

Martin Barry – a Cricketing story.

I've been a keen cricketer since my schooldays, and now many years later, and firmly at home in the 'veteran's category', I certainly wasn't expecting an international call up at the ripe old age of 50.

I had been selected for the Sussex Over 50s cricket team for the first time earlier this year, and despite achieving some success, I was very surprised to receive a call from Peter, who introduced himself as the manager of the England Over 50s team. Peter advised me that I had been selected for 3 upcoming England matches, against the West Indies, India and finally Wales. After expressing my surprise and delight and, following a nervous look at my team's leave chart, I confirmed my availability.

There followed a mad scramble to order all the required England playing kit (representing our national 50s team is purely self-funded), and this included shirts, trousers, caps, and a team blazer. After a nervous wait, the kit eventually arrived and a couple of days later I set off for Broxbourne Sports Club, Hertfordshire, to make my England debut against the West Indies.

After some introductions on arrival, me and rest of the team changed into training kit and set about a rather rigorous warm up routine. This was led by Sean, the team's opening fast bowler who also doubled up as fitness coach.

'I've served 27 years in the military!' he kept reminding us as the team were put through an exhausting routine of shuttle runs and sprints. Stretching followed, and we found ourselves having to manoeuvre into positions that I never thought were humanly possible. After this, an intense session of fielding practice rounded things off.

After warm-ups and a welcome opportunity to get our breath back, we lined up for a presentation ceremony for the West Indies and then the singing of the National Anthems. It was at this point that I discovered, to my embarrassment, that there's more than one verse to 'God Save the Queen' but luckily it soon became apparent that I was not alone.

The match started shortly afterwards with England batting first. I was chosen to open the batting, my preferred position, and I strode out to the middle with Giles, the England captain and number 1 ranked Over 50s batsman in the world. Unfortunately, less than 10 minutes later I was striding back to the pavilion having been dismissed by the West Indian opening bowler for just 7 runs. However, the rest of our batsmen were far more successful & helped the hosts to an impressive total of 302. Despite some spirited resistance from the visitors, England were able to claim a 16 run victory.

A few days later, we were back in action again at the superb setting of Marlborough College. First up was a game against India. We batted first again in glorious sunshine and this time I contributed a decent score of 40 before being dismissed. The rest of the team then went on to help post an imposing score of 359 in our allocation of 45 overs. This proved to be far too much for the Indians as we claimed victory by a massive 179 run margin.

A team meal at Rick Stein's restaurant in Marlborough followed, and after a good night's sleep, we were back in action against Wales the following day. This game proved to be another relatively easy victory as the Welsh could only muster a score of 147 from their 45 overs, a score our team passed with the loss of only 1 wicket. I wasn't required to bat in this game, the captain deciding to shuffle the batting line up around to ensure all of the batters could spend some time in the middle.

With the conclusion of the 3rd match, my stint in the England Senior's set up has, for now at least, come to an end. I have been invited to tour Barbados with the squad in November, but unfortunately, I have had to decline. An Over 50s World Cup is also scheduled to take place in South Africa in March 2023. I've been selected in a provisional group of 30 players, this will be trimmed down to 17 when the final squad is announced in a few months' time.

A very generous contribution from the HASSRA Development Fund has been invaluable in helping me to continue to work towards achieving my goal of participating in the World Cup.

Whether I'm selected or not for the tournament, having the opportunity to have played these few games for England has been an amazing experience and one that I will always remember with a real sense of pride.