



ECB today announced that the Minor Counties have unanimously voted to become the National Counties Cricket Association from 2020.

This decision signals the start of a new phase for the Minor Counties who formed their championship in 1895 and continue to play an important part in growing the game across England and Wales by developing professional players and engaging fans.

The rebrand – including a new name and logo – is part of a number of progressive changes planned for the soon-to-be National Counties in 2020. These include dividing both the Western and Eastern divisions into two five-team groups within which sides will be relegated and promoted. As a result, there will be more 50-over matches compensating for the slight reduction in three-day matches.

The updates are part of the new County Partnership Agreements between ECB and the cricket network designed to ensure there is a thriving county network at the heart of the domestic game – one of the key strategic priorities in the new 2020-24 game-wide strategy, *Inspiring Generations*. ECB will also give at least £450m of direct funding to the county network – including First-Class Counties, County Cricket Boards and National Counties – over a five-year period (2020-24).

From 2020, a round of 50-over fixtures will be played before the domestic one-day competition in mid-July, with each First-Class County visiting a National County.

Commenting on the upcoming changes, Gordon Hollins, ECB Managing Director, County Cricket said:

“This marks the beginning of a new chapter for this hugely important tier in the game as it makes exciting updates to its competition, structure and brand. As we said to the game at the start of this process – the Minor Counties are on the move.”

“The county network is the bedrock of cricket in England and Wales which is why one of ECB’s strategic priorities for 2020-2024 is to develop the role of the soon-to-be National Counties. We have worked closely with these counties to invigorate the competition’s direction and we look forward to seeing the changes come to life.”

Chairman of the soon-to-be-called National Counties Cricket Association, Nick Archer said:

“We have worked closely with each county and ECB to shape these changes – not only do we have a new look and feel, but our format will be more competitive and engaging.

“Now that our name change and new logo has been officially approved, we can move into the next phase of introducing the changes in 2020. “

“The two-tier system within each division will ensure that the best sides get to play each other. There will also be more players available, due to there being fewer three-day games; so spectators and followers will get to see and enjoy the best playing the best.”

Changes to the Minor Counties from 2020:

Automatic promotion and relegation in the National Counties Championship.

Two five-team groups in both Western and Eastern Divisions.

The fifth county in each regional First Division to be relegated and replaced by the respective Division Two winners.

A reduction from six three-day games per season to four games.

The final would now be between the Division One East and Division One West winners.

An increase in the number of matches in the 50-over Minor Counties Trophy, by reverting from a straight knockout tournament to the old group format with quarter-finals and semi-finals. Counties would be guaranteed at least two home 50-over matches.

The Minor Counties T20, which was successfully re-introduced in 2018, would be retained with four groups of five - different ones to the Trophy - with the group winners progressing straight to Finals Day.

The three Minor Counties competitions are expected to be played in blocks throughout the season. It has been proposed that the Trophy would be at the start of the season, followed by the T20 in the middle, then the three-day competition at the end.

Eastern Division teams

Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cumberland, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northumberland, Staffordshire, Suffolk.

Western Division teams

Berkshire, Cheshire, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Wales, Wiltshire.