

## Craven Shield Needs a Revamp

*By Keith Butler*

I would like to see the BSPA consider a much needed re-vamping of the Craven Shield. Now that it is established, particularly, as the end of season 3-team tournament we should be asking whether it could be improved. The concept of a 3-team tournament is good. It's different, unusual even, and potentially gives rise to some close battles and exciting meetings. 18 heats, with 3 teams battling it out, gives the fans better value for money.

Its problem is that it's too "bitty". No sooner have you watched your team's riders, they're then missing from a race and can't affect the score. There's 6 out of the 18 races (33%) that your team has no involvement in and, as a biased spectator, you have less interest in. In short, it's a pretty mundane format of racing at present.

Wouldn't it be better to have a format in which each team were involved in every race – without resulting to 6 riders per race (come to think of it with a bit of handicapping that might be more interesting to... but no)

Apologies now for the tedious formula bit, that's about to follow.

I would like to propose a new race format. One that still maintains the 6 riders per team with each having 4 rides over 18 heats. Each rider however will race against 5 of the 6 opponents from each opposing team. He gets 2 rides with a team partner & 2 singularly. I've used Coventry, Swindon & Belle Vue purely as an example; with Cov. being the home team, Swin. being away team 1 & B Vue away team 2 in this instance.

	Heat Red - Gate 1	Blue - Gate 2	Green - Gate 3	Yellow - Gate 4
1.	Cov 5	BV 1	Cov 6	Swin 6
2.	Swin 1	Cov 3	Swin 2	BV 2
3.	BV 3	Swin 5	BV 4	Cov 4
4.	BV 1	Swin 3	BV 2	Cov 2
5.	Swin 5	Cov 1	Swin 6	BV 6
6.	Cov 3	BV 5	Cov 4	Swin 4
7.	Cov 1	BV 3	Cov 2	Swin 2
8.	BV 5	Swin 1	BV 6	Cov 6
9.	Swin 3	Cov 5	Swin 4	BV 4
10.	Cov 2	Swin 6	BV 5	Swin 5
11.	BV 6	Cov 4	Swin 3	Cov 3
12.	Swin 4	BV 2	Cov 1	BV 1
13.	Swin 6	BV 4	Cov 3	BV 3
14.	BV 2	Cov 6	Swin 5	Cov 5
15.	Cov 4	Swin 2	BV 1	Swin 1
16.	Cov 6	Swin 4	BV 3	Swin 3

17.	Swin 2	BV 6	Cov 5	BV 5
18.	BV 4	Cov 2	Swin 1	Cov 1

Obviously over the 3 legs each team would take the configuration for home team, away team 1 & away team 2 accordingly.

Some of the rules governing this format would need discussing, but generally these appear to be the main ones:

- (i) Heat leaders should be positioned according to averages with top average rider at 1, second at 3 & third at 5. Other riders positioned at team managers discretion.
- (ii) I believe a No. 7 should be nominated who can replace any team member if required, probably with a maximum number of rides (say 6)
- (iii) To catch back a deficit I would allow up to 2 tactical “double” rides per team. These would only apply to riders racing singularly (not in a team pair). This could kick in when teams are 7 points behind the leaders.

A final few points worth noting with this proposed format:

- (a) All riders get to start from each gate position once.
- (b) Second string riders are given the more favoured gates (1 & 2) for the latter stages of the meeting.
- (c) The home team has a marginal disadvantage in that they only get 1 ‘back to back’ occurrence of pairs races, whilst the other teams get 2.
- (d) As all riders only race singularly twice Team managers may be faced with some tricky choices as the meeting progresses, if they start to fall behind, with the tactical double rule stated above being used.

Now I'm pretty sure someone with a better grasp on race layout could enhance my format further, but I believe the foundation is there for a real improvement in the meeting format. The Craven Shield would get a fresh impetus and the fans get full involvement throughout the whole meeting.

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