








VCA's closest season ever?

With the final games approaching, this can arguably be described as the closest VCA season to date. The fight to reach the finals is more intense than ever, with 5 teams battling tooth and nail to reach one of the 4 coveted semi-final spots. The VCA secretary, Mark Jones, gives his analysis of the season since the half way mark, and makes his predictions on who will make the finals.

At the half stage (table right)

On the weekend of the 25th January, 2015, the 21st game of the season was played. PSCC lead the way by 3 point from SACC and UCC, with SSC and ISCS needing at least 2 victories to break into the top 3. How have the teams faired since then? Are PSCC still setting the pace? And do ECCS still find themselves without a win for the 2014/15 season?

Rank	Club Logo	Pakistan Saigon Cricket Club								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
1		6	5	1	0	4	24	8.83	7.36	1.47
Rank	Club Logo	Saigon Australian Cricket Club								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
2		6	4	1	1	3	21	7.98	6.64	1.34
Rank	Club Logo	United Cricket Club Saigon								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
3		6	4	1	1	3	21	8.69	7.41	1.28
Rank	Club Logo	Sri Lankan Sports Club								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
4		6	3	2	1	1	15	6.97	6.90	0.06
Rank	Club Logo	Indian Sports Club of Saigon								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
5		6	2	3	1	2	12	6.98	7.32	-0.34
Rank	Club Logo	Indian Cricket Club of Saigon								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
6		6	1	5	0	0	4	7.05	8.45	-1.40
Rank	Club Logo	The English Cricket Club of Saigon								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
7		6	0	6	0	0	0	6.80	9.22	-2.42

Pakistan Saigon Cricket Club (PSCC)

Last 5 fixtures: LLWLW

PSCC's form has been inconsistent since the season's turn. After losing to their bogey team UCC, they were soundly beaten by ISCS before bouncing back strongly to defeat SACC. Then they suffered a resounding loss to SSC yet made up for it with a thrashing of a depleted ECCS squad. It must be said that PSCC have suffered from a couple of key players being away, but their lack of consistency must be a worry for their captain. However, if Ahmed Shabbir, Tariq Sofi and Parvez Zargar continue to play well in the big games, I put them marginal favourites for the cup this year. On their day, they are capable of beating anyone with explosive hitting right from the first ball. In particular, the man to watch is Tariq Sofi. Coming off the back of a faultless sixes tournament, he has been at the heart of PSCC's run scoring machine. His safe hands in the outfield so also not be underestimated. I expect them to beat ICCS and finish top of the ladder as the other playoff contenders are likely to take points off one another.

Saigon Australia Cricket Club (SACC)

Last 5 fixtures: WLWLL

SACC have suffered a dip in from since the term, but never write off the SACC. After an unexpected loss to a Jai inspired ECCS, they conquered old adversaries UCC in a tightly

fought contest. On that day, Ben Daley, Mitch Hyde and Captain Stephen Green took the match from the purple hearts. Following that, defeats against ISCS and PSCC have left them probably needing to win both games against ICCS and SSC to have a shot at reaching the finals. Whilst Amit is topping the wicket taking charts, SACC have been struggling to stem the runs a little this campaign. Is the pressure of trying to defend the title too much? I wouldn't say so but it's now or never for the boys from down under. Another team constantly missing players due to injury or travel, I believe SACC have the depth of squad and talent to win their remaining fixtures to give themselves a shot at making the finals. A lot will depend on whether their classiest (in my opinion) bat Mitch Hyde is first available, and secondly able to bat sides out of the game as he did against UCC. SACC have plenty of batting fire power so anything is possible. Although I make SSC slight favourites for what could be the crunch match, I wouldn't be at all surprised if SACC edged a tight one. However, given the remaining fixtures, I think this could be the first season SACC don't make the playoffs. A big call, and one that the canaries will be keen to prove me wrong on.

United Cricket Club (UCC)

Last 5 fixtures: WWLWL

As is becoming apparent, this season has been a topsy turvy affair and no team is immune from it. UCC started the second half by defeating PSCC before succumbing to some sublime batting from SACC. They bounced back with a strong performance against ECCS but were edged out on the penultimate ball against SSC yesterday. James Davis has been their star performer with 5 consecutive 40's before a rare low score against the Sri Lankans. However, Guy Dormer and Steve Meikle have also been in good touch. This being said, it's with the ball where UCC need to excel if they are to go one step further than finalists this time round. While Bala Murgan has been their highest wicket taker, it's the bowling of Dan Malone which could be their trump card. With remaining fixtures against the two Indian teams ICCS and ISCS, it's not mathematically guaranteed that UCC will reach the finals although I do expect them to win at least one of those fixtures. My prediction is that UCC will finish 2nd/3rd in the ladder.

Sri Lankan Sports Club (SSC)








Last 5 fixtures: WLWWW

Sri Lanka is a team on the move, and must be considered serious contenders for the title this year. After comprehensive wins against ICCS and current front runners PSCC, they proved their metal in a tight encounter with UCC this weekend. With Skipper Joel Sabreen in threatening form and Sumedha back at his best, SSC will take some stopping. In particular, Hiran is bowling better than ever and bowled a peach to castle UCC danger man Davis. However, the men to watch are Banuka and Chandana who could be argued to be the best opening bowling partnership this year. If these guys hit their lengths, it's difficult to see the runs flowing. With games in hand, SSC could potentially finish top of the ladder, but I expect them to lose at least one of their remaining fixtures against ECCS, ISCS or SACC. My prediction is that they'll finish 2nd/3rd to set up a meeting with UCC who they have defeated twice already this season.

Indian Sports Club of Saigon (ISCS)

Last 5 fixtures: WLWWW

ISCS have hit form at the right time, recovering well from a slow start to the season. Sri Ram has grown into the captaincy well and has played some mature innings as well as bowling his usual misery line. Rubal Sharma has been in great form this year with the bat, and has often given them the impetus their innings has needed. Yet, it is with the bowl and in the field that ISCS are at their best. They have a relatively young squad and are usually pretty sharp in the field. Although they have spilled a few chances, they are starting to stick more and with Arun George, Sri Ram and Robin Deepu to call on with the ball, they have a strong bowling roster. Perhaps though, it's their main man Pratap who holds the key. Not at his best this year, it could be an ominous sign for the other teams as if he finds form at the right time, ISCS's batting becomes more secure and threatening. As ISCS have the trickiest run in with ICCS, UCC and SSC, I expect them to drop some points along the way. It's a tricky one to call, but I predict they'll finish fourth and face PSCC in the Semis.

1		Pakistan Saigon Cricket Club								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
		11	7	4	0	6	34	8.48	7.47	1.01
2		United Cricket Club Saigon								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
		10	6	3	1	5	31	8.68	7.28	1.40
3		Sri Lankan Sports Club								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
		9	6	2	1	3	29	7.32	6.67	0.65
4		Indian Sports Club of Saigon								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
		9	5	3	1	4	26	7.11	6.54	0.57
5		Saigon Australian Cricket Club								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
		10	5	4	1	3	25	7.88	7.81	0.07
6		The English Cricket Club of Saigon								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
		11	2	9	0	1	9	6.85	9.40	-2.55
7		Indian Cricket Club of Saigon								
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate
		8	1	7	0	0	4	6.92	8.53	-1.60

Indian Cricket Club of Saigon (ICCS)

Last 5 fixtures: LLLLF

Unfortunately, ICCS haven't played much cricket over the last 2 months. It's just one of those scheduling oddities that happen sometimes. However, ICCS will have a significant say in who makes they playoffs. They play PSCC, ISCS, UCC and SACC in their remaining games and have the batting strength to pull off an upset of two. If club legends Manish Sogani and Nikhilesh Deshpande get going, they are still among the better batsmen in the league, and newcomer Rajesh has proven himself to be an excellent all-rounder and addition to their squad. With Abhishek, Anand and Harry to bowl as well, it wouldn't surprise me if ICCS pick up a win or two in their final few games. I don't want to predict who might fall to the men in light blue, but I think they might leap frog ECCS to finish sixth in the table.

England Cricket Club of Saigon (ECCS)

Last 5 fixtures: WLFL

England regaining the Saigon Ashes came as something of a shock, but ultimately proved to be a false dawn for ECCS. Whilst showing glimpses of brilliance, it's been another disappointing for them. The stand-out performers must be Jai Garbyal, Sven Roering and Adam Zakharoff who have all played great knocks and bowled some good spells this campaign. However, due to travelling, and some unfortunate dates meaning players weren't available, results just haven't gone their way. ECCS's final game is against SSC who will be looking to secure a final berth. I don't think the Sri Lankans will slip up. Prediction: ECCS to finish at the foot of the table.

Final Thoughts

This season has just been too tight to call. The standard of cricket has been great this year and whoever wins this year should know they've won the tightest competition yet!