**2019 L&DCC Season Review**

The 2019 season was badly affected by the weather. Whereas 2018 enjoyed a long continuous spell of fine sunny weather, this time rain causing complete cancellations over several weekends and lots of frustration for players, officials and spectators. Nineteen games were completely abandoned in the Premier Division alone without a bowl being bowled, with another five games being curtailed as No Decision results. Elsewhere, across the divisions, the story was the same or worse.

In the games that were played, Firwood Bootle, under new captain Neil Williams, became worthy **Premier League** champions for the first time since 2009.

At the halfway stage, they held a 31-point advantage over New Brighton who had beaten them on the campaign's opening day, their only defeat until Leigh rather surprisingly held off their attempt to overhaul their total in Round 20.

Their recruitment of Hampshire pace bowler Keith Barker helped to cement their tabletop position. In his 8 games, he captured 25 wickets including a return of 9 for 22 against New Brighton as they bowled them out for 47. Bay's Saman Jeewantha also had a nine-wicket haul.

Ormskirk finished eighteen points adrift and runners up for the second successive year, ensuring that the season ran to the last weekend before Firwood Bootle could confirm their success. Ormskirk recovered from a slow start where they lost three of their opening games, including an opening day defeat to newly promoted Orrell Red Triangle in that club's first ever Premier Division game. Ormskirk remained unbeaten after their loss to Firwood Bootle in Round six, with the eagerly awaited return fixture between the top two falling foul of the weather and thwarting any chance of the top spot changing hands.

Last year's reigning champion's Northern took third place, while the relegation battle ended with Colwyn Bay (after a four year stay in the top tier) and Lytham (champions in 2012) dropping into Division One with Southport & Birkdale managing to remain a small advantage over these sides over the final weeks of the campaign.

The batting honours for the Division went to New Brighton's Clarke with 816 and Sephton (seemingly as usual) with 67 wickets for former champion's Northern took the bowling.

The **Division** **One** was again a close-run affair. Wigan, with Redmond leading the division's run chart with 741 and Yadav claiming 58 wickets aided by Richardson' 47 victims to go with his 600 runs, were the Champions. Long-time promotion contender's Newton le Willows saw the second promotion spot taken by Sefton Park who put together an eleven-match winning streak (interrupted by two Abandoned games) which included evergreen Houghton's 1000 league wicket for the club in his second spell at the club. At the halfway stage, Park were languishing in 7th position and became the first team to amass 300 in the division since 2013.

Highfield finished third, five points further back. Although Wavertree suffered a season to forget losing each of their completed games, the second relegation spot featured a battle between Prestatyn and Fleetwood Hesketh. The Welshmen could not match the late season surge that saw Fleetwood win three of their last six games to leapfrog their rivals.

The two promotion places in **Division Two** were claimed by a strong Liverpool side who remained unbeaten (winning sixteen of their seventeen completed games) and by runners up, St Helens Town who won all nine of their completed games in the second half of the campaign. Both sides relied heavily on their bowling attack with Kelly/Clubbe taking 122 wickets and Richardson/Davies claiming 87 although Charlton topped 700 runs for the champions. Clubbe with the division's best return of 9 for 37. Maghull's Ring with the season's top individual score of 165.

Alder experienced another difficult season with just a single victory to show for their efforts. They managed to avoid relegation to the Southport ADL following the decision of Burscough to withdraw from the Liverpool competition owing to difficulties in guaranteeing being able to field two sides in 2020.The top club from the SADL feeder league did not meet all of the necessary criteria to gain promotion. As a result there will be just 35 clubs in the structure for 2020 with the 36th club vacancy being advertised for the 2021 season.

In the **Second XI competition**, the Premier Division was won by Wallasey. Starting the campaign as last year's Runners up, they went one better with sixteen victories and a seventy-point advantage over Lytham taking second spot from previous Champion's Ormskirk in third just four points further back. Miles and Hughes each topped 500 season runs for Wallasey with Gill of Ormskirk managing top scorer with 646 and Hughes also claimed 47 wickets helped by Keogh's 35 victims. Cartmell of Lytham the most with 56 wickets in the division. The two teams to drop out of the division were bottom – placed Wigan and (to complete a bad year all around) previously promoted Colwyn Bay, who joined their first eleven counterparts in a lower division next year. Sefton Park who must have feared the worst as they went week after week without a win after an impressive start and Southport & Birkdale just did enough to avoid the drop.

In Division One, Newton le Willows took top spot at the beginning of August from Firwood Bootle who were looking to bounce back after the shock (by their standards) of the previous season's relegation, and never released their grip and confirmed their title success in the penultimate round when results went their way.

Promoted club Sutton (St Helens) found life a little more difficult in the higher tier and could not muster enough victories to climb away from the second relegation position. Maghull, who avoided relegation, by just three points in 2018,could do little better this year and ended up in bottom place. Ainsdale's overseas player McClure with 496 led the scoring table ahead of Wavertree's Daulby (442). Leading wicket taker was Ainsdale's Friar with 50, two ahead of Firwood Bootle's Meskell.

The two relegated teams bounced straight back with promotion led by Leigh's promising young second team, won Division Two with games in hand from Northop Hall. Prestatyn ended the season without a victory and in last place. Top spots in the batting stakes were taken by players from Welsh clubs with Northop Hall's Little (577 runs) ahead of Prestatyn's Taylor (486) who battled in vain. Black of St Helens Town claimed an exceptional 75 wickets with Graham of Leigh taking 43.

Best bowling performance across the three Divisions were by Parkfield Liscard's Courtney with 9 for 29 enabling his side to successfully defend a comparatively low total and Colwyn Bay's James Jones (again for 29 runs) who took all wickets in a drawn game

In the **3rd XI competitions**, and despite a late scare, caused by the disruption by the annulment of previous results following the enforced expulsion from the league of a side who had conceded their fourth fixture, Northern 3 (led by Simon King), who were without a fixture on the final round could only wait while closest challengers and current reigning champions Ormskirk, were held to a frustrating (for them) draw as their opponent's last pair held out. Northern therefore, won the league by the small margin of just 3 points. Just 25 points covered the top four in a very competitive campaign. Two players scored 400 runs, New Brighton's London (404) and Wallasey's Bark. Northern SK's Doyle was the leading wicket taker with 53 including the season's best return of 8 for 21. Just one team (Firwood Bootle) was relegated.

The two promoted teams were champions Orrell Red Triangle and Formby (after some late confusion) ahead of Sefton Park 4. Orrell losing just one game. Sefton Park's pair led the individual honours, Kennedy, who scored 515 runs in Division One ahead of Wallace (Formby) 445 and their promising Under 13 player Burke topped the wicket table with 45 victims (with five 5-wicket hauls). Cheetham of Orrell Red Triangle including figures of 8 for 4 finished in second place.

In the Sunday set up, Liverpool beat Leigh into second place in the Premier Division. Northop Hall were relegated. Spring View were champions in the North East division in a very competitive division with any of the top six having the chance of winning with just a couple of weeks to go. Wallasey saw off the challenge of Rainhill in the South West. The revised format of small divisions led to frustrations for many clubs caused by weather and conceded games.

Seven players, led by Banerjee (454 runs), topped the 300 mark with Benish Shukla with an exceptional unbeaten 155 for Fleetwood Hesketh 3s in a North East game. Spring View's Nathan Ashford recorded most Sunday wickets with 24 as well as being part of the “300” club.

**In the Cup competitions,** the prize of the Digman Cup went to the side who could bowl straight when the Final between Formby and Ormskirk was abandoned due to rain before the completion of the required number of overs in the second innings. Formby coming out winners 2 – 1 in a less than satisfactorily way of deciding the Competition's Premier knock out cup. Liverpool retained the Tyler Cup (and league double) in a very low scoring affair having been dismissed for just 99. Those who expected Newton le Willows to cruise to victory did not allow for Kelly's return of 5 for 26 in a 33-run defeat.

Nationally, Ormskirk beat Firwood Bootle to progress to the area Finals thanks mainly to McGladdery's unbeaten 100 to win the L&DCC Rounds of the ECB Vitality T20. In the Area Final (again delayed by the weather), Ormskirk progressed at Lostock and Garstang's expense and but fell, curtesy of the dreaded DLS method, in the Quarter Final when well set against Toft.

In the Royal London Competition, Ormskirk again carried the flag for the area, when they gained some sort of revenge in a Quarter Final victory over Richmondshire (who beat them in a ten over thrash the previous year). They, however, then lost out to Nantwich who progressed to the Final where they lost to Swardeston.

Locally, no club from the Competition managed to progress into the Quarter Finals of the Lancashire Cricket Foundation Knock out. Chester Boughton Hall beat Formby by twenty runs in a shortened Liverpool Echo Invitational Cup final.

Ormskirk made some sort of amends in beating Wallasey in the final and retaining the Chester Cup. In the competition's initial round Sefton Park amassed 400 to set a new competition record on a day when Ormskirk just failed by one run to reach that magical target. Leigh also completed a league and cup double when they beat Wavertree (on the DLS method) in the rain affected Tittershill Cup Final. Formby beat New Brighton to lift the Chrysalis Cup at the second attempt when rain prevented any possibility of obtaining a result on the initial finals day.

A strong Ormskirk team also retained the Leddy Cup with a harder than expected win against Liverpool. They maintained their monopoly of the Third XI cups by beating Newton le Willows in the Embee Finals day.

The newly created **Women and Girls** sub-committee made massive strides in promoting and organising a number of softball tournaments throughout the year. Many of the women and girls were playing organised cricket for the first time and many clubs have set up Women and Girls sections. Congratulations to Paul Bate for his recent award from the LCF on behalf of the magnificent work done in this field.

The Competition's **Under 12 side** are also to be congratulated for winning the 2019 Lancashire Inter – League Competition with victories over the GMCL, Wigan JL and Lancashire League with the game against the BCL abandoned. They collected the Alan Wright Trophy. Congratulations also go to each of the winners of the league and cup competitions of the various age groups in the LC-SD-Junior Leagues.

**Off field,** the year will be also be remembered for the failed challenge against the League Chairman and the Management Committee which was unsuccessful. One of the Comp's clubs found itself in the national media spotlight with an unsavoury on-field incident in an LCF knock out cup game with allegations of headbutting being spread around social media. The same club found itself penalised with a large points deduction when one of their players was caught playing under a false identity for another club in a final of a Southport & District organised cup.

A series of regional of Open Forums were held post season, which discussed many aspects of the problems (or otherwise) affecting (mainly) lower level cricket such as player eligibility, impact of conceded fixtures, league structures and produced a lot of lively discussions.

The L&DCC thanks Messrs Liverpool Gin, who ended their three-year sponsorship at the end of this year and we also warmly thank our other significant sponsors Messrs Icon Sports and Messrs Readers.