



## [My 2009 Indoor Cricket World Cup Journey To Australia](#)

### Selection

I will fondly remember that day in April when I received a call informing me of my selection for the England U16 indoor cricket squad to play in the forthcoming World Cup tournament in Australia in October 2009. Mike Gatting had made the squad announcements at the Bristol training centre but not confident of selection, I did not attend this event! Having played indoor cricket from the age of 8, I was confident of my abilities but when I saw those big lads at the trials, I thought I had made a mistake. Of course I was overwhelmed and proud to have made it to the initial squad. The task now was to make it to the final squad of 12 players for the tournament.

### Preparation

Our pre-tournament training was mostly based in Bristol over a period of six months. This involved rigorous fitness training as well as honing the skills of playing competitive indoor cricket matches. On a few occasions we played against the U19s and the men's teams to toughen our approach. Indoor cricket was invented in Australia where they have over a hundred centres compared to our six! Needless to say, the international level of competition was expected to be very strong. This is the fastest format of the game and is gradually gaining popularity in all major Test playing countries. The ECB is taking control over the game from this year and it is anticipated that more quality facilities will be available throughout the country in the coming years.

As the training sessions passed, I became more confident playing with boys two to three years older than me and gradually felt I had a good chance at making the final cut. In the meantime, my parents were looking a little sick on finding out the cost of this adventure – but they encouraged me to go for it!

The final squad was announced in June and I was over the moon on seeing my name on the list. The pride of representing my country for the very first time on an international platform slowly started to sink in. I also took every opportunity to say I was from the Nottingham High School and put our school's name on the map.

We received our England kit a week before departure in September and I finally felt 'pumped-up' and ready to go. All my clothing was twice my size so some fast alterations were called for!

### The Journey

We finally boarded our flight to Australia on 30<sup>th</sup> September. The check-in desks were crowded with 60 England players and 15 officials. I enjoyed the buzz of excitement with everyone



enjoying themselves and taking photographs. I was of course the youngest member in the party and attracting all the attention!

The flight was pretty gruelling - almost 20hrs of flying with no decent vegetarian food on board; I decided to sleep all the way! We finally reached our Brisbane destination at 3am local time on 2<sup>nd</sup> October and needless to say I was totally exhausted.

The following morning I was up relatively early and was amazed at the view from our apartment's balcony. The ocean view with the noise of waves crashing onto the beach was simply breathtaking. We were staying at the beachfront in the Gold Coast for five days of acclimatisation and training before moving on to Brisbane.

### **Pre-tournament Training**

We had very little free time to recover from our long flight. The afternoon following arrival, our training resumed again at a local indoor cricket centre. The first thing that struck me was the quality of the facilities – they were just fantastic compared to what we were used to in England. We trained hard for the first five days. It was really tough getting used to playing in a hot environment within an indoor arena; dehydration was a constant worry. To gauge our level of play, we had several matches with both local and Queensland state teams; we won most of our games and the entire squad felt comfortable with our state of readiness for the tournament.

It was only now that I realised the age category we were in was technically U17 since anyone who did not hit their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday by 1<sup>st</sup> October qualified for this age group. Some of those Queensland state team boys really looked big and bowled viciously quick! My own performance was holding up extremely well during these early training sessions and felt comfortable and confident that I could cope well against any opposition.

The occasional free time we had on the Gold Coast, I took the opportunity to fit-in some local sight-seeing and enjoy the beach – I made sure there were no sharks lurking nearby! I missed out on jet-skiing with my parents though – had to be cautious not to pick-up any injuries with the tournament only two days away.

### **Tournament Week**

The week began with an opening ceremony at the famous Gabba cricket ground on 10<sup>th</sup> October. The previous night I was told that I had been voted by Team England to be the country's flag bearer at the opening ceremony – I was so shocked on hearing this that my immediate thought was what if the weight of the pole/flag made me tumble on stage!!! Well I was re-assured ...I was of course overjoyed that the entire Team England squad had bestowed this honour on me – I think it also showed the popularity I was gaining as a player amongst the team.

The Gabba was an enormous stadium; when I stepped onto the upper floors, I could envisage the enormity of playing to a full house on this ground – may be one day I will under full England



colours! That will be the day....All the other participating country players together with their supporters made the auditorium lively. Soon Ian Healy commenced the opening remarks and after the Australian representative, my name was called upon to come on stage as England's representative. There was a loud roar from all my team mates and all our supporters. As I stood on stage with the other country representatives, I forced myself to hold back tears – the enormity of the occasion was hitting me hard but fortunately I held my composure. This moment felt unreal – how could a 13 year old boy be standing on an international platform with adult representatives from the other countries! As the programme continued, the various trophies were unveiled and entertainment performed by local artists. The whole atmosphere was fantastic to savour. Now I couldn't wait for the tournament to begin the next day. The only disappointment was that teams from India and Pakistan were not participating.

Our first game was against Australia and our team composition was announced in the morning – I was in the playing eight! We won the toss and decided to field first. When I saw the size of some the Aussie boys, I knew immediately we would have a tough fight on our hands. I opened our bowling effort and was hugely relieved at not conceding too many runs. I was surprised that my pace was troubling the Aussie batting pair. As the game progressed, I could see that they had settled down into a good rhythm and were scoring freely against our bowling attack; some of our players were obviously nervous and showed in our fielding and bowling effort. Our supporters were vociferous and encouraging us all the way. Despite the heavy score of the Aussies (260+!), we remained enthusiastic and gave it our all. Fortunately I was batting second pair in this first game so had the opportunity of seeing the Aussie bowlers in action; they certainly bowled quick and short of a length to allow the ball to bounce into the chest. Our first batting pair soon started to struggle; getting bowled and run-out. The Australian fielding standard was something to be seen to be believed. Soon my turn to bat came and I was dreading at what was to come; the Aussies had packed their side with fast bowlers and had a good combination of left-hand and right hand bowlers. My partner and I started slowly but quickly got used to the pace attack; we began taking two's and rotating the strike. There were no big scoring shots from us but we kept building the score and didn't loose wickets. There was no let-up to the fast bowling and the balls I faced were mostly at my chest but soon the four overs finished and phew what a relief!! I survived, managed to score some runs and not get out. Our later batsmen didn't fair too well and in the end we lost heavily. Well it was baptism by fire but what an experience!

The second game against South Africa was later in the day but having picked-up a niggling finger injury batting in the first game, I had to sit it out. The South African team was also strong, again packed with quick bowlers. Their fielding too was much superior to ours and we certainly felt the impact of their strength in the second game.

The second day's evening had an 'Ashes' theme and all the English teams were playing the Aussies. The atmosphere was just electric – we all supported each team's effort and together with our vocal supporters, the stadium was buzzing. Our supporters' slogans of 'Come on England', 'The score board is flashing' and '2 for freeeeee' kept the audience alive as the evening wore on. The last game finished around 11pm and by that stage most of us felt exhausted but marvelled at the occasion.

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I played in all the subsequent games and as the week progressed our team performances kept improving. It was becoming apparent that that two of our batting pairs were putting up decent scores but the other batters were struggling. Our predominantly spin attack was also leaking too many runs. Together with my batting partner, we were consistently scoring the highest pair score within our team. After the first couple of games, I got used to the opposition bowlers and their intimidation tactics did not work on me; they all began to respect me as a player. The opposition coaches too applauded my skills and gamesmanship in view of my age. I began to make a few friends in the opposition ranks and soon made arrangements to exchange shirts and other gear with players from Australia and South Africa. Mid-week our squad was invited to have lunch with the Australian U16s which I thought was a good gesture from them. It was a great lunch mixing with the Australians and making new friends.

With India's withdrawal there were only three teams in our age group; we played each other three times in a round robin league. Australia won all their matches and qualified for the final. England and South Africa had a semi-final play-off; I was hoping that our team would rise up to this challenge and somehow get into the final! Alas our efforts were in vain; I gave it my all as did the other team members but the Saffas were just too good on the day. We must have had the loudest support of all the other teams playing that day; the Aussies too were cheering us!

In between our games, I had the opportunity to watch the other teams play. The standard of play from the New Zealand teams in the U19s and men's group was awesome. It was such a joy just to sit, watch and soak up the quality of play on display at this tournament. The best moment though was when the New Zealand men's team performed their traditional 'Hakka' prior to their game against the Aussies.

The finals day saw the Aussie teams qualify in all the categories and sure enough they started winning trophy after trophy. The last men's game was a nail biter though. It was a tough fought game with the New Zealanders a whisker ahead. However, in one game changing moment towards the end, the Aussies clinched a small lead and closed it out with a score of 55 against 44!

The tournament came to a conclusion later that evening with a closing ceremony back at the Gabba. A representative from the ICC was also present throughout the tournament as there is a strong desire for this format of the sport to be embraced by cricket's governing body and future tournaments be held under its name.

It was a memorable week which I will cherish for a long time. I made so many new friends and purely from a playing perspective, learnt so much from the opposition. As it turned out, my own performance stats were the best within our team which really surprised me.

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## **Final Thoughts**

Of course I was disappointed that we weren't able to hold that 'trophy' as winners but the experience gained was invaluable. The next tournament will be held in South Africa in 2011 so we will give it a real go then – I will have grown a little by then so will be able to give it back to the Aussies and Saffas! I can't wait....

The sheer joy of representing my country in a World Cup event was indeed something I will forever remember. I thoroughly enjoyed my stay in Australia and came away with many memorable moments. It all seems like a big dream!

Finally, I encourage all budding cricketers to get involved in this format of the game and bring your talents to the fore. The next World Cup beckons! It will soon become a major ICC event.

Anuj Dal

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