

Spitfires expect Twenty20 sell-out

THE NEVILL in Tunbridge Wells is expected to be a sell-out for Kent Spitfires' Friends Provident t20 clash with the Sussex Sharks on Wednesday night.

A crowd of 6,000 turned out for the first-ever 20-over game at The Nevill last year when Rob Key's side beat the Hampshire Hawks by 20 runs, and a similar figure is expected for this summer's fixture.

"Last year our allocation went

quickly, it was like rain falling on a hot coal," Wells secretary Alan Cutts said, adding that this year's game is likely to be even more popular than last season's, owing to its derby status.

"Sussex is just a mile down the road so it's easier for people to come to Tunbridge Wells from a huge big county like Sussex, than it is to go to Canterbury or Beckenham," he added.

For many Sussex fans Tunbridge

Wells is also nearer than their home grounds in Hove, Horsham and Eastbourne.

Kent also expect the ground to be packed out for what is their first home game of this year's tournament.

Tickets are still available but fans not wanting to take the risk of missing out should call 01227 456886 or visit the club's website, www.kentccc.com.

Play begins at 5.30pm.

HOME GAME:

Kent Spitfires

Picture: ADY KERRY



SUDDEN IMPACT

Conway lives to tell the tale of his horrific 220mph Indy 500 smash

By TOM HOWARD

MIKE Conway is one of the luckiest men alive after he cheated death in an horrific 220mph crash in the famous Indy 500 last weekend.

The 26-year-old from Sevenoaks miraculously escaped the shunt with fractures to his left leg and back, sidelining him for three months. For many the scenes would put them off the sport but Conway, who admitted he is very lucky to be alive, is eager to get back behind the wheel.

The chilling accident came when he was heading into the final lap of the prestigious 500-mile race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. He tangled with Ryan Hunter-Reay, who was coasting after running out of fuel, pitching his car into the air at 220mph before smashing into the circuit's perimeter fencing, Marshals and medical staff rushed to the scene and managed to retrieve him from the cockpit of the car, which was all that remained intact. He was immediately flown to a hospital in Indianapolis.

Thankful

In a statement released this week, Conway said: "I'm feeling fine at the moment, all things considered. I'm just thankful that I came out of it alive. I want to thank all the medical staff at the Methodist Hospital, as well as the IRL Recovery Crew and all those at the Indy Speedway track that pulled me out of the car - they've all done a fantastic job.

"I'm hoping for a speedy recovery and am already looking forward to being back behind the wheel of a race car."

Mark Blundell, Conway's manager and an ex-Formula One and Indycar driver, witnessed the crash while watching the race live on television. The 44-year-old experienced his fair share of accidents during a four-year stint racing on similar ovals in North America 10 years ago and is amazed his driver escaped the crash alive.

He told this newspaper: "The first thought was 'I hope to God he is okay' because having done racing like that I



TERRIFYING: Mike Conway's car disintegrated as it smashed into the crash barriers

know how big those accidents can be. Mike's a very lucky guy. Luckily for him he is going to be able to walk around and talk about it. He doesn't have a great deal of recollection of it. However, he has seen it a million times because it's constantly being shown on television over there.

"When you're in an accident like that you really do think 'this could be it'. Until it happens, you're not aware of what the consequences are."

Up until the accident, Conway was enjoying his second experience of the famous Indy 500. He started 15th on the grid and main-



SURVIVOR: Mike Conway is just thankful he came out of the wreckage of his car alive

tained a challenge in the top-10 before an inspired fuel strategy saw him lead the race for 15 laps.

After analysing the fuel remaining in his rivals' cars, Blundell is almost 100 per cent certain had it not been for the accident Conway would have finished on the podium, a potentially career changing result.

He said: "I would say it was his best oval race ever. He was one of the fastest if not the fastest on the track before the crash. If it had not been for Mike's accident, most of the guys would have run out of fuel."

The focus now switches to recovery, which is expected to take three months. After two successful operations on his injuries, Conway, who is due to return to his Sevenoaks home later this month, is already looking forward to making his return to racing, likely to be in September.

Blundell said: "I'm pretty confident he will be back racing this season and his focus is already on his comeback race. Mike is a professional racing driver and he is already thinking very positively. I don't think there are any doubts about quitting."

Although Conway managed to escape the accident with relatively minor injuries, Blundell believes the Indy Racing League should amend its rules on the amount of fuel in the cars at the end of the race, to prevent crashes of this nature.

Picture: PA PHOTOS



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