



# THE SUPPORT NETWORK

**Attracting more female coaches to cricket is vital for the game, and the advice from one emerging village club is simple: give them your support.**

**Buried in deepest Buckinghamshire, Dinton CC has a history of girls' cricket similar to that of many small clubs: flashes of success thanks to enthusiastic parents and strong groups of friends.**

Now home to a growing, organised girl's section, they've recognised that female coaches bring something distinctive, valuable and worth investing in.

Dinton's Briony Brock, Hannah Fisher and Mike Sutliff took time out from filming for All Stars Cricket to speak to ECB Coach Development Manager, Martyn Kiel.

Briony is in her early 20s, a lapsed player returning to volunteer as a coach with the budding girls' section. She had no coaching experience when she came back to Dinton, but she had something impossible to teach: an understanding of why playing cricket as a young girl is a unique experience.

'There are inherent feelings about gender that are tough to hear. For example when I ask a girl if they want to bat, they say "oh ok, but I'm rubbish," which is exactly what I would have said at that age!

'I know those underlying feelings are in me and it's a battle to generate the confidence I need to overcome all that. Men and boys tend to be better at projecting confidence so it's a challenge to guide girls into being confident in that way.

'I was on a coaching course recently and there were lots of comments like, "so is it the girls' section you coach?" That kind of attitude is clearly frustrating but it's nice at Dinton because people aren't like that. They understand the importance of exposing kids to mixed cricket.'

Hannah, another young coach at Dinton, recalls similar frustrations but maintains that cutting through that is a battle worth taking on.



**Dinton CC coaches Briony Brock (left), Hannah Fisher and Mike Sutliff**

'I find it challenging when some of the boys I coach don't want to listen because I'm a girl; they seem to find it harder respecting a female coach. That's a real challenge because you want to change that perspective but it's obviously set-in. Having support from other coaches is important, and for the boys to see the performances of female cricketers is a big step.'

From the point of view of Mike, Dinton's junior co-ordinator, having young female coaches like Hannah and Briony is important for generating an atmosphere that encourages young players of all kinds to join the club.

'Players coming to cricket should be seeing the potential of girls. I want my son to recognise that girls can be incredible players. The traditional image of the men playing and women making the tea is horribly outdated.

'If we're going to create a true family atmosphere here then everyone needs to participate. I think it's really important to have role models, people like Hannah and Briony who are young adults, who provide a great model: they are enthusiastic, they invest time.

'They offer elements of personal development that most experienced cricketers can't, things like confidence and empathy with teammates. They have a unique skill set that we can't do without.'

Once clubs have created an environment to bring in female coaches, what can we do to make the most of them?

'We can support, encourage, value them, give them access to the coaching courses and help them to be the best coach they can be. That doesn't mean coaching at county level - there's a perception that a good coach must coach elite squads. That's not true.

'The coach that gives a 15-year-old the confidence to stay in the game is of real value, as is the one who can instill a love for the game in the 12-year-old who is struggling to find their place in the world. That's the kind of thing Hannah and Briony are far more successful at than a failed county pro.

'Clubs need to be flexible, to understand what else will be going on in their world, to provide an environment where people want to spend time. A place their friends will want to come to. We should always be open to discussions about other things they may want to experience - travel perhaps, or coaching a different sport.

'We can't just rely on who we've got now either. We can be looking at our 14-year-olds and offering them opportunities to work towards coaching, creating a sustainable club where we are building young coaches and young role models.'