



## Cross upset at claims from 'mate'



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St Leonards darts ace Rob Cross was forced to defend himself against claims he overstepped the oche line in a defeat to Mervyn King at the Ladbrokes Masters Picture: Chris Dean/PDC

## Grants will do little to help us

Hastings United have described the prospect of a government grant to make up for lost income in the coronavirus pandemic as a drop in the ocean. A scheme has opened which enables clubs at steps three to six of the non-league set-up to apply for government grants.

Maximum amounts payable range from £27,000 for step three (Isthmian premier) clubs to £5,000 at step six (SCFL division one).

In all £10m is set aside for step three to six clubs, with another £4m available in loans which most don't see as viable. Hastings CEO Billy Wood said the amount available a drop in the ocean for non-league teams, who currently had no cash-flow.

"For us it helps with bills, but we have to spend it in three-months. It's a stopgap. A gap-filler...it doesn't change anything," Wood said.

"We're lucky we have fans that really support the club. They buy tickets, merchandise, shirts. Not everyone has this.

"This level of football can't happen without fans.

"Without people at the games you're not making money. We've just got to hope they are back watching as soon as possible."

The grants picture at Hastings' level is at least clearer than it is for neighbours Eastbourne Borough in the National League.

At that level, the government wants to replace grants with loans but clubs say that's not viable and are now voting on whether to stop playing, deeming the half-season already played as a waste of time and money.

**JACK BUTLER**



Hastings United CEO Billy Wood

# Why should we be ambitious?

**Jack Butler**  
hastingsobserver.co.uk/sport  
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It is a way to retain the integrity of football – but will the FA back it?

Billy Wood, Hastings United CEO, is hoping the principles of Project Non-League are used to restructure the local football pyramid as hopes fade for the 2020-21 season being able to finish.

Hastings, who top the south-east division of the Isthmian League, as they did when last season was written off, are waiting to find out the future of a season that ground to a halt

in November. Wood is calling on the FA to make it clear what the plan is going forward – and to back Project Non League.

This calls for results from the truncated 2019-20 campaign and this season to be combined to work out which teams have earned promotion in steps three to six.

"We're calling for a bit of sensitivity and creativity", Wood expressed.

"One million per cent I expect the season to be made null and void... we're not expecting this season to be done on points per game.

"The FA wants to restructure step four.

"This is giving them an option

to reward the teams knocking the door.

"It doesn't affect teams at the bottom – there is no relegation. This is a way to keep it fresh and keep the integrity of football."

Wood is quick to acknowledge the club's seven completed matches aren't enough to justify a points-per-game calculation for 20-21 alone, but says there must be some motivation for teams to compete.

"Why should we be ambitious if we're not going to be rewarded?" he asked.

"What's the motivation for Hastings United to spend money and compete if we get nothing?

"I want to know what's going on. I can't keep spending money trying to get Hastings United into the National League if every time we're stuck at the top of the league this happens.

"I might as well not bother." For many in non-league football, the big frustration is over the lack of planning to combat the impact of the pandemic.

Wood said forward thinking was the key.

He added: "I don't want to be sitting here in January 2022 in the same situation, still not knowing what's happening. That's the problem."