

# How to replace an icon

Worcestershire are back in Division One but without Graeme Hick. Paul Bolton talks to director of cricket Steve Rhodes about the next era

THERE have been some significant changes on and off the pitch at New Road this winter but Steve Rhodes, Worcestershire's ebullient director of cricket, believes his side are still well-equipped to cope with their return to the top flight of the County Championship.

Gone are the attractive half-timbered pavilion, which has been a

landmark at New Road since it was opened in 1899, and Graeme Hick, who contributed 140 centuries and almost 49,000 runs in all cricket for Worcestershire during 25 seasons of outstanding service.

A replacement for the pavilion, which will be named after Hick, is already being built at a cost of £2m. Finding someone to score a proportion of his runs will be more difficult, though Rhodes believes that Hick's retirement will provide an opportunity for one of his young batsmen.

"Hicky has been immense. I have had the pleasure of being involved with Graeme Hick for the whole period and I count myself as being fortunate to have seen most of his innings," Rhodes says.

"But the bottom line about any terrific icon of county cricket and someone who has played as long as Graeme is that everyone panics when they retire and says you will

never replace him, but people do come along.

"I look at myself in my 20 years at Worcester, people said you will never replace Steve Rhodes. But shortly afterwards we have got Steve Davies who has got an immense future in cricket and who could play for longer than I did.

"It could be Moeen Ali that comes along and takes Graeme's spot and has a fantastic 20-year career, we don't know that. Alexei Kervezee is maturing nicely, he's serving his apprenticeship in the twos and he's looking better and better.

"Moeen has a slight advantage at the moment because he's played

**"I like the idea of punching above our weight. We should be OK"**

## New and improved Road

The county are staying put and confident of keeping their heads above water

NEXT WINTER Worcestershire hope to have a new indoor school, which is planned for Malvern College. Further ground developments are in the pipeline at New Road with the proposed construction of a 122-bedroom hotel followed by the development of a new stand at the New Road end of the ground.

The total ground development project will cost around £12m and all the new buildings will be built above the level of two consecutive summers of flooding which forced Worcestershire to switch some home games to Kidderminster.

Reports that Worcestershire might be about to leave New Road and build a new ground close to Worcester Warriors' rugby ground at Sixways appear wide of the mark. "We would be interested in developing an academy ground there but that is a long way away and we will not be leaving New Road," says David Leatherdale, the former county batsman who is now marketing director.

Leatherdale may have appreciated that New Road's rudimentary facilities unsettled some visiting sides during his playing days but he now sees things from a different perspective.

"The ground has become antiquated and we have to provide quality facilities for the players and for the members," Leatherdale says. "You can't expect people to pay top dollar if they are sitting on old wooden benches, we need to move on and progress."

Paul Bolton

more and he's also highly thought of. When he gets involved in England development squads you know that he is seen by others as a future first-team player."

Rhodes will need Stephen Moore, the leading run-scorer in first-class cricket last season, beneficiary Ben Smith and captain Vikram Solanki to take up some of the slack left by Hick's departure and he will also require his four senior seam bowlers to steer clear of injury.

Matt Mason, Kabir Ali, Simon Jones - who spent eight weeks on crutches last autumn after another knee operation - and the overseas recruit Ashley Noffke (sore back and a skin cancer scare) have all had their recent fitness problems.

"This could well be our strength and one of the reasons why we might do a bit better," Rhodes says. "We are a stronger bowling attack going into Division One than we previously were. We need a lot of luck because there are guys with potential injury worries but, if things go well, then we should be OK."

The new pavilion might not improve the appearance of New Road but it should provide the players with better facilities, though Rhodes has mixed feelings about that.

"One of the messages I always try to put over to the players is how we punch above our weight," he says. "I like the idea of counties

hopefully disappearing home from New Road thinking: Christ, how have they done that to us again?"

"That's the type of attitude we want. We won't have massive facilities. We will have bigger dressing rooms, but not Test-match-ground standard, a physio room and small rehab room."

Worcestershire are still the only county without an on-site indoor cricket school which meant the players had to make winter coach journeys to Shrewsbury School, Loughborough and Edgbaston for net sessions.

"The travelling is not ideal preparation for the boys," he says. "But I could not ask for a better bunch, no one has moaned, they get on with it. They recognise that we don't have the facilities and we really do make the most of what we have got."

"The good thing is that the lads do spend a lot of time talking to each other on the coach trips which we do on away matches as well. Twenty years ago those conversations used to take place in the bar where youngsters used to get the chance to talk to and learn from senior players over a pint. Those bar chats don't take place any more but we still have those conversations on the coach." ■

Paul Bolton has reported on Warwickshire for 20 years and is TWC's correspondent in the Midlands

## Moore of the same, please

Stephen Moore has his sights on playing for England

WHEN Stephen Moore turned down several lucrative offers last summer to leave Worcestershire - a county that at times hovers close to the realm marked "unfashionable" - he did so with the confidence of a player who suspected his runs would speak for themselves. Top spot in the country's end-of-season first-class run-scoring list followed by selection for the Lions' winter tour to New Zealand were gratifying proof that New Road does register on the selectors' radar too.

"Worcester have had quite a few guys in and around the England set-up," says Moore, justifying his decision to stay at the county he first represented in 2003. "Graeme Hick, Vikram Solanki, Kabir Ali, Gareth Batty, Simon Jones, Steve Davies now, myself this year - we've had our fair share in the last decade. I sincerely hope we are taken on even ground with every single other county as a hotbed for developing English talent."

Moore's own development is a case in point. There were moments early in his career where he was in danger of being pigeon-holed as a steady but unspectacular four-day opener but Moore - a graduate in

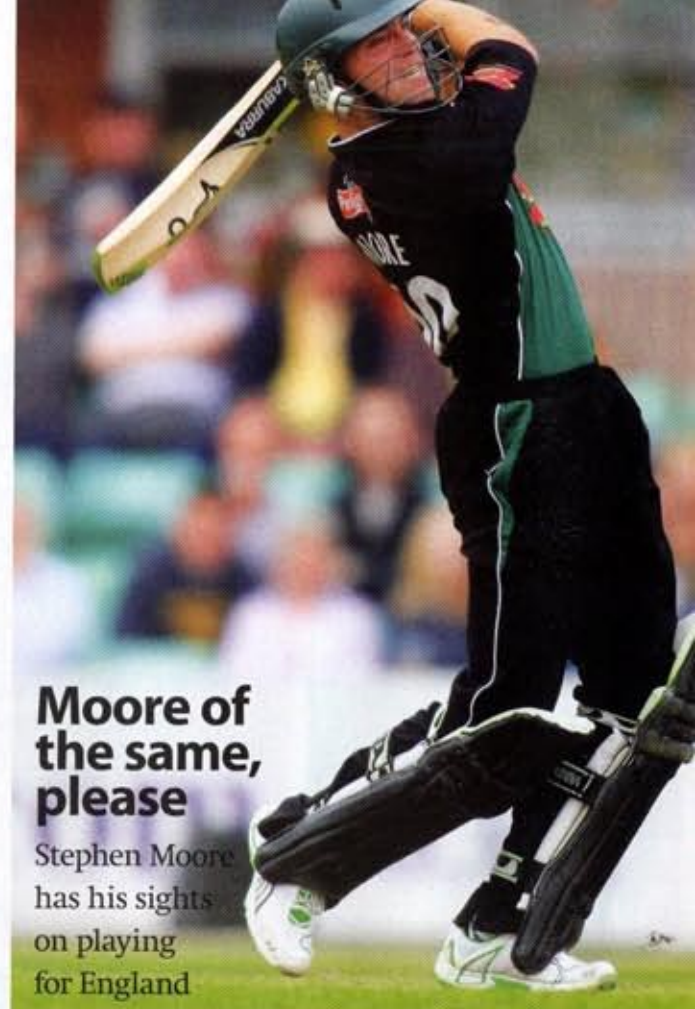
electronic engineering from Exeter University - has been smart enough to change with the times.

"I haven't got my switch-hit down pat yet but I would hope I'm one of those players who's evolving with cricket and taking it to new levels," he says. "I think I have become more aggressive in my approach to batting. You're expected to score at a quicker rate these days."

It is an approach that may eventually persuade Geoff Miller and Co to reward Moore, now 28, with higher honours. The drive is certainly there. "Obviously if I play Test-match cricket for England, I'll be pleased as punch," he says. "But I'm not settling for that. I firmly believe as a professional cricketer you can play across the different forms of the game. If you're good enough to perform at Test level, you should be good enough to perform in all facets of the game."

Interview by Lawrence Booth

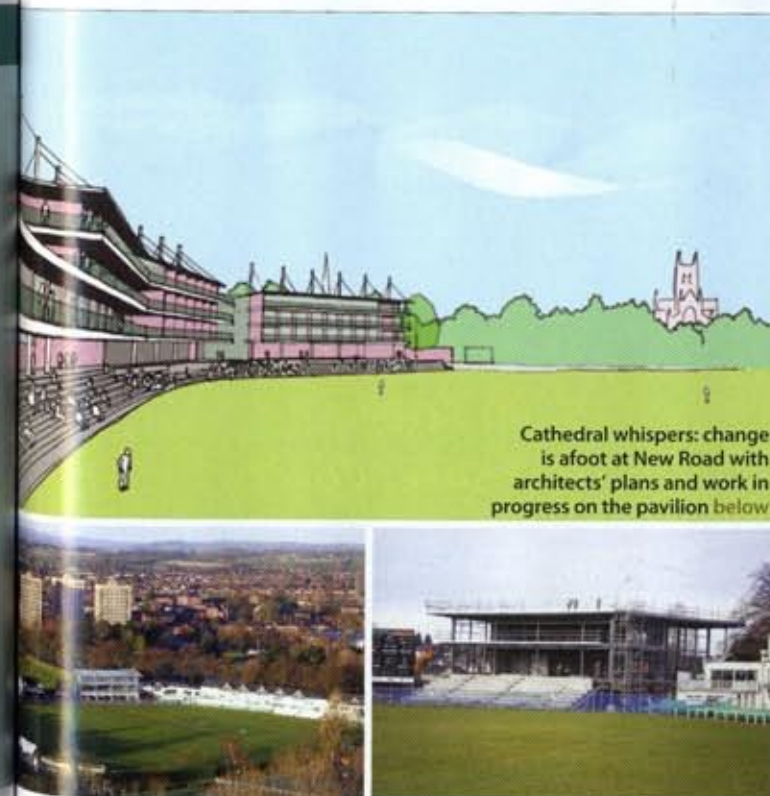
Total Sport Promotions (TSP) exclusively represents Stephen Moore. For more information go to [www.totalsportpromotions.com](http://www.totalsportpromotions.com)



Coach traveller: Steve Rhodes says the bonus of journeys to nets, in Worcestershire's unique lack of an on-site indoor cricket school, is bonding on the bus



PETE MORTON



Cathedral whispers: change is afoot at New Road with architects' plans and work in progress on the pavilion below

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