

PRE-DEPARTURE MESSAGE:

Friday 11th February

I am delighted, after such a long absence (just over two years), to be returning to Nepal to continue our fantastic programme of work supporting grassroots cricket development with a focus on gender equity. Funded by the MCC Foundation and supported by brilliant partners Cricket Without Boundaries and the Nepal Cricket Foundation, we will work to kick start the project again and check in on progress since we were last in the country.

What has been so brilliant to see over the past couple of tricky years is that the foundations of our work have remained strong. With a focus on engaging young women and girls in cricket and using the sport as a powerful tool in challenging social norms, I have been heartened to see our local team continue to engage and support young people in Biratnagar (our original project site).

Our project over the next month will take us back to Biratnagar to build on our successes and will also see us scale to two new regions; Rajbiraj in Madhesh Province and to Dhankuta, a hill town a few hours north of Biratnagar.

The team and I are itching to get started and we look forward to sharing updates on this blog over the coming weeks.

Angus Berry - Connecting Clubs International

A BUSY FIRST 5 DAYS:

Friday 18th February

With the team landing safely in Kathmandu on Saturday 12th February we got stuck straight into work with a number of meetings designed to strengthen our relationships with key stakeholders in Nepal. We were delighted to meet with the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) where we outlined our work to the President of CAN. He was thrilled to hear about the progress we've made in Biratnagar to strengthen grassroots cricket and was keen to understand how we can work together for all of Nepal.

Following a quick flight to Biratnagar, we were able to start engaging with the local coaches and communities with which we have worked since the project's inception. Hitting the road again, we visited the first of our new project sites, Rajbiraj in Province Number 2. A few hours West of Biratnagar in Rajbiraj we will again be working on developing grassroots cricket with a focus on women and girls.

Back in Biratnagar, we were delighted to be able to spend time with 16 young female players who are receiving scholarships with support from MCC Foundation. This will enable them to train on a regular basis and access funding for equipment and travel costs, without which they would not be able to play the game that they love!

A very early start on Thursday 17th saw us climb into the hills for the first time as we moved to our second new project site, Dhankuta. Now known as the "Avocado Capital of Nepal", Dhankuta is a stunning location to be coaching cricket and developing our programme. We have linked up with the local cricket team to understand how we can support them to grow the game and to use the power of sport to make a difference.

A special shout out to Bat for a Chance for its support in providing equipment to our Nepal project. The donated kit is being used in schools across Dhankuta and igniting the passion for cricket.

I have written this just after a session with 220 school children, just under 100 of which were girls playing the game for the very first time!



FROM THE HILLS OF DHANKUTA TO THE TERAI REGION

Tuesday 22nd February

Since our last update we have made the journey back south to the Terai region of Nepal, settling into Rajbiraj in Madhesh Province. I am very pleased to report that the team is as enthusiastic and hard working as ever, seeking out any and every opportunity to further showcase and support grassroots cricket in Nepal.

In Rajbiraj, we have three main focuses; the first is to expand our schools programme to introduce cricket to more and more people. The second is to support the growth of women's cricket in the Province and we are working with the local cricket association to run a camp for promising young talent. Finally, we will work with coaches from across the Province to create the next generation of coaching talent that will drive growth long after we have left.

In total we have worked with 946 people across 18 sessions. 56% of those participants have been girls, many playing the game for the very first time. Our partner, Cricket Without Boundaries, and its reps Lee Booth and Sara Begg have taken their incredible coaching prowess and techniques to all of our sessions. They are able to engage people across all levels and this is shown no more so than in our Province talent camp.

42 women and girls from across the Province have been working for the past four days to enhance their skills, learning from our ECB coaches, and also work with our gender equality component of the project. They have brought enthusiasm to Rajbiraj with a great deal of talent on show. I would not be surprised to see one of the girls from this camp playing in the national team in the future!

A special shoutout to the founder of our local implementing partner, Avi Shrestha, without whose tireless work our progress would not be possible. We are always pushing each other to make the best impact we can across Nepal and we have been delighted to work with such passionate and talented people throughout our visit.

A final word on a fantastic success story from our project. Nameta, one of our community coaches in Biratnagar and a breakout star of the project is currently competing in the National Mayor's cup tournament in Kathmandu. She will be lining up alongside the current captain of Nepal and we will all be supporting her loudly. Go well Nameta!