

From Cheshire to The Hundred – An Unforgettable Development Experience at Headingley

When I enrolled on the ECB Umpire Course earlier this year, I never imagined that just a few months later I'd be standing at Headingley, learning from some of the country's leading cricket officials during The Hundred.

Thanks to the ECB Hundred Rising programme and the incredible support of Cheshire ACO, I was fortunate enough to spend an unforgettable day behind the scenes at one of England's premier cricket competitions. It was an experience that has inspired me even more to continue developing as an umpire.

From the moment we arrived, it was clear that this wasn't simply about watching cricket; it was about understanding what it really takes to officiate at the highest level.

Our day began with an introduction from Gareth, who made everyone feel incredibly welcome and ensured we made the most of every opportunity throughout the day. We were then introduced to onfield umpires Gabi and Naeem, who shared fascinating insights into their pre-match preparation, decision-making, teamwork and communication. Listening to how they approach each game reinforced just how much preparation goes into elite officiating long before the first ball is bowled.

One of the highlights of the day was spending time with Rob, the TV Umpire, who explained how television decisions are reviewed, how communication works between the on-field umpires and the TV umpire and the importance of staying calm and accurate under pressure. It was a fascinating glimpse into an area of officiating that most people never get to experience.

We also had the privilege of meeting Hassan, the Fourth Umpire, and Phil, the Match Referee, who talked us through their responsibilities before and during the match. Walking onto the field before play, observing the pitch and wicket inspections, discussing match-day preparations and even learning about the technology behind the LED bails, that illuminate when the wicket is put down, made the whole experience feel incredibly special.

As cricket fans, there was another unforgettable element to the day.

Watching some of the world's finest players preparing just metres away from us was a surreal experience. During the women's fixture, we saw international stars including Smriti Mandhana, Deepti Sharma, Richa Ghosh, Kate Cross, Sophie Ecclestone and many more going through their preparations before taking to the field.

Following the women's match, we had the opportunity to meet the officials for the men's fixture, who were equally generous with their time and knowledge. They shared stories from their own officiating journeys, practical advice on progressing through the pathway and invaluable tips that I will certainly carry forward throughout my own development.

As an added bonus, we were invited to stay and enjoy the evening's men's match. Watching world-class players such as Mitch Marsh, Ryan Rickelton, Harry Brook, Jos Buttler, Heinrich Klaasen, Aiden Markram and many others in such a fantastic atmosphere was the perfect way to end an already memorable day. Receiving an official Hundred match jersey was another wonderful surprise and a fantastic keepsake from the experience.

However, there was one moment that I'll never forget.

At the end of the women's match, after Manchester Super Giants secured victory with a six from Smriti Mandhana, one of the match officials walked over and handed me the actual match ball that had finished the game.

As someone who has only recently started this umpiring journey, receiving that ball meant far more than I can put into words. It has become one of my most treasured cricketing souvenirs and will always remind me of a day that strengthened my passion for officiating.

Looking back, what impressed me most wasn't just the cricket itself, it was the professionalism, teamwork, humility and willingness of every official to share their knowledge with developing umpires. Every conversation became a learning opportunity and every part of the day reinforced how much there is to learn within our game.

Having completed my M4 observation this season, this experience has given me even greater motivation to continue progressing through the ECB umpiring pathway. My goal is to keep learning, continue developing and step by step, work towards the next levels of officiating.

Most importantly, I'd like to express my sincere thanks to Cheshire ACO.

This season has genuinely been one of the highlights of my cricketing journey. The excellent CPD sessions delivered by Inge, the encouragement and support from Barrie, the leadership of Martin, the guidance from Ian Greensmith, Ian Goldstone, AJ and the welcoming nature of the wider Cheshire ACO community have all played a significant role in my development. As someone relatively new to umpiring, I've always felt encouraged, supported and inspired to keep improving. Without that foundation, opportunities like the Hundred Rising programme simply wouldn't have been possible.

I'd also like to thank Michael Grossett, Gareth Isaac, the entire ECB officiating team and The Hundred for creating such a fantastic development opportunity. The passion everyone showed for helping the next generation of officials was genuinely inspiring.

To anyone considering taking up umpiring or applying for opportunities like this in the future, my advice would be simple: go for it. Every match teaches you something new, every conversation helps you improve, and you never know where the journey might take you.

This experience has only strengthened my love for officiating and I can't wait to continue learning and progressing through the game.

Debayan Dey
Cheshire Association of Cricket Officials

"Every match teaches you something new and every experience is another opportunity to grow as an official."



