

REGIONAL STRENGTH

Simon Brown took a wicket with the tenth ball of his single Test for England in 1996. Now, after more than a decade in the business world, the former Northamptonshire and Durham fast bowler is back in the game as Head of Regional Operations within the 82-strong Participation and Growth team.

I always wanted to get back involved with the game but I didn't know in what capacity. But when I saw this job come up I just thought it was too good to be true. My last season with Durham was in 2002 and I have worked in banking and most recently in professional services for PricewaterhouseCoopers.

You don't realise at the time but you pick up a lot of valuable, transferable skills as a cricketer. That includes leadership, contributing to team cohesion and understanding people.

I liken my role to that of a national sales manager. I have seven regional heads who are effectively my regional sales managers. Each team has specific targets, whether that's attracting new players, creating efficiencies, generating revenue or building upon some of the great things which are already going on that supports development and growth in their region. As our Director of Participation and Growth, Matt Dwyer says, they are responsible for the holistic health of cricket in their region, so it's a broad remit.

We achieved a lot in quite a short space of time. We did a lot of recruitment quite quickly and now have the right people in the right roles with a nice mix of skills, experience in cricket but also from the business world.

Participation and growth go hand in hand. We know that someone who buys a ticket to a match has probably played the game at some stage. So if we can get more people on the field playing then we will attract more spectators and people with a genuine interest in the game.

There is a huge opportunity to take cricket to new markets. I don't think we've ever really focused on five to eight-year-olds before which is why All Stars Cricket is so important. It also gives us an opportunity to reach a new family audience.

If a five-year-old is brought down to a club then hopefully the parents and siblings will get involved too. It's almost a 'halo effect' with new volunteers getting involved and new revenue streams opening up.

We want to get parents and primary school teachers involved. The skills required for the activators who will deliver this programme to a younger group can be quite different to that of a traditional cricket coach who may be used to older players. There's quite a lot of pastoral care and nurturing involved, and the fun element is crucial.

It's about breaking the coaching environment down. Kids can step up to competitive games when they're ready but let's give them some grounding and core skills first. This may look quite different with specially designed equipment being used to assist development. It's about a change of perception with a massive emphasis on fun as much as anything.

We're also looking at where we can help efficiency across the regions. We work with 39 counties who face similar challenges and address these in their own way. Each regional head has on average five counties in their portfolio and we've already seen how taking a view across a region can deliver efficiencies which improve the way we operate.

There are lots of people doing some really great things but for various reasons they have tended to be a bit in isolation. A big part of the regional head's role is to ensure that all the initiatives and programmes we're running tie together as well as sharing best practice so we can all learn from each other. We don't want to be having lots of disjointed conversations with county boards about the various propositions and initiatives being worked on, we want to pull it all together and work as one aligned delivery team.

