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CRICKET GETS MODERN MAKEOVER



Phil Keen on new delivery



THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW

PHIL TUFNELL
CRICKETER & TV PERSONALITY

PHIL “Tuffers” Tufnell is talking to me about wine.

This I hadn't expected. “I like Sauvignon Blanc,” he's telling me, “but I also like a Chardonnay.”

Now, the reason I had not been expecting this is I thought we were here to talk cricket.

Specifically, new domestic competition The Hundred, starting tonight, for which ex-England bowler Phil, 55, is part of the BBC commentary team.

But it turns out that's what we ARE doing.

All Phil's trying to say, with his wine analogy, is we shouldn't fear the unknown. “For me, Test cricket will always be the pinnacle,” he's happy to acknowledge. “But cricket is forever evolving.”

Key

The Hundred is dramatically different in several key respects. Staged over a month and featuring eight newly created men's and women's teams (in seven cities), it's designed to attract a new generation of fans. There's even live music at each match, thanks to a tie-up with BBC 6 Music.

Format-wise, each game features just 100 balls per innings. Bowlers deliver either five or 10 in a row, rather than the traditional six. There'll even be time-outs.

“That'll be interesting,” Phil chuckles. “The last thing some players will want is for the coach to come on and give 'em a b****king!”

Sides created for the competition are London Spirit, Birmingham Phoenix, Southern Brave, Trent Rockets, Welsh Fire, Northern Superchargers, Manchester Originals and Oval Invincibles.

The women's teams of the latter two start us off at the Oval tonight (6pm, BBC Two). Tomorrow it's the men.

Purists may freak but it'll certainly shake things up. Not so sure about those team names, mind. I mean, come on, Phil — Invincibles?! Seriously? He laughs. “Well, yes,” he admits, “Why call yourself that? It's just asking for trouble! I'm looking forward to the changes we'll see with The Hundred, especially the new tactics.”

● **The Hundred is on BBC Two, radio and online tonight.**



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