

Ooh, aah and McGrath at Twenty20



Maiden heaven ... Alex Manu and Stacey Hutchinson chat during a singles meet as NSW play Western Australia. Photo: Domino Postiglione

Alex Tibbitts

GLENN McGRATH is still sexy.

Pigeon managed to draw 24,000 spectators for his farewell performance for NSW in a Twenty20 cricket match against Queensland at Homebush Bay on Tuesday. However, the opportunity to meet available single people only drew 11,000 to last night's match against Western Australia.

McGrath agreed to play on Tuesday to raise money for research into breast cancer.

"We don't get international players very often [to play domestic matches] so it's very hard to draw a crowd," the chief executive of Cricket NSW, Dave Gilbert, said last night.

Last season Cricket NSW drew fire from cricket purists by selecting the rugby league player Andrew Johns for the team.

"Things have changed very dramatically for Twenty20, with the professional league being set up in India and a world championship," Mr Gilbert said. "We can't go the route of Johns ever again."

So last night the Speed Blitz Blues became the Speed Date Blues as Cricket NSW got behind a promotion to run a singles night at the cricket.

"Twenty20 is about a carnival atmosphere; it's about drinking and having a good night out," Mr Gilbert said. "It's about attracting a new crowd. Hopefully people will see something they like."

Joanie Bell, a special education

teacher from Windsor, got an eyeful. "I asked a young bloke what a protector was," she said. "I know now."

For about \$10 on top of the \$19 game ticket, singles could mingle in the members area.

Signs ordered those there to "Sit boy, girl, boy, girl."

Boys had to shuffle along a couple of seats every time one of the players hit a four or six or got out. Just in case you were not paying attention, a girl would parade a sign: "Men move one seat along to the right".

"It's to make sure people are actively involved in the game," said an organiser, Sean Grobbelaar, from Get Hitched.

Some were sceptical.

"I'm not sure if it works," said

David Welzman, 30, a corporate entertainer. "You'll have some people wanting to watch the cricket and some people who just want to chat. At least it gives you an excuse if you want to get out of bad conversation."

"I didn't know what to expect. The ad said thousands of people, which is not exactly correct."

Mr Grobbelaar said 700 people had been attracted to the event, although he acknowledged only 550 had paid.

"I heard a lot of men were given free tickets," Ms Bell said.

"That's not fair. It's not very sporting. I think it should go on looks. If you're a good-looking girl you should get in free. Just because you're a bloke doesn't mean I want to talk to you."