

TEAM GAME

Joe Root reflects on his journey from cricket-mad kid in Sheffield to England Test captain and pays tribute to the many people and opportunities that have helped shape his career.

I fell in love with the game from a really young age. My brother Billy and I would go and watch Dad play for Sheffield Collegiate at the weekend and we'd be bothering anyone who was around – grandparents, players or other kids – to help us knock a ball around by the boundary. We'd play until it got dark.

I learned the game properly by playing men's cricket quite young. We played all around the Peak District at some lovely grounds – with proper cricket teas! I learned what it was like to be part of a team and also the structure of the game, going from 20 overs into 50 overs. You learn what it's like to get out early and then field all day. I learned some of the hard truths of cricket – it was very rewarding when you won and not so much fun when you lost.

Kevin Sharp, then the Yorkshire batting coach who is now at Worcester, saw me in the under-12s and liked what he saw. I got on a scholarship scheme with the Yorkshire Academy and I would have one-on-one sessions with him – he was very influential.

That's when it started to get serious and when I thought it was a possible career after school. I'd go to sessions with Kevin and before me would be some of the Yorkshire players like Anthony McGrath and Darren Lehmann. I was so in awe of them and I would ask Kevin if I could have the same session they had just had, just so I could go back and tell my dad, brother and grandad that I'd been doing the same training as the pros.

I was starting to learn some of the intricacies of batting. The Bunbury Festival is a huge thing for the under-15 age group and I was very fortunate to do well there in 2006. That led to an invitation for me and three other guys to spend a week at Loughborough training with the Lions squad when they toured Bangladesh.

It was a big week in my development. I came away realising the intensity required and that I needed to up my game. It was inspiring and some of the guys – like Matt Prior, Stuart Broad and Tim Bresnan – I eventually ended up playing with for England!

In 2009 I toured Bangladesh with England Under-19s which was a brilliant experience. It gave me a great understanding of how different cricket can be in other parts of the world. It was all completely new to me and to be exposed to those conditions at such a young age was crucial. I've been on three tours to Bangladesh now and I'm always banking knowledge.

I was chucked in at the deep end when I first played for England Lions in 2011. My performances for Yorkshire didn't warrant selection but Graham Thorpe saw something in me.

Just over a year later I was making my Test debut in Nagpur. It was so helpful to have already played a lot in Asia, experiencing the heat and the challenges of facing a lot of spin bowling. I was also fortunate to have a great group of senior players who guided me along. I didn't know any of them well but they were happy for me to pick their brains.

It's important to ask questions and I'll continue to do it. You've never mastered this game so you always need to keep improving.

I'm very grateful for all the help I've had along the way from so many different people. I'm very fortunate to have a family who have given up so much of their time for me. It's always nice to go back to Sheffield Collegiate and offer a little bit back to the guys who helped me and the young guys coming through so they get the opportunities I did.

