

By RICHARD SPILLER

# Curran missing title battle but he's not done yet

TOM Curran has ruled himself out of Surrey's defence of the LV County Championship – but he hasn't slammed the door on red ball cricket altogether.

The 27-year-old seamer, who has played 58 one day internationals and T20s for England plus two Tests, will concentrate on limited over formats in the short-term after suffering a number of injuries. The most serious was a stress fracture to the back which kept him out of much of last summer.

Curran celebrated his return to Championship cricket after three years by hitting a maiden first-class century at Northampton in September and recently he has been playing for Desert Vipers in the International League T20 in UAE.

A regular sight at the Indian Premier League and Australia's Big Bash, in an increasingly frantic franchise programme around the world, his next engagement will be with Islamabad United in the Pakistan Super League.

He explained: "The last couple of years have not been easy for me. I have had a lot of time and this isn't a decision I've taken lightly.

"Some choices in life I don't think you will ever be 100 per cent sure about and this is definitely one of those. But where I find myself at this exact moment, I feel it's the right decision for my body and mental health."

But he added: "I'm definitely not ruling out playing red ball cricket again in the future and I feel I've got unfinished business for both Surrey and England there.

"But until I can feel 100 per cent committed and confident in my body to be performing day in and day out for Surrey in the County Championship, I feel that putting all my time and focus into our Vitality Blast campaign this year is the right thing to do."

Surrey's fast bowling stocks have already been reduced by Jamie Overton's back injury, which will put him out for the early stages of next season, while Reece Topley and Curran's younger brother Sam will be at the IPL in the early weeks.

But overseas signings Kumar Roach and Sean Abbott give them strength there alongside Dan Worrall, Jordan Clark, Tom Lawes and Gus Atkinson, among others.

Alec Stewart, the club's director of cricket, commented: "Obviously when you lose a player of Tom's quality from your County Championship squad it's a blow. But I've spoken to him about it at length and understand why he has made the decision.

"He has suffered injuries in recent years. If this can help him strengthen his body and keep him



Curran in action

Picture: Mark Sandom

on the field more regularly over the coming years then I fully support the decision."

When Curran snr returns for the Blast T20 competition in late May, it will be alongside West Indies spinner Sunil Narine, who has signed on for a second season at the Kia Oval.

He took 14 wickets in last year's competition, also contributing 199 runs as Surrey reached the quarter-finals.

The county's only concern – other than his esoteric fielding – will be if Kolkata Knight Riders reach the final stages of the IPL, given it clashes with the start of

the Blast.

"I'm thrilled to be returning," said Narine, who will stay on to play for Oval Invincibles in the Hundred. "Getting knocked out in the quarter-final last year was a real disappointment. I know we can do better this year.

"Between Surrey and Oval Invincibles, the Kia Oval has become a second home for me in the English summer."

Stewart added: "We saw what Sunil was all about in 2022, so I'm delighted to be bringing back a player of his calibre. He is a world-class cricketer, capable of producing magic with both bat

and ball."

Five Surrey players have been named in the squads for next month's short tour of Bangladesh.

Sam Curran, Jason Roy and Reece Topley are among the 15-strong party for the three one-day internationals scheduled from March 1-6.

Roy, who broke a run of low scores by making a century against South Africa at Bloemfontein last week, misses the T20 leg but his county colleagues Will Jacks and Chris Jordan come in for the trio of T20 games from March 9-14.



Beddington Park Blizzards

## Little League makes its comeback

By PATRICK HUTCHISON

IT was with great pleasure that Wallington Little League was back up and running in September 2022 after its collapse due to the Covid pandemic. A monumental effort by all involved ensured that the league was able to update their old equipment and purchase new kits for all participants.

The league consists of six newly-formed teams who will battle it out between September and April for League and cup glory whilst adhering to the league ethos of respect, enjoyment, and togetherness.

The first half of the season has flown by. The enthusiasm, commitment and desire shown by every single child involved has been remarkable. With the 39 games played including cup competitions 148 goals were scored with Callum Hams leading the chase at the break with 15 goals to his name.

A tightly contested first half of the season saw Beddington Park Blizzards, who sport an all royal blue kit, secure their place in the play-off final having gone unbeaten throughout, winning six of their ten league games and drawing four.

Beddington Park Blizzards would also see themselves book their place in the gold cup final against Wandle Thunder who wear yellow tops with black shorts. This is currently scheduled to be played on April 16.

The second half of the season commenced on January 8: in partnership with the local paper, we intend to report the ongoing on a weekly basis.

We have recruited an additional four players for teams who wanted to bolster their squads for the second half of the season - it has been great seeing how quickly they have fitted into their respective teams which is full credit to the volunteers and players.

As a registered charity, we rely heavily on the efforts of the local community and see this as a great opportunity and platform to say thank you.

## Blues boss is hoping for more goals



Graham Potter

ANOTHER weekend, another London derby. After the goalless draw against noisy neighbours Fulham, Chelsea travel to West Ham for a Saturday lunchtime showdown.

There are now so many new faces in the Blues team that it's almost simpler to list the old ones.

Can Graham Potter integrate the fresh arrivals while keeping the existing players content?

One of his headaches is working out what to do about Hakim Ziyech, a winger who had a very good World Cup, but whose planned deadline-day loan move to Paris Saint-Germain was scuppered because Chelsea failed to get the paperwork in order.

Two days later came the west London derby, and Potter decided to put the wide man in the starting line-up, while praising his profession-

alism for handling a potentially awkward situation well.

But Potter knows that Ziyech's heart and mind now lie away from Stamford Bridge, and with such a surfeit of talent to choose from in his squad, the manager may starve the Moroccan of opportunities in the coming weeks.

Yes, Enzo Fernandez has made a promising start for the Blues, despite the mill-

stone of that £106 million pricetag, but Chelsea desperately need more goals to start moving up the table, and Kai Havertz simply isn't prolific.

Left back Ben Chilwell is fit again, and made a six-minute cameo at the end of the match against Fulham. As he and Reece James rediscover their powers, Potter hopes more goals will be forthcoming... starting at the old Olympic stadium.