

David Tossell



THE

GIRLS

OF SUMMER

An Ashes Year with the England Women's Cricket Team

Foreword by Charlotte Edwards

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Introduction and Acknowledgements

‘It is difficult to avoid prejudice, following one team and concentrating on what they do. Naturally this leads to seeing life through their eyes, which is permissible perhaps in a book about the year in the life of one team’
– Hunter Davies in *The Glory Game*

I’D wondered when it would happen, if it happened at all. That moment when my wish to see the girls triumph on the field exceeded the natural desire of an English cricket follower to witness Australia beaten; advanced beyond an author’s concern for the most appealing narrative. I’d known such a phenomenon on a couple of occasions and could recall specific tipping points. Neither, I hasten to add, in connection to Arsenal, lifelong fandom of whom I had been able to easily forget in favour of reporting deadlines. They were my team but I’d never been close to them on a personal level. It had been different, though, covering Slough Town for the local newspaper I worked for, riding the team bus to

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away games and getting to know the players' personalities and peccadilloes. When they had gone two goals up in an FA Cup match at Orient – a tie they contrived to lose in a replay – I'd been on my feet at the back of the Brisbane Road media area. Likewise, fellow writers and I who had hopped back and forth across the Atlantic with the London Monarchs American football team in the early nineties elicited, and ignored, a 'no cheering in the press box' warning as we watched a stirring comeback in a play-off game in New York's Giants Stadium.

Having asked, and been allowed, to follow the England women's cricket team at close quarters during what promised to be a historic year, it didn't take long for me to become aware of my partiality. About half an hour of the first match, in fact.

Somerset's ground at Taunton was already close to being full as I made my way from the England dressing room, where I had watched the early overs, to the press box, where I knew I could make myself a cup of tea. The buzz and chatter around the boundary made it feel like a grand occasion, an atmosphere befitting the first morning of the Ashes, regardless of the gender of the participants. England had already taken a wicket, a catch by Charlotte Edwards, and as I stood by the kettle Katherine Brunt, the quick-tempered and fiercely passionate fast bowler who I had quickly realised was the emotional heartbeat of the team, was bowling the ninth over.

Few sports can provide the split-second elation that cricket offers up in that moment when, often after a long period of inactivity, a wicket suddenly falls. In rugby and football, tries and goals are built over a matter of seconds, with even a shot out of the blue taking its time in finding the net. When a batsman is bowled it is instantaneous, no warning, no mounting inevitability. At least that is my excuse for shouting 'Yes' and, in the action of pumping both fists,

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almost sending a cup of boiling tea down the necks of those in the back row of press seats when Australian batter Jess Jonassen played across the line and had her stumps flattened. I returned sheepishly to my place on the end of one of the front rows. At least now I knew where I stood.

I pondered long and hard about whether this would be a problem; should I take a more detached view when it came to writing about the games? In the end I decided it wasn't and I shouldn't. In any other fly-on-the-wall type book I had read it was obvious that the author ended up rooting for his team. After all, if he or she didn't care, why should the reader? It is the author's role to create empathy, after all.

In one of the best examples of the genre, *The Glory Game*, published in 1973, Hunter Davies decided that he had no need to remove himself emotionally from the Tottenham team to which he had attached himself. Having written the words that appear at the start of the chapter, he argued that neutrality was the domain of the press men. Another writer, Pete Davies, had unashamedly called his book about a season with Doncaster's female footballers *I Lost my Heart to the Belles*. I might never be able to match the effortless excellence of those particular books, but at least I could use them to justify my own approach.

The fact that I felt close enough to the England girls to be so bothered about their fortunes owed a lot to many people. Firstly, Clare Connor, Director of Women's Cricket at the England and Wales Cricket Board, had welcomed the idea of this book from our first meeting in a coffee shop down the road from Lord's. She had even insisted that 'it shouldn't be sanitised' and immediately set about ensuring the cooperation of all those whose support would help it come to life.

Foremost among them was Paul Shaw, whose responsibility in overseeing elite performance in the English women's game included, but was not confined to, the role of head

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coach of the national team. Over the course of several months of regular conversations I was only very rarely aware of him being cagey about what he told me and not once did he ask me to leave the dressing room. Anything he did hold back was for the sake of the confidentiality of his employers or out of concern for the feelings of others.

From the outset I was aware that having the support of team captain Charlotte Edwards would be vital and in our first encounter she had appeared somewhat non-committal. In the end, I need not have worried. When I had my first proper chat with her, she could not have been more charming and enthusiastic. At first it felt over-familiar to call her Lottie, as everyone else did, but quickly it became unnatural to consider using any other name. She was never less than engaged and engaging, suggesting different elements of the team I should witness and experience, showing interest in my writing process and always willing to share her thoughts, even when they were not happy ones. It pained me to hear and read some of the stick she would take during a difficult summer.

From a logistics point of view I was lucky that the England women's team was blessed with one of the most efficient and accommodating PR professionals I have ever encountered in media manager Beth Wild. The speed of her responses to questions and requests was consistently impressive. In fact, all the members of the England coaching and background staff, in particular assistant coaches David Capel and Carl Crowe, deserve my gratitude for the way they quickly got used to having me around and never appeared to mind as I pestered them about what they were up to.

Various other people were helpful in many different ways. At the risk of missing someone out, I must thank: Harriet Jackson, Lorraine Burlinson, Chris Watts and Steve Richardson at the ECB; the BBC's Charles Dagnall for support and encouragement; Ebony Rainford-Brent; Don Miles for his photographs; women's cricket followers Raf

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Nicholson, Syd Egan and Martin Davies; and, of course, Paul Camillin, Jane Camillin, Duncan Olnor, Derek Hammond and everyone else at Pitch Publishing. The Chance to Shine charity deserves mention in any book about women's cricket for the outstanding work they have done in introducing so many young children of both sexes to the sport over the past decade. I am delighted that a percentage of royalties from this book will go towards their work, details of which can be found at www.chancetoshine.org.

But back to the England girls. As the father of four daughters whose ages mostly fitted within the range of the team, I found myself becoming more protective towards them as the summer series wore on, even more so when results and fortune began going against them. I loved their passion for the profession into which they felt so privileged to have been welcomed. None had expected to be paid to play cricket – certainly not so soon – and their determination to wring every ounce out of their sport without taking it for granted, and to give back in return, exceeded anything I had witnessed.

I saw the team spend most of a washed-out day at Worcester circling the stands signing autographs for those fans who were huddling for shelter. I noted the genuine enjoyment they took from introducing youngsters to their sport, many of them remembering what an impact one enthusiastic and generous individual had made on their own lives at a similar age. I saw them happily – no sense of obligation – posing for pictures with fans at the end of every day's play, even when those days had brought bitter disappointment on the field. At Chelmsford, I was approached by a father who had heard me talking about this book on the radio and wanted to make sure I knew that his cricket-mad ten-year-old daughter had written to Jenny Gunn to request a signed photo and received back in the post Jenny's personalised Test match shirt signed by every member of the team.

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I was struck by the unencumbered joy the girls derived from each other, their respect and gratitude towards the people who supported them, from friends and family to sponsors, supporters and employers. They were funny, friendly and forthcoming and made an outsider feel most welcome. I didn't ever pursue the issue of the effects of periods on performance – a topic that was being raised by tennis player Heather Watson around the time I embarked on the book – but I did get to know more about sports bras than I ever envisaged. When my time with the team ended, the overriding feeling of relief that usually accompanies the completion of writing a book was absent. I would miss them.

Inevitably I spoke more to some than others, a natural function of the different personalities within the squad, which will come across in the pages that follow. But my sincere thanks are due to every single one of the Girls of Summer. This book is their story and any failure to do them justice is entirely mine.

1

Back to School

‘We manage everything for our players, but it’s important that we create an environment where they assume responsibility for themselves. There is only so much you can do and when they cross the white line they are on their own’ – Paul Shaw

OUTSIDE the row of fancy cosmetics stores on the St Pancras shopping colonnade there’s an escalator that carries you up towards a stark choice of travel options. Turn back on yourself after being deposited on the station’s upper level and you join the lawyers and lovers heading for Eurostar’s hourly departures to Brussels and Paris, with their whiff of sophistication, romance and Agatha Christie-style intrigue. If it’s too early in the day for a visit to the champagne bar before departure there are any number of tastefully furnished coffee shops, with their siren calls of rich roast and elegant patisserie, in which to await your boarding

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call. On this particular January morning, I left such delights to the businessmen checking their tablets and smartphones. Instead, I headed straight ahead to the more prosaic charms of the East Midlands Line, which serves Leicester, Nottingham and Sheffield and where, with any luck, I might be visited at my seat by a tea trolley and a shortbread biscuit.

The sky below which we journeyed north offered a singular graphite shade of grey and was hardly the kind of landscape to inspire thoughts of summer sport. Yet, having disembarked at Loughborough and taken advantage of the returning university students' burden of oversized luggage to arrive first at the taxi rank, I was soon being dropped outside the doors of the National Cricket Performance Centre.

Three stories of unimposing glass and steel, but with an immaculate full-sized playing field spread out alongside it, this north-east corner of the Loughborough University campus had been the educational home of English cricket since 2003. Officially opened by the Queen, its doors had welcomed all the national squads; men and women, boys and girls, from the professional level to the disabled sides. Tour preparation, training camps, rehabilitation, science and research all fell under the centre's remit. Ashes victories, global tournament triumphs and the ascension to the top of the world rankings – in both the men's and women's game – offered justification for the £4.5 million invested in its creation.

On this day it was staging a reunion of sorts; the England women's team's first training session of 2015 – a year which, for the first time, they had seen in as full-time professional players.

It was just before ten in the morning and in the entrance lobby, situated on the structure's middle tier, I was greeted by Beth Wild, the team's engagingly cheery media manager. Fair-haired and smiley, and a decent player herself, she broke off regularly from our conversation to exchange greetings

with players, the early arrivals among whom were emerging from the lower level changing rooms. Others I watched lug bulging equipment holdalls through the front doors. Professional, yes. Mollycoddled, clearly not.

'Beth Wild!' called one of the girls, clad in the team's blue and white training uniform.

'Kate Cross!' was the response, delivered on cue.

As similar ritualistic welcomes continued, the mood appeared to be less first-day-of-term than start-of-school-trip, in this case an adventure that would soon find the girls heading to New Zealand before returning home for an Ashes summer.

Heather Knight, vice-captain of the team, pulled up in a taxi; those enrolled as students at the university had merely had to walk from their rooms. 'A few of the others have homes in Loughborough,' Beth explained.

And then: 'Here she is.'

'She' could mean only one person: Charlotte Edwards, team captain. The leading run-scorer and dominant player in women's cricket; the most recognisable face in the game. Right now, that face – bronzed from her three months in Australia with Western Fury – was stuck on the wrong side of the glass, waiting for someone to buzz her in.

While most of the eighteen players given professional contracts by England the previous May had been getting together at Loughborough two days per week during the autumn, the return of Edwards and Knight, who had been playing for the Tasmanian Roar, meant that the team was more or less back together, although a third Australian opportunist, wicketkeeper-batsman Sarah Taylor, was remaining a few weeks longer with the South Australian Scorpions before joining the squad in New Zealand. 'We could have stayed out there as well,' said Heather, 'but the domestic season is winding down and we were missing our families. And it's good to be back with the girls.'

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Edwards had barely been back in the country long enough to wash off the sun screen and post on Twitter how happy she was to see her two-year-old niece again. When we spoke five days later at Lord's, she would admit that her return to England had been 'a whirlwind'. 'Out there all I had to do was get up and think about playing cricket. They thought I was a workaholic, but I just loved being able to train every day. Now I'm back I have to remember where I have to be each day and what I'm doing. And I had a pile of post that high,' she added, indicating the approximate size of a cricket stump.

The girls gathered round someone who had become as much mentor and big sister as teammate and captain. 'It will be interesting to see how the dynamic changes now that Lottie and Heather are back,' Beth noted. 'When they are away it is a chance for some of the other personalities to come to the fore a bit more.' It is easy to see why. Seam bowler Tash Farrant was six weeks old when Edwards, her county captain, made her England debut in 1996.

While the players prepared, I took the opportunity for a walk around the university campus, making my way initially to the Bastard Gates, presented by an eponymous former chairman of governors in the thirties. As well as serving as the university's northernmost entrance, the landmark's name continues to amuse many of the institution's 18,000 students. Elsewhere, the architecture is evidence of Loughborough's century of growth. Alongside the 1930s structures that surround the picturesque fountains are the harsh square legacies of sixties and seventies planning and the smooth modern curves of its School of Business and Economics.

Starting out as a technical college early in the twentieth century and reaching university status in 1966, Loughborough achieved its popular reputation through sporting achievement. The Paula Radcliffe Stadium and the Seb Coe Building are a reminder of that heritage. Among the arresting pink- and purple-lettered hoardings

that decorated much of the campus, lamp posts bore signs reminding everyone that Loughborough had been ‘inspiring winners since 1909’. The relaxed yet purposeful air of the place gives you an idea of why it has been such a productive environment; why it has consistently been credited as ‘Best Student Experience’ in the land; and why the England and Wales Cricket Board chose it as home.

Before heading back to join the team, I stopped for a cup of tea in the Student Union, where I overheard a young blonde lamenting that her boyfriend had left her to become a professional rugby player in New Zealand, ‘after all the support you gave him,’ according to her sympathetic companion. The hazards of dating at an institution that churns out elite sportsmen.

Back at cricket headquarters, the sound of Aerosmith signalled that the girls’ warm-up session had begun in the main sports hall. Muscles were being stretched and loosened, football and rugby passes exchanged in carefully controlled drills, and sprints undertaken over a variety of distances – all under the direction of strength and conditioning coach Ian Durrant, whose previous role had been with Great Britain’s synchronised swimmers. ‘Three more minutes,’ he yelled at his tiring charges as Coldplay took over from Lenny Kravitz.

Along with the seventeen contracted players present, the four additional girls who completed the Performance Squad meant that the team could be conveniently split into three groups of seven. On either side of the net bisecting the hall, one group was designated for ‘scenario batting’ while another prepared to bowl at Edwards and Knight, who would be batting in partnership. Former Leicestershire player Carl Crowe, one of the team’s assistant coaches, explained the imaginary set-up to his group: 50 for 2 after fifteen overs, with fourteen overs now to be bowled by those not batting and wickets and runs judged by an ‘umpire’. Laura Marsh, a spin bowler fighting her way back from injury, drew the first

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stint as adjudicator, noting Carl's underscored notice on the whiteboard that her 'decision is final'. There would be, Carl warned, a five-minute 'fitness and fielding intervention' after eight overs. It would be 'short and sharp; and there will be the opportunity to take some catches'.

To the backing of the Rolling Stones' 'Gimme Shelter', Anya Shrubsole, the Somerset seamer, began proceedings on the other side of the net by delivering a ball outside off stump. Lottie cut calmly and then trotted a pigeon-toed, hypothetical single to send Heather to the striker's end. A few minutes in, the sound of *Frozen* favourite 'Let It Go' filled the building and brought instant smiles on both sides of the dividing net. Spin bowler Becky Grundy mimed and acted, Dani Hazell sang out the first line of the chorus and her efforts were taken up by Katherine Brunt as the music built to crescendo. It was the first time I had heard a Yorkshire fast bowler singing Disney in the nets, but you never knew what Fred Trueman used to get up to. Suitably inspired, Brunt – no evidence of the back problems that had plagued her career – hurried Knight into popping the ball up to where square leg would have been. Bleached blonde and athletically built, Katherine could frequently be heard emitting grunts of effort and later she shrieked in approval after getting county teammate Lauren Winfield to glove one.

Well-timed shots and good deliveries were greeted all around the hall by approving noises from players and coaches.

'Yes, Grundy.'

'Well played, Nat.'

'Bowling, Anya.'

Another of the coaches, former England all-rounder David Capel, approached Anya and told her that he'd instructed the new batsmen to go after her bowling. 'What are you going to do to combat them?' he challenged. I noticed at some point the music had stopped, which made for an even

more focused, intense atmosphere in the hall. Light-hearted comment receded as tiredness advanced.

After an hour in which she'd gone from facing her teammates in one net to batting against the bowling machine in another, and then back again, Lottie was finally able to pull off her helmet and strip the pads from her legs, only to be told that the BBC had a film crew waiting for an interview.

'Hat or no hat?' she asked.

'Probably no hat,' Beth replied.

'That means I'd better go and do my hair.'

'At least you can show off your tan.'

Also free of batting duties, Heather selected a white ball from the pile at the end of the net. Over the previous year, following a hamstring injury, she'd been converted from a seamer to an off-spinner and was still considered something of a novice in her new craft.

'How much bowling did you get over there?' asked Capel, referring to her Australian excursion.

'A lot,' she answered, to the nodding satisfaction of the coach.

During my stroll around campus, I'd crossed the Hazlerigg-Rutland Hall fountain courtyard. Embedded in the paving stones circling the water feature, the university's motto is spelt out in Latin and English: 'Veritate. Scienta. Labore' – 'Truth, Wisdom and Labour'. The man responsible for ensuring that English women's cricket lived up to such lofty values – he who was charged with 'inspiring winners' among the national women's team – was Paul Shaw, who assumed the role of Head of Women's Performance in 2013, five years after arriving at the ECB as Academy head coach. After a couple of years in his original role, he'd progressed to the position of High Performance Manager, so it was a natural succession to put him in charge of the whole kit and caboodle when Mark Lane moved on after five years as head coach, a title that had been made redundant.

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Formerly head coach at his hometown club of Barnsley and aged forty when he took up his latest position, 'Shawsy', as those around the team called him, is short in stature and with a cheerful demeanour accentuated by the dimples that appear in his cheeks whenever he smiles, which he does a lot. Moving quietly from net to net, he encouraged and advised, never chided or criticised – at least not on this day – and rarely lost the look of a man deeply in love with what he was doing.

When I asked him for an assessment of his winter months with the girls he answered, 'Things have been going very well. It is nice to have four months with the players, to work with them, not just from a strength point of view but from development as players. Now we'll have four weeks of preparation for New Zealand, going into a fair amount of detail in readiness for their batters and bowlers.'

The thinking behind the 'scenario net' – where Lydia Greenway was helping the batters take their score to a theoretical 112 for 2 in the prescribed time – was obvious. I asked about the logic of having two batsmen on the go in the other one rather than giving them twice as many deliveries in individual nets. 'We want people batting in partnership so they can start reading each other,' Paul explained, his accent soft but clearly indicative of his geographical roots. 'We will also have individual nets, but the closer we get to New Zealand the more we will do to replicate match situations. We might have a fatigue session where we get them running hard between the wickets, or take out the running and just focus on shot selection.'

He continued, 'We manage everything for our players, but it's important that we create an environment where they assume responsibility for themselves. There is only so much you can do and when they cross the white line they are on their own. Carl and Capes are great at facilitating that. They will ask them the right questions at the right time.'

I picked up with Paul the notion of the senior players' return changing the personality of these training sessions. 'We have spent two years creating an environment of high performance and protecting that. When a number of the senior players are away and then come back it does have an effect. The players Lottie, Heather and Sarah left in October might not be the same as when they meet them again. It is important to maintain contact by email, phone and text, to update them on what we have been doing and how the players are growing as cricketers and people. Those three are strong players and personalities, so when they are not here it creates a void. We have encouraged players to grow and fill that void, to grow as people. It is not just about being captain or vice-captain; we want leaders all over the field, players who are going to contribute.'

Lottie would confirm later that she had indeed noticed a change on her return. 'There was much more focus in what they were doing,' she said. 'Everyone seemed to know what they were trying to do and I thought something had clicked. Some of the younger girls used to just come along and wander around net sessions not really knowing what they were trying to do or get out of it. The way it is structured now, Paul's attention to detail, is really good.'

Approximately two hours after they had entered the hall, the team was allowed to break for lunch, although Heather and Lauren's stomachs had to wait until the BBC cameras had finished with them. Like disciplined factory workers, everyone clocked back on at 2pm. No lunchtime finish and off to the snooker hall for these players.

The afternoon would feature two further sessions like those staged in the morning. In the scenario net, the skiddy seam bowling of Kate Cross and Sonia Odedra was being handled expertly by Fran Wilson, trying to fight her way back into the team after a four-year absence. One of the non-contract players, she was driving fluently until ruled

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to have clipped to imaginary mid-wicket. Such judgements were eagerly sought by the bowlers. Kate looked aggrieved to have been denied a caught behind against Danni Wyatt by the non-decision of Beth Langston, one of the Academy players. When Dani Hazell's off spin was twice edged just wide of the notional wicketkeeper she looked as wounded as if it had happened against the Aussies. Even with the music back on, this was clearly more work than play.

And so it continued until the traditional down-tools time of 5pm, after which it was my turn at the crease, so to speak. I'd been offered the chance to outline to the girls the plan for this book and duly took my place at one end of a large rectangular arrangement of tables in an upstairs meeting room. With everyone spread about me and free of headwear, I sensed the dominating force of Charlotte Edwards, almost six years older than the teammate closest to her in age. I fought against the urge to speak mostly to the skipper, to seek in her facial muscles a twitch or tick that might indicate the level of cooperation I could expect. Wishing to be as inclusive as possible, I endeavoured to share out the eye contact, but couldn't avoid the sense that teammates were similarly watching her body language, taking their cues from their leader.

When Clare Connor, the ECB's Director of Women's Cricket, asked the room, 'Any questions? Lottie?' and the captain offered a good-natured, if somewhat non-committal 'no', I felt like the batsman who had survived a tricky final over of the day. I was off the mark.

* * * * *

Thoughts of New Zealand had already occupied plenty of Paul Shaw's waking hours, but the snow that was wrapping itself round his home in Barnsley a couple of weeks later, a few days before the squad's departure, served to sharpen

his anticipation of spending February in the southern hemisphere summer. 'It will be nice to get there and get working,' he said. 'We'll have a little transitional period after we arrive, adapting physically, mentally and emotionally, getting used to the environment, and then we'll step up the preparation for the first ODI.'

Around the time that the men's World Cup would be getting underway on either side of the Tasman Sea, England's women would embark on a series that encompassed five one-day internationals, the first three comprising part of the ICC Women's World Championship, and three Twenty20s. Paul saw the schedule as preparation for the Ashes and for the T20 World Cup in India a year hence, but stressed that those were secondary considerations behind 'winning those games'.

At Lord's a couple of days earlier, Charlotte Edwards had been the face of the announcement of England's fifteen-strong touring party. Admitting she couldn't remember ever losing to New Zealand and acknowledging England's status as favourites, she was diplomatic enough to state that it would be no easy contest and highlighted opponents such as home captain Suzie Bates, who sits alongside her at the top table of excellence in the sport. Much was made of the fact that England had been able to pick from a fully fit squad of players, meaning all those I had met at Loughborough were considered. 'The girls have had the last six to eight months just concentrating on their fitness, preparing themselves and having the support from our medical team,' Lottie had said. 'It makes a huge difference.'

The benefits of that difference might have been lost somewhat on the three players among the contracted eighteen who had been told they were not making the journey. For Tammy Beaumont, who represented England in all formats in 2014, back-up all-rounder Georgia Elwiss and the youngster among the full-time pros, Tash Farrant, it was not the start they had hoped to make to such a big year.

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Back in the party were Laura Marsh, who had not played international cricket since 2013 because of a shoulder injury, and another spinner, Becky Grundy, recovered from the groin injury that sidelined her the previous summer.

Coach and captain had been aided in their decisions by fellow selectors Sarah Pickford (chair of the panel), Errol Simms and former Australian international Lisa Keightley, head coach of the England Women's Academy. A full complement of healthy players had made their deliberations more satisfying, yet also more challenging.

'Let me explain the process,' Paul offered. 'Between us all we discuss all the twenty-two players in the Performance Squad and any other players coming through the Academy who might be an outside bet, plus any from outside the system who have shown high potential. We have lots of chats and deliberations and there are a number of things we look for when we select a tour squad of fifteen. One is the players who at this point in time give us the best chance of winning. Then we look at the performance history of the players and we'll consider each player's development plan. Within that there are a number of goals a player has and we look at how they have progressed in line with those goals. The form of the player is important and also the injury history. Are they a high risk? And importantly, one which I am really keen on, is the character, the individual and how that person comes to the fore when they are under pressure.'

Factored into that was the balance between needing to win games now and the desire to look ahead to World Cups at differing formats in 2016 and 2017. 'We consider those time frames,' Paul added, 'but most important is looking to win with the players we have got now.' The potential for the players to adapt to different pitches and conditions, the various tactics and strategies of the opposition formed the basis of further debate. 'A number of those conversations are actually started about five weeks before the selection and

then we sit down and formalise those discussions and come up with the best fifteen.'

And then perhaps the more difficult part began: informing, supporting and, in some cases, consoling those who had been omitted. Of course, team selection is a far more compassionate procedure these days; a far cry from the days when England's men would tune in for a radio announcement or check Teletext to discover whether they had been discarded. And if they waited for an explanation, well, they would still be waiting.

The first task belonged to Pickford, a long-time stalwart of England and Yorkshire cricket, who phoned every one of the twenty-two squad players to let them know if they had been selected or left out. The unlucky ones received a further call from Shaw, but only once he had waited forty-eight hours. 'We give them that time to think about it and get their emotions in check. It allows them to think about any questions they want to ask me or any pointers they need. I ask them how they are, offer some feedback and go through the rationale as to why we have left them out. I talk to them about the developmental plans we'll put in place while we are away and then the players get the opportunity to sit down with me another week later and go through it in person to make sure they have clarity in what they need to do next. We are there to develop cricketers, but we also look to develop them as people. In this instance that means understanding the individual, being able to deliver the appropriate message in a really individualised way. That is how you get the best out of them.'

According to Paul, the notion of a 'good tourist' was becoming outdated in the professional era and not something that weighed too heavily on the selectors. 'When you go anywhere for four or five weeks some people adapt quicker than others. Some players, if they are not selected while on tour might find it tough, so we do consider that. But, in

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essence, if we are picking a home squad or a touring squad we feel confident that the environment we have created is one where the players should be able to cope with any challenge.'

On this occasion, twenty-three-year-old Beaumont, who had been one of the leading scorers in county cricket in 2014 and played in England's summer Test and ODIs, was the most notable omission. 'We had two or three tough decisions and Tammy was certainly one of those,' Paul continued. 'We just felt that we had got a batter ahead of her at this time and wanted to give that batter the opportunity. When you have a squad as fully fit and competitive as ours then it is pleasing to be able to make those decisions in the way that we have.'

A tour such as that to New Zealand, which would be followed by a twelve-month period featuring an Ashes series and a global tournament, posed an interesting challenge in the balance of priorities. 'All the games are important,' said Paul. 'Winning creates winning habits and so on. The games up front with the points on it are the most important and we'll be doing all we can to win. If the latter stages of the tour give us a chance to give younger players more development opportunity then we will do that. But we look at it as a tour that stands alone and our first focus is definitely on winning those games, with the preparation for the Ashes coming on the back of that.'

But there would not merely be conflict between the need for immediate success and the desire for preparation for greater battles ahead. Paul understood his team's role in carrying its sport beyond the current boundaries of comprehension and acceptance, and had mentioned the imperative of playing 'the right kind of cricket'. I asked him to elaborate. 'We always set our sights on playing a really positive and exciting brand of cricket that takes the women's game to the next level and works closely to our vision of inspiring the nation. We're always looking to go that extra yard to be more dynamic, a more powerful type of game.'

That correct 'brand' of cricket was considered so important that, upon return from New Zealand, the girls would have several meetings at which they were invited, or rather instructed, to create their own definitions of what it meant. Paul saw such responsibility as 'a great opportunity' for him and his team rather than any kind of burden. 'We can create something really special here and lead the global women's game. I see it as a chance to really excite people around the world.'

When I mentioned those comments to Shaw's immediate boss, Clare Connor, she looked pleased. 'I feel that really strongly and it is interesting that Paul does as a coach,' she said. 'I chair the ICC women's committee so I do feel our wider responsibility. I am so well supported here at the ECB and the women's game is so well supported that I do feel we have a responsibility to try to take things forward.'