

## Martin Taylor



Martin Taylor runs an education company and lives in Beaconsfield with his wife and three children. He shares with us how he came to volunteer at Beaconsfield Cricket Club, alongside his wife Michele, what they enjoy most about their volunteering and what opportunities there might be for anyone else looking to get involved with their local sports club.

### HOW DID YOU GET INTO VOLUNTEERING WITH THE CRICKET CLUB?

We probably started seven years ago. I used to play cricket when I was younger, knew a bit about cricket, played a bit at school, just junior counties stuff. One day I was helping out with my nine year old son's age group, and I saw my other son (who was about five or six at the time) running around with a bat using it as a gun. There were about 40 kids with one coach, and the kids were running rings around him.

I went back to Michelle and told her how rubbish I thought it was that these kids were not actually learning any cricket and she said, "Well, stop whinging about it. If you've got a problem with it go and do something". And I thought that was a very good, solid reaction from my wife. Effectively, stop complaining and, if you think you can do better, then get involved. At that point I was working in London, so all my social life was in London and my wife's social life, with school etc, was in the town. So that meant we had two quite separate social lives as well. And I think her ulterior motive was to get me (being the very clever, savvy, woman that she is) more involved in the local community.

It started very much as running an under-six and under-seven year group that year that my youngest son was in. I think that's where lots of people get involved and volunteer, when it's your own kids. I run an education company, so I guess that's where my heart has been. And the idea of running sessions and planning things out suited what I knew in my "corporate" life.

I knew we needed to get more people involved. So any parent that stood within about five yards of the edge got dragged in. Mike was one of those who got dragged in. A classic story was one of the dads, Ian, who I grabbed from the side-line to get involved and was giving him a few pointers as to how to coach the kids "this is how they hit the ball, just do it like this".... Well, he didn't tell me for about a month that he had been a professional cricketer, playing for Hampshire for a few seasons! And I just laughed, "I am in a hole now, just pull me out. This is extremely embarrassing". So it wasn't as though I went in with a bunch of friends or anything. I met a whole bunch of completely new people.

The club said they wanted someone to co-ordinate the under-six, seven and eight year olds more officially. So I said, "Yeah, I'll give that a go", and that was probably the first bit of getting into more of the Club, how it runs. So then I started doing more across



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the whole Mini-Colts and that's when Michelle got more involved. There is a definite powerhouse there. She doesn't like shouting about what she does but everyone knows that she does a staggering amount behind the scenes that makes the rest of us, who rock up on a Sunday morning and have a laugh with the kids, it all looks as if it's us. When actually she's done membership, subs, communications, waiting lists all that sort of thing.

The Colts have gone from 100 or so to about 350, and that includes about 80 girls as well. There is a big girl's section now. It has been a really diverse five years, and that's all down to people wanting to get involved, the volunteers. We only had about ten girls to start with, they all trained with the boys' age groups and the two of the dads were really keen that the girls had their own training sessions. I was keen for that to happen but said that for it to be possible they needed numbers, so they went off and spoke to local schools – and with some hard work they're now at about 80 which is great. With the increase in numbers comes lots more jobs, more people needed. There are more Colts, there are more boards to buy, there is more kit to have, more organisation behind the scenes, so you need more people to help run it.

#### HOW HAVE THE LAST SIX MONTHS AFFECTED WHAT YOU'VE DONE?

We had just got to a point where everything was up and running really well. And then we got a call from one of the schools we use for indoor nets, about an hour before the sessions were due to begin and they said, "We're not doing any more external bookings. You can't come". We were like "What?" That was the first ripple of 'that's not normal'. Within 10 days we were all in lockdown and it happened around the start of the cricket season.

We set up a new Facebook Colts' page, so there are plenty of videos of me saying "Welcome to this, welcome to the start of the season. Here are some weekly challenges, or home drills you can do". I put advice on there around buying new kit and what to look for. Trying to give them things to look forward to - buying new bats, or new pads. Just trying to make people feel that the cricket season had started - in whatever way it was.

In the last week of May we were able to have two kids and a coach in a net, at any one time. They kids couldn't touch the cricket ball and all that sort of stuff. We opened from 10:00 am until 19:00 pm and the kids would come along and it would sometimes be the first time they'd seen a mate for six or eight weeks. They'd have a little session then they'd have to go. Before the next ones came in we'd have to spray down all the stumps, spray down everything, so lots of cleaning in between. We had something like 180 – 200 people in that first week using it, spread out over God knows how many hours. And it was just really great seeing the kids – well not just the kids - the parents – the parents hadn't been out of the blooming house for however long ... so it was the first social contact they'd had as well.



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Obviously not everyone came back. Some people were shielding. Some of the age group managers were shielding so we had to find others to try and step up and help out. But the great thing – if I can say the great thing about COVID – is that you had to get the parents involved as there were strict rules around handling of balls/equipment and that it had to be by a family member. So, it was a much easier thing to say to the parents “Look, you’ve got to come. If you’re practicing catching, Mr/Mrs Parent, you’re the only one allowed to touch that ball, so you have to be there with your son/daughter”. It was really good. You couldn’t have a drop-and-run approach, so a lot of parents did get more involved.

Then we could then go into groups of five, and we could do drills if we used hand-sanitizer every 20 minutes. By July we were into playing matches. It was brilliant because we then had matches organised for July, August and into September and it was almost like our three month summer schedule which is normally May, June, July, had just moved to July, August and September. I think, for most people, the cricket felt like it was almost a normal season apart from no teas, lots of hand sanitiser, and using track and trace at the start of every match. The reaction from the parents and the kids has been great, we’ve had some lovely, lovely emails from parents this year saying things like “When my kid turned up I could forget they had lockdown. Just, when all the schools were shut, when the schools weren’t doing anything, this was the only thing in town where they could meet anyone of their own age, and competitively too”. Again, just to have the highs and lows of competitive juices, or whatever, flow.

Michelle and I were also lucky that I think we felt far further through all the restrictions and lockdown, because we’d been (1) involved in reading lots of guidelines and knowing what to do, and (2) having been out and about an awful lot more than a lot of people were. For us, I don’t think it felt as much of an inconvenience as it has for a lot of people. So, I cannot say what it would’ve been like, but it definitely provided a distraction from work, and helped our family, our social interactions, everything. It’s been a brilliant – if I am being really selfish – a brilliant thing for me. It’s lovely doing it with ‘The Missus’ as well, because there’s never a dull moment. There’s always something going on as far as the politics of the club that you can take the micky out of. So it’s been good.

## HOW MUCH TIME WOULD ONE NEEDED TO COMMIT IN ORDER TO HELP AT A LOCAL CLUB?

However much time you have free there would be a job for you! And the more volunteers the better, as they saying goes ‘More hands make light work’ and it’s so true. You need someone who knows what jobs need to be done and then you need people saying, “Yeah, happy to help”. Some people might do a couple of hours a week and others a lot more, depending on their capacity. If you’re helping with coaching it would be two hours on a Saturday morning, and then there might be a match where you might be umpiring or scoring. We have people looking after the pavilion, doing the teas/coffees or helping on the gate.



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Personally, I'm doing about eight hours because I will be helping with some other sessions. So you have a range. But that said, it's only for ten to twelve weeks. It's not all year. I won't be doing any more cricket until January now. So there's a gap now, and I know I've got a break. I know some of the people go and volunteer at rugby as well, or football. They are like perennial volunteers, they just love doing it whereas I like to have a break. I like doing full-on with the cricket and then I don't feel bad about standing on the rugby touchline or whatever, letting someone else have a go.

**IF THERE WAS SOMEBODY WHO'S A BIT OLDER NOW, HAD KIDS YEARS AGO BUT WANTED TO COME AND HELP OUT, COULD THEY JUST TURN UP AND OFFER TO VOLUNTEER? OR IS IT BETTER IF THEY CONTACT SOMEBODY VIA THE WEBSITE?**

If you weren't engaged in a club right now, I think I would definitely suggest you make contact through the website. It would be good to get along and see what a training session looks like. This year, obviously, has not been a normal set-up. But anyone involved in any sort of kid's activities has to go through checks such as DBS and that sort of stuff that everyone needs to go through. I think it gives other people more trust. It didn't make a blind bit of difference to me. But it gives other people more trust that you do know what you're doing.

Cricket is different than other sports, you just have to look at rugby and there are fifteen or whatever dads per year volunteering for rugby and we probably have around two or three. But the numbers of kids in them are not that dissimilar. I sometimes wonder why that is. I don't know whether it's because some people think it's more technical. So is it a harder game to play? There are not very many Mums volunteering either but there is absolutely no reason why they shouldn't. Whether it's coaching, managing waiting lists, organising social events, there are lots of jobs. So there are opportunities definitely, for anybody. Male, female, young, old, I guess is what I am trying to say. Our sixteen year old son now volunteers, he does the under eights which is a great thing for him to do. And we do get a few Duke of Edinburgh kids volunteering.

So if you want to get involved, dip your toe in, see what it's like. For most people it's been a nice cultural and social fit.

**HOW DOES WORKING WITH THE CRICKET CLUB AND VOLUNTEERING BENEFIT YOUR LIFE AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS?**

I think it's probably got me closer to my kids, the boys. I think there's a respect that you get from your kids that I imagine I wouldn't have got if I hadn't done it. It's also brought me closer to Michele I think. I think it's lovely to have a common language and a common objective in your house that is not just talking about where we're



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going to go to eat or, if you have so and so's present, or what the kids are doing. So you get a chance to work with your spouse in a way that I have never done previously. I've seen, quite clearly, the skills I am sure she's displayed in jobs and vice versa. The downside for her is that I am equally as frustrating as a husband as I am running the Colts Cricket. So all the things she knows about, you know, Mr 95% Man ideas and then doesn't follow through and those sorts of things. She gets that with her home life and now with cricket.

Michele is definitely not a cricket widow. That is one thing she has been brilliant at. She's learned how to score. She doesn't play but she wanted to be active in the boys' lives in it and she goes and supports far more of their matches than I probably do, that the kids play in. We were both 50 this year – and without COVID, our plan was to go to Australia to watch the T20 World Cup. And I just can't believe that the women I married would be saying that's what she'd want to do for our joint 50<sup>th</sup> birthday present. To go to Melbourne and watch cricket. That would never have been a thing, that's been brilliant and definitely an unexpected result. That's the thing about getting involved in this kind of activity, you don't know where it's going to go.

So there is a huge amount you get back from doing it that you don't immediately think you're going to get. I can walk into any pub in Beaconsfield now and I know half a dozen people. Five years ago that would never have happened, my social life only really existed in London. If I had entered into the last six months, into COVID, without having volunteered, this would have been a very, very different experience for me. My wife has her social life around here but for me it would have been much, much, tougher without the volunteering team having provided me with a social network.

Whether that's just been on quiz nights also just giving me a reason to get out and about. I've been in London twice in the last six months. With the cricket club, I have probably been there four times a week. You definitely get a lot of benefit from the involvement, and I am sure most of us volunteers would say, you get a lot more out of it than you even knew you needed to start with. I started off because I thought my son wasn't learning anything. He doesn't go to an independent school so there was no cricket at school. So, the club was the only place he was going to get a chance to learn cricket and it was being done badly (through no-one's fault – they were just short of coaches). So, it wasn't really to do with me, it was to do with him having a better experience. Whereas actually what I have got out of it has been loads more. You go in with very different objectives but if you stick at it, you can build up great friendships. You can explore new opportunities, whether it's for your family or socially.

Health-wise, I'm really happy I am back playing cricket. I don't think I'd have been playing cricket if it hadn't been for doing this. I had definitely hung up the boots 20 years ago and I've played now since coaching. I guess, without it, I'm not sure whether I would have gotten out of the house so much over the last few years, and indeed the last six months. I might have ended up being a three stone heavier than I am now.



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DO YOU THINK YOU'VE LEARNT NEW SKILLS? OR ENHANCED WHO YOU ARE AS A PERSON?

I've been able to use my skills in a different area. A voluntary role is very different to corporate work. There are people that you don't get on with as well as others so you need people skills too. There are people old enough probably to be my parents and people who are young enough to be my kids involved. You can't go in as Mr Big B\*lllocks thinking you're an Exec Board Member at work, you leave that at the door. If you're on the barbeque, you're on the barbeque. If you're on washing up, you're washing up. And the ideal scenario is that you don't know what background anyone's got, you don't even know what people do for a living and there is no need to actually use that position "thing". You are just all there to help the kids and have a nice time.

HOW DO THE CHILDREN BENEFIT?

This is getting to my attitude about "things". My kids don't go to independent schools. I work in an education company and see school leavers and graduates coming through and I am very conscious of kids labelling themselves, or the schools labelling them, from a young age. Some children from independent schools can come into the club saying, "I am an A Team Player, or a B Team Player, or a C Team Player". When you're part of a team, I just hate that sort of language. Children shouldn't be labelling themselves like that. We're a Club. You are a Beaconsfield Player, that's it. We give them names, the Lions, the Tigers, but we don't refer to them by A and B team. Yes of course the kids know which players are better than others, but we try not to ram it down their throats. That can be difficult sometimes, some of the parents want their children to "win" at 12. Whereas we want to have them all still playing when they reach 15 or 16.

What the volunteers do at the club is all about trying to keep an interest because otherwise the independent school kids will always be the ones with the A team, because they are the ones that get to play there at school. Just being a member a club I think is really important. The kids get to understand what it feels like to be part of their local community, and from their perspective it's very important.

