

PLAYING THE GAME

News for cricket umpires, scorers and referees

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Three country European T20 league may launch this year.

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A European Twenty20 cricket league featuring franchises from Scotland, Ireland and Holland could launch this year. The boards of Scotland, Ireland and Holland are in talks about creating a new tournament called the Euro Cricket League (ECL), the first cross-nation T20 league of its kind if you discount the Caribbean Premier League (CPL).

It is understood that the league could be funded by Indian sports marketing company 'Mercuri', which bankrolled the inaugural Global T20 Canada league last year. It is believed they would pay the three boards an annual fee in return for organising the competition. The first ECL is envisaged to run in August-September this year, featuring six franchises. If that proves too soon – and there remain financial and operational challenges – the league could begin in 2020.

Current plans indicate that Scotland, Ireland and Holland would each have two franchises in the tournament. Sides would be permitted five overseas players in their playing eleven for each game, including one from an International Cricket Council second-tier Associate nation, and up to seven overseas players in their squads. The boards hope that the league would attract leading T20 players, with those developing their careers especially likely to be drawn to it.

The plan is for the two Irish franchises to be in Dublin and Belfast. The Scottish teams would be based in Edinburgh and Glasgow, while the Dutch would be in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Sky Sports, as well as online broadcasters such as Facebook and YouTube, are considered to be potential broadcast partners.

The creation of the league reflects the fact that T20 cricket is an increasing priority for the three nations, with men's Twenty20 World Championship events scheduled for 2020 and 2021. The tournament is considered a way of popularising cricket, as well as providing national team players with high-quality opponents.

As is common in T20 leagues, overseas players would be determined by a player draft, designed to ensure overseas talent is evenly distributed. It is envisaged that each side would play ten group games, in a double round-robin format, before the semi-finals and final.

Hopes are that in excess of 1,000 would be drawn to each game. While this is ambitious, there is a belief that a marquee annual tournament would develop cricket's following in the three countries. Ultimately the commercial viability of the competition would largely be determined by broadcasting rights.

The ECL would add to cricket's saturated calendar. Availability of elite overseas players would be a major challenge, as the proposed dates for the league this year clash with the last stages of the England and Wales Cricket Board's T20 'Blast', as well as the CPL and the Ashes. When contacted, cricket agency 'Insignia' said players such as Babar Azam, Shadab Khan, Brendan Taylor, Luke Ronchi, Imran Tahir and Brendon McCullum may be possible signings for the new league if they are not contracted elsewhere.