

Countdown to the Finals

By Mark Jones

United Cricket Club Saigon										
	Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate	
1	3	3	0	0	2	14	7.57	5.70	1.87	
The English Cricket Club of Saigon										
	Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate	
2	4	3	1	0	1	13	7.66	7.29	0.37	
Sai Gon Australian Cricket Club										
	Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate	
3	3	2	1	0	2	10	8.61	6.53	2.08	
Sai Longin Saigon Club										
	Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate	
4	3	1	2	0	1	5	5.73	6.76	-1.03	
Saigon Australian Cricket Club										
	Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate	
5	3	1	2	0	1	5	7.03	8.18	-1.15	
The English Cricket Club of Saigon										
	Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate	
6	2	0	2	0	0	0	6.28	7.64	-1.36	
Indian Cricket Club of Saigon										
	Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate	
7	2	0	2	0	0	0	5.40	7.45	-2.05	

Coming into the closing weeks of the regular season, it's time to reflect on what has happened so far in a truly intriguing VCA season. With 3 rounds to go, the 4 sides who will contest the finals are already known, but that's not to say that the season hasn't been filled with suspense and drama. In fact, last week's crucial match between SACC and PSCC turned out to be a knock-out tie in which a PSCC bonus point win would ensure their passage to consecutive seasons in the finals.

There have been some great team and individual performances throughout the season with ISCS looking to be strong favourites to take the crown. However, defending champions UCC won't go down without a fight, SSC are

capable of beating any team and an inform PSCC have been the only successful team against ISCS this time round, so anything is possible. So, what's happened since we moved into 2016?

ISCS (Played 11 – 48 points)

ISCS have looked imperious this season. Their bowling discipline has been amazing, and with amazing depth in their batting, they are looking like a championship winning team. After suffering a surprise defeat against an Ahmed inspired PSCC, ISCS haven't really been challenged yet this season with very convincing victories against closest rivals UCC, SACC, SSC, ICCS, PSCC in the return fixture and a crushing win against ECCS where they chased their target in just over 4 overs. Their star player has been Parvez, who has scored over 300 runs and taken 25 wickets. Pratap has also been impressive scoring over 200 runs and taking 16 wickets. Supported by Tariq (200+ runs) and Robin (15 wickets) and the likes of Rubal and Sri Ram amongst others, it will take a fabulous performance from one of the remaining teams to upset them.

UCC (Played 10 – 35 points)

Despite not being at their best, UCC have suffered only 2 defeats this season against ISCS. However, as potential grand final adversaries, Vijesh will be worried about the manner of those loses. In a topsy-turvy run since Christmas, UCC tied a nail biting game against PSCC, and the next week escaped with a 1 run win in a game that the Australians should have won. However, against SSC, ICCS and ECCS they have been much more convincing in securing second spot in the ladder. Much of UCC's batting performance is dependent on the opening pair of James and Dormer who have both scored north of 200 runs. However, with numerous others in the line-up capable of clearing the rope, they have the batting

capability to upset ISCS' bowlers although they have failed to in their encounters so far this season. The pick of their bowlers have been Rajesh (17) and Bala (13) and Malone and Vijesh have also been threatening. My money would be on them reaching their 4th grand final this season although they may fall just short of being the first team to win back to back titles.

SSC (Played 10 – 29 points)

The Sri Lankans have slipped in under the radar, and are a dark horse for the championship this season. The biggest concern for Joel and his men will be that potential semi and grand final opponents UCC and ISCS have each inflicted 2 heavy defeats over them this season while they have run out convincing victors against the other four teams in the competition. Their best batsmen have been Sumedha, Joel and Bertie who have all looked threatening at times this season. They will all need to be on top form if they are to reverse and avenge the defeats they have suffered earlier in the season. With the ball, SSC have Banuka, 15 wickets, who has been incredibly impressive in the last couple of matches and perhaps holds the key for the boys in blue. With a likely tough match in the semi-final against UCC, I can't see SSC reaching another grand final. However, Joel will no doubt want to prove me wrong and use this as motivation for his team!

PSCC (Played 11 – 25 points)

Pakistan have had an inconsistent season but, perhaps importantly for their likely semi-final, are the only team to have defeated ISCS. With Skipper Ahmed, Toseef and Zaki all explosive with the bat, they will always have a chance although all will need to be available and on form if they are to deliver another surprise victory against the table toppers. Since Christmas, SSC, ISCS and ICCS have inflicted heavy defeats on the men in green, they tied against UCC, and won a crucial match last Sunday against SACC, who had previously beaten them in the season, to ensure their finals' berth. With the bat, Ahmed has nearly scored 300 runs with Toseef providing able support. The same men again have been the pick of the bowling with 15 and 10 wickets respectively. Veer has also taken 10 wickets. In the semi-final, I think ISCS have too much fire-power and are likely to end PSCC's run this term.

Rank	Team Logo	Sri Lanka Cricket Club Season									
		Played	Won	Lost	Tie/No Result	Bonus Points	Points	Run Rate For	Run Rate Against	Net Run Rate	
1		11	10	1	0	8	48	8.64	5.34	3.30	
2		United Cricket Club Season									
		10	7	2	1	5	35	7.61	6.27	1.34	
3		Sri Lankan Sports Club									
		10	6	4	0	5	29	6.65	6.40	0.25	
4		Green Sports Club									
		11	5	5	1	3	25	6.43	6.82	-0.39	
5		Sri Lanka Australian Cricket Club									
		11	4	7	0	3	19	6.33	7.11	-0.78	
6		Indian Cricket Club Season									
		10	2	8	0	1	9	5.62	7.24	-1.62	
7		The English Cricket Club Season									
		9	1	8	0	1	5	5.96	8.52	-2.56	

SACC (Played 11 – 19 points)

SACC has been inconsistent this season, and have suffered from availability and injuries to key players. However, they came very close to securing a finals' spot, only to lose an effective knock-out match to PSCC last weekend; leaving it mathematically impossible for them to reach the finals. However, the story may have been different had new stars, Horne and Blinkhoff, played more matches as well as the evergreen former Skipper Green. Since the New Year, SACC

started the year with defeat in the Ashes only to regain them impressively 3 months later. After successive victories against PSCC and ICCS, SACC looked to be gaining some momentum but a one-run defeat in a game they should've won against UCC ultimately cost them. Heavy defeats against SSC and ISCS left them needing to beat PSCC last weekend where the canaries fell just short. With the bat, Captain Daley has led the way with Blinkhoff; each of them scoring about 170 runs. Bowling-wise, Horne (14) and youngster Cameron and Green taking 10 a piece have caused batsmen problems all season long.

ICCS – (Played 10 – 9 points)

ICCS have gradually improved throughout the season, and this is largely due to the enthusiasm and dedication of new captain Tanvir, and previous Skipper Deshpande. After suffering a sequence of defeats against UCC, ISCS, SACC and twice against SSC, they won a nail-biting one run match against ECCS. Following that, they had a surprise victory against PSCC where they scored 150 runs, easily the best they've managed this season. This weekend sees a big bottom of the table clash against ECCS where the English will be looking to avenge defeat 3 weeks ago. With the bat, Adil, Deshpande and Zahoor have all looked threatening at times and with the ball, Tanvir, Divyesh, and Tahir have all improved their consistency and become more potent. If they continue to improve like this, I see ICCS being a genuine chance for the finals next campaign, especially if they can find more runs.

ECCS – (Played 9 – 5 points)

ECCS started off 2016 in perfect fashion with victory in the Saigon Ashes. However, since then, it's not gone well for them with heavy defeats against ISCS, SSC, UCC, PSCC and in the return fixture against SACC to lose the Ashes urn. In their last match, they agonisingly fell one run short against ICCS and will be looking to reverse that this Sunday. With the bat, Captain Zakharoff and Sven have made several good scores, but stand out batsman is Norfolk who has made 2 forties in only 3 appearances. With the ball, Zakharoff (10) has taken the most wickets, with new ball partner Essery chipping in with 8. Despite the disappointing season, spirit has remained high and I'm sure they are hopeful for a change in fortunes next season.

Overall

The standard of play has been great again this year with a number of games going right to the wire. While ISCS have been dominant this term, anything can happen in the finals, and I wouldn't be surprised if my predictions prove to be wrong. With all to play for, it would be great to see as many people at the ground to support our cricketers from every team to give our season the climax it deserves.