

ASSOCIATION DES CLUBS DE CRICKET DU SUD-OUEST

Siège social : Hôtel des Associations - 47160 DAMAZAN



ACCSO AGM 2019 – President’s Report / Bilan Moral

There’s much to reflect upon at the end of season 2019; but I make no apologies for opening with something which has yet to happen!

At AGM, Stephen Harrison will step down after being ACCSO’s treasurer for no less than 20 years. During the first 10 years he was also in charge of all things umpiring, remaining to this day our most senior umpiring authority, still coaching and qualifying our regional umpires.

Outside the region, Stephen also played an important part in setting up the modern-day France Cricket – again as Treasurer and as a senior umpire - but also worked at getting ICC recognition for cricket in France, leading to France’s becoming an Associate member, just below the level of the Test-playing countries.

That makes an awful lot of cricketers who are indebted to Stephen for all those many and various contributions. We shall have the opportunity at AGM to express our gratitude.

Clearly, that expertise and commitment will be very difficult to replace. But replace it we must.

It looks as if Stephen will be willing and able to continue in the short term as umpire coach and examiner. And that’s very good.

But we simply must now find a replacement as treasurer.

Why? No treasurer = no association.

At the time of writing no candidate has come forward as a candidate, despite a call for candidates and various “trawls”. I repeat: No treasurer, no association.

Ian Brown has circulated a “job specification” to club presidents and so between now and AGM I urge clubs to think of possible candidates.

While on the subject of challenges, I need to remind clubs that there can be no competitive matches without qualified umpires.

Season 2019 saw an unprecedented number of matches scheduled, thanks in part to the welcome return to competitive cricket of Bordeaux-Giscours and Damazan. And also to the remarkable feat of Toulouse CC in fielding 2 teams in all 3 competitions (bravo – a first in ACCSO history, I believe!).

But far too many of those matches were played with just the one qualified umpire, standing at both ends. Although this satisfies the Code du Sport it is patently unfair on the single umpire, who may well have travelled further than

the away side to do just one thing: enable 22 other (mostly younger) guys to play a game of cricket. And he's out there the entire match; while the players are "only" on the field for half of that time, plus the time they actually bat.

There are currently not enough qualified umpires on the books. Fact.

Or rather – begging Malcolm Grant's pardon - there may be enough qualified umpires but half of them are still also players and – as Malcolm highlights in his report, most of those did not umpire a single match in 2019.

At the France Cricket level, any club which enters a competition must have at least 2 qualified umpires on their books and make them available – to umpire matches involving clubs other than their own. I'm reluctant to go so far; but the juggling Malcolm has to perform in order to provide even just the one umpire per match is proof that something needs to change.

Here's a table which is interesting for several reasons. It shows above all how the number of member-clubs and licences have varied over the years. Thanks to Philippe's successful recruitment campaign, we've only just returned to the playing strengths of a few years back.

But I want to make use of these data to highlight the scale of the problem we face on the umpiring front. And I'll continue the text after the table.

Year	N° of clubs	Total licences	Player licences	Licenced non-players (= umpires, treasurers, etc.)
2005	4	116	113	3
2006	10	223	217	6
2007	11	303	290	13
2008	11	252	239	13
2009	11	266	255	11
2010	10	243	231	12
2011	9	220	211	9
2012	8	196	188	8
2013	9	211	197	13
2014	10	231	218	13
2015	9	221	207	14
2016	8	190	174	16
2017	8	189	176	13
2018	8	176	162	14
2019	8	189	174 (incl. 10 player-umpires)	15 (incl 9 umpires)
2020	9 ? (Nîmes)			
2021	10 ? (Aunis)			

The 9 qualified licenced umpires include one directly licenced at the FFBS and one who lives well outside the region and can only get a licence via a club – any club, in effect. Together with just one of the player-umpires (who stood frequently), they've collectively clocked up many thousands of *kilomètres* in 2019.

Based on the published umpire rosters and completed match report forms, I reckon that at least 6 (probably 7) of the 10 player-umpires did not stand at all in 2019. And that's why I propose to put my weight behind a proposition that every club will commit to provide 1 qualified umpire from within the club's playing membership to stand full-time at each home match; leaving Malcolm to provide the other umpire from his pool.

Radical? Yes – to solve a fundamental problem. And even more radical: I am now inclined to favour deducting points (League) or forfeit of a match (Cup), for non-compliance.

Something to get our teeth into at AGM!

There is one aspect of FC's match-management practices which has been successfully put in place here; and that's the pre-match printing of rosters/team sheets. I thank the clubs for making this effort and Ian Brown for setting up what has proved very useful to umpires and to scorers.

And talking of scorers.....

I quite frequently see, at end of match, a member of one team using his smartphone to take a photo of the other team's scorebook. Proof that only one book was maintained throughout the match.

This may be convenient for the club in question; but it is incontestable that accurate scoring comes from 2 people scoring alongside each other. We play competitively these days, with results that are sometimes close. The 2019 final of FC's Coupe de France was decided by a Super-Over after the 2 innings of 50 overs ended with the scores tied. You can bet that the *two* "scorebooks" were scrutinized in order to be certain that the match was indeed tied!

Perhaps we can put those smartphones to better use and increase the number of players willing and able to score?

I have asked Ian Brown to investigate whether we could easily switch to an app for smartphones/tablets, called CricHQ, which is the standard tool for FC's matches (including that Coupe de France....).

It has proved to be very attractive to younger FC players who would never dream of filling in a scorebook.

Have they indeed ever seen a scorebook?

It would cost us nothing, financially, with FC as the licensee; and it would, as a by-product, make all player performances visible to FC, which in principle ought to enable FC remotely to spot emerging talent for the French national teams (no ACCSO club president has ever seen an FC talent scout in the region!).

I would be happy to see a couple of ACCSO clubs signing up next season to a trial of the software, prior to full implementation in 2021.

Talk of French national teams leads me inevitably to write a few words about France Cricket.

Some of you already know that I have resigned from FC's board.

I prefer to answer questions at AGM as to the details; but for the moment I'll just say that I profoundly disagreed with the way David Bordes, FC's Technical Director, was treated, leading him to hire a lawyer to attack FC for harassment. The upshot was that he quit, thus enabling FC to appoint what they called a quote more suitable person unquote. That person was put in charge of the once-in-a-lifetime chance to qualify for the U19 Cricket World Cup; and his selection went on to lose all 5 of the 5 qualifying matches.

At the same time, the French Ladies' team, with zero input/involvement on the part of FC, won 4 of their 5 matches in a tournament held at Nantes (on France's sole grass track).

You may draw your own conclusions.

I'm relishing the time and energy freed up, to invest more in real cricket, S-W style. The only drawback is that there's now only one regional rep on FC's board (a lady from Nantes, as it happens, and member of that winning French ladies' XI) to offset the Parisian mindset. Meaning that there's nobody any more to promote any bid for special funding, such as might be required by clubs such as TCC and Nîmes for their new pitches.

Other than such bids, not much is likely to happen between now and the FC elections in March 2021, after which the ACCSO president of the day (my replacement!) will have to negotiate the renewal of 2 agreements authorizing ACCSO to organize competitive cricket the way we want to play it (I wrote about those agreements in my report to AGM-2018). Hopefully the new FC team will be less hidebound and dogmatic than it is today.

Coming back close to home, 2019's weather made its presence felt – as in 2018 - with early-season rain and high-summer heatwaves to contend with. And as in 2018, I again commend clubs both for their concern for player (and umpire) safety and for their willingness to juggle dates, days of the week and venues. Clubs also owe a great deal to the willingness of Ian Brown and Malcolm Grant for sorting out the logistical and umpiring consequences. When that's all done in the interest of getting games played, it reveals the region-wide desire to get out there and play. There's no shortage of passion!

And passion is what's driving the creation of a new club, at Nîmes. Rolf Lechder is a Zimbabwean who's played on grass wickets in his youth (a rarity!) and who has decided to enable local refugees to play and even emulate the success of Saint Omer these past 2 years. Rolf is well on the way to forming a club and getting a carpet down, in time for season-start. And he's well aware of the need to get umpires and scorers on board!

For the record, all the other start-up initiatives we knew of in 2019 in our region have not materialized. The club at Aunis (17) has evolved the most, with 24 licences on board - but the large majority of those are too young to play in ACCSO competitions. But club president Pradeep Chalise is still on record as wanting to play in senior competitions; so maybe 2021?

Ian Brown is already getting to grips with the structural and logistical implications of the arrival of a club at Nîmes. These are not negligible - not least the fact that Nîmes is regularly cited in *météo* bulletins for high temperatures. For the record, ACCSO's remit to provide competitive cricket has evolved over time from 1992's handful of *départements* and now embraces the 2 enlarged administrative regions of Nouvelle Aquitaine and Occitanie.

With Nîmes in mind, it might be that we need to be a little more creative when it comes to the financing of clubs' transport to away fixtures.

The possibility for some matches to be played at "half-way houses" (which we introduced when we had a single region-wide pool in the League) is still on the table.

External financing might come from ACCSO itself setting up a region-wide deal with a company such as ADA for all clubs to have access to "people-carriers" at reduced rates (on the lines of what B-GCC organized).

It's also probably worth looking at a rather more radical notion: getting the civic authorities in Bordeaux and Montpellier to recognize their respective clubs as *ambassadeurs de la région* whenever they play away outside-region, opening up the possibility of regional contributions to the cost of travel. That would have to be a joint initiative between ACCSO and the respective clubs; and it might mean that pools are constructed on a regional basis. However, given that the regions' budgets for 2020 are already set in stone it might not come into effect until 2021.

Fingers crossed for TCC to find the necessary funding for the purchase and installation of a new carpet at Sordelo (no further competitive matches will be scheduled on the existing track).

Hopefully Philippe Fermanel will be able to exploit the great publicity generated by TCC's being featured on French TV.

If you missed that, here's the link:

https://www.facebook.com/francecricket/videos/570262580162777/?source=feed_text&epa=HASHTAG&_tn=*NKH-R

Ian has done a remarkable job this season in bringing you lots of info on the matches as soon as he received and checked the data. He has agreed to take over managing the content of the ACCSO website, which will improve the flow of information to it and will also, I'm sure, make it more "friendly" to portable devices.

And last but far from least: time for me to remind you that the ACCSO "business model" is based on the continuing goodwill of our sponsor Blevins Franks. A look at Stephen's balance sheet and budget statements says it all. On your behalf, sincere thanks to Rupert Holderness and his team. Please continue at club level to promote Blevins Franks services and highlight what our cricket owes to the company.

I'm pleased to be able to say that, thanks to the splendid show put on by Eymet CC at the 2019 Blevins Franks Cup Final, Rupert has already fixed the date for his customers' big day out at the Cup Final of 2020.

Roll on season 2020!

Peter Townsend
ACCSO President
1st October 2019.