theme 5: Selection structure and contracting

Selecting State Teams

There were a number of themes emerging regarding selection structures and processes with definitive pros and cons of each. These included:

- independence in a selection panel - Some believe having an independent selector is outdated and old-fashioned, created disagreement, often ego centric and had little accountability. Other states disagreed stating an independent voice gave a different perspective, a bigger picture view as a HP department can have 'tunnel vision' at times and miss things going on outside their programs.
- the role of talent manager as a selector- whether this provided sufficient objectivity in selection of players.
- the role of State Head Coach and whether that role should have a significant say in selection.
- a good and transparent selection structure is important, including having the best possible people in positions and a robust process and accountability in assessing performance.
- the importance of reporting and analysis into identifying talent and in the selection process with the need for more accountability and performance reviewing of the selectors and talent identification staff.

Contracting players

Key themes raised were:

- the number of contracts, rookie contracts, no provision for mature-aged rookie contracts and different philosophies surrounding contracting.

- the balance between identifying and rewarding the best state talent to ensure players and squads are set up for long-term success.
- the need for List management, contracting and selection to be well organised and planned using depth charts, age and personality profiling along with other tools to ensure all positions are covered adequately for now and the future.
- the number of contracts given to players- what is the optimal number.
- the contracting system and remuneration levels sufficient to encourage players to stay in one state or move between states.
- the identification and development of players in Victoria to make it attractive for Victorian players to stay and interstate players to see Victoria as a desirable destination.
- the provision of rookie contracts and their suitability.
- the philosophy of winning titles and the impact that has on who gets a chance for selection.
- the effect of other sports such as AFL/AFLW on a young cricketer's desire to choose cricket.

F. RECOMMENDATIONS *(for consideration by CV)*

1. People

Employ the best available people:

- ensure thorough employment processes for each position of the male and female HP program with the aim of getting the best possible person for each role.
- conduct talent review to assess employee performance and capability as well as identify gaps in talent.

CRICKET VICTORIA'S INITIAL POSITION (subject to further consideration of the recommendations)

CV agrees that employment processes must be thorough and transparent and will ensure that these principles are upheld in any recruiting of HP staff.

CV has recently reviewed its talent management approach and has embedded processes that regularly review performance and capability.

2. Junior Player development

Bigger focus on junior player development (male and female):

- Improve the quality of coaching in junior pathway programs.
- Increase the level of coaching expertise and skill development.
- Employ the best coaching, sport science & sport medicine and training resources available.
- Explore the viability of adding the futures league as a layer beneath 2nd XI to expose young talent to four-day cricket. Alternatively, expand the 2nd XI competition clearly communicating that a number of games designated for developing and exposing younger players (male cricket).

CRICKET VICTORIA'S INITIAL POSITION (subject to further consideration of the recommendations)

CV is committed to coaching excellence and, in concert with improved employment processes, will seek to employ the best people in the right roles.

CV will discuss the Futures and 2nd XI Competitions with Cricket Australia and also consider developing a Victorian 2nd XI fixture.

3. Coach development

- Invite club coaches into the youth pathway and part-time opportunities being exposed to the senior CV program.
- Review coach development programs to ensure they are aligned throughout HP program.

CRICKET VICTORIA'S INITIAL POSITION (subject to further consideration of the recommendations)

CV will continue to look at ways to build opportunities to expose club coaches in the youth pathway.

4. Communication & relationship building between CV and Premier Clubs

Improve CV HP relationships with Premier Cricket clubs:

- genuinely work with, resource appropriately, place value in and communicate effectively acknowledging the importance Premier Cricket in the pathway.
- improve communication processes to clubs in Premier Cricket developing relationships with all Head Coaches.

CRICKET VICTORIA'S INITIAL POSITION (subject to further consideration of the recommendations)

CV will undertake a review of our current communication channels and processes with a goal to improve CVHP – Premier Club communication.

This review will involve ongoing input from both CVHP and Premier Clubs (both female and male).

5. Premier cricket to produce first class players

- Clearly identify the role of Premier Cricket as an elite competition, entrusted to develop and produce first-class players and a vital part of the pathway.
- Re-structure the Premier Cricket competition into a two-division system with promotion and relegation opportunities.
- 1st and 2nd grade teams being elite teams, 3rd grade a development team and 4th grade, still part of a club, but play in community cricket competitions.

CRICKET VICTORIA'S INITIAL POSITION (subject to further consideration of the recommendations)

CV regards this recommendation as out of scope and believes it is up to Victorian Premier Cricket Clubs to determine the best way to ensure they are producing the best players for Victorian selection.

CV believes the Premier Cricket Committee with input from the Presidents or a Premier Cricket Strategy group would be suitably positioned to tackle any questions around the purpose and structure of the competition.

6. List management

- Through the Head Coach, HP manager, talent manager and assistants, develop a consistent vision and long-term strategy to list management incorporating talent, character, age profile and positional depth.
- Recruitment from interstate only if there is a glaring gap in talent in a specific position.
- Review the validity of having key members of CV HP such as HP manager, talent manager, selectors and Head Coach also involved with a BBL franchise.
- Include the provision of at least one mature aged rookie contract.

CRICKET VICTORIA'S INITIAL POSITION (subject to further consideration of the recommendations)

CV is supportive of this recommendation and will refine its approach via the HP Committee.

CV will take up the discussion around the rookie contract with CA and the ACA.

7. Selection and contracting process and accountability

- Develop a robust structure for assessing Premier Cricket and pathway performance by engaging with coaches and use of senior players as spotters with better reporting and performance management making selectors more accountable for decisions.
- Improve communication about selection and non-selection to both uncontracted and contracted players on the fringe of selection in the pathway and Premier Cricket.
- Improve communication about selection philosophies to Premier Cricket coaches.

CRICKET VICTORIA'S INITIAL POSITION (subject to further consideration of the recommendations)

As per recommendation 4, CV will undertake a review of our current communication channels and processes with a goal to improve selection, transparency and accountability.

8. Women's cricket considerations & pathway

- Build stronger foundations across program in city and country areas.
- Improve pathway structures allowing the promotion of girls at the appropriate time.
- Tap into regional areas more effectively.
- Introduce a number of rookie contracts.
- Consider introducing a 2nd XI competition / fixture.
- Explore the value of a 'Super 4's' competition or other opportunities to help reduce the gap between Premier Cricket and state cricket.
- Examine the optimum number of clubs in the Premier Cricket competition.

CRICKET VICTORIA'S INITIAL POSITION (subject to further consideration of the recommendations)

CV is updating its 'Women and Girls in Cricket' strategy and will consider these recommendations to improve the effectiveness of Victoria's female pathway structure and will streamline and help make more visible the pathway for girls in cricket in Victoria, from grassroots to professional level.

There will be ongoing liaison with further input from women in the game, to ensure a greater understanding of the issues confronting the women's competition. There are nuanced differences between the men's pathway and the women's pathway, and CV are committed to understanding and supporting these differences.

G. TIMELINE AND WAY FORWARD

The CV Board will review the recommendations of the independent review and, along with the CEO, take responsibility for the progression and monitoring of the implementation of appropriate actions.

The CV Board will treat action on the recommendations as a matter of priority.

The Board and CEO will report regular updates to Members and stakeholders, as standing agenda items, at Presidents' and Delegates meetings.