



“CRICKET BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER”

John Stern hears how MCC are backing a project to bring sport, including cricket, to a South African township

Training places: one youngster perfects the cover drive as others train at Ukhanyo Primary School; (right) Vince van der Bijl with PE teacher Nceba Jonas; (below, l-r) off to play, sprint training and bowling tips from Vince

Middlesex supporters of a certain age still have fond memories of Vince van der Bijl’s single stellar season of county cricket in 1980 that helped deliver a Championship and Gillette Cup double.

Now, 37 years later, van der Bijl’s connection with Lord’s is still going strong to help deliver a much greater glory than sporting silverware.

The former pace bowler is heading up a project to transform the lives of young people in the township of Masiphumelele, an hour’s drive south of Cape Town, near the picturesque coastal town of Fish Hoek.

Masiphumelele, whose population has grown from 8,000 to 45,000 since 1990, is severely disadvantaged, with poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, crime, drugs and gangs. It has no police station and it’s estimated around 30-40% of the community are affected by HIV/AIDS.

Ukhanyo Primary School is the only primary school. Built for 500 pupils, it now accommodates 1,860. Organised sport is limited due to lack of staff and facilities that amount to no more than a single netball court and a short sprint track.

The school’s one PE teacher, Nceba Jonas, teaches eight PE lessons a day to classes of 43; each pupil has one PE lesson a week.

Van der Bijl, 69, who was born in the wealthy Cape Town suburb of Rondebosch, retired to Fish Hoek in 2015, having finished a seven-year stint in Dubai as ICC umpires and referees manager.

A chance conversation with Brad Bing, a former Western Province cricketer who founded

the charity, Sporting Chance, led him to Ukhanyo Primary School.

“I was enchanted,” says van der Bijl. “These children are absolutely flawless – they look at the world in such a wonderful way. I felt we needed to do something.”

Van der Bijl had been invited to sit on the MCC’s World Cricket Committee, but was unable to attend his first meeting in July 2015 as he was recovering from skin and blood cancer (“I was man down,” he says casually).

But when he was fit enough to attend, in 2016, he made a proposal to Derek Brewer, MCC’s chief and executive secretary, that MCC consider backing the project to bring sport to Ukhanyo Primary School.

MCC has agreed to donate £50,000 over three years to kick-start the project, which will provide sporting facilities and coaching to the school. The Club’s involvement follows their support of similar community-

based schemes in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

After three years, the project must be self-sustaining, through fund-raising and the strong and successful partnership with the

NGO Masicorp, which has been dedicated solely to the well-being of Masiphumelele since its foundation in 1999.

“I am setting up an MCC Masi 750 Club,” explains van der Bijl. “We live in this amazing country of incredible gifts and opportunities but great hardship and inequality. Big companies are already sucked dry of money they give to disadvantaged communities. This club is designed to reach the middle class who we are asking to give R100 (£6) or R200 a month ad



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Third Test starts 27 July

England v West Indies
Test Series, 17 Aug – 11 Sept
Twenty20, 16 Sept
ODI Series, 19–29 Sept



ICC Women's World Cup
24 June – 23 July



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infinitum. By the second year I'm hoping to raise about R1m a year via this method. That will allow this project to be sustainable."

There are currently no facilities for cricket but van der Bijl's goal is for the school to develop a team that ultimately can host home matches and compete in tournaments. The school has a few bats, but no pads or gloves.

There is a tangential sporting issue at play here, namely the long-term sustainability of cricket, traditionally a sport from which black people were excluded in South Africa. This feeds into the need for greater integration, trust and understanding between the wealthy minority white population and the still largely impoverished black communities.

"This project is not about producing Proteas and Springboks – even though we'd love to," says van der Bijl. "It's about giving the kids a healthy lifestyle away from gangs and drugs. If I was a cellist I'd be using the cello as a vehicle to do something similar. Cricket is my vehicle and I'm very



Bok to school: the kids at Ukhanyo enjoying tag rugby – but on rough ground

grateful to MCC for giving us this boost.

"My vision is to involve the wealthier residents in Fish Hoek with Masiphumelele, so there's integration. This is what cricket does – it brings people together."

The MCC Masiphumelele project will be formally launched at Ukhanyo Primary School on 22 August, by which time three artificial nets will have been constructed, with girls' cricket introduced for the first time.

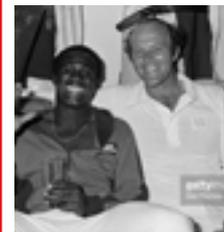
"You can't change the world," adds van der Bijl, "but you can change the environment you live

in and MCC had the vision to understand what influence they can have. Hopefully we can embolden the kids at Ukhanyo and get their parents more involved. All of us have to do this. This is one seed – and hopefully people are scattering them all over the country."

The township was initially known as Site 5 when it was set up in the 1980s. Residents renamed it Masiphumelele, which, in Xhosa, the language spoken by the majority, means "let us succeed". With MCC's help, hopefully they can. ●

BOWLED OVER

How Vince van der Bijl landed at Lord's – and learned about yorkers and life



In 1980, Middlesex were assuming their star fast bowler, Wayne Daniel, would be picked on West Indies' tour of England, so they recruited a 32-year-old South African, Vincent van der Bijl, to replace him.

When Daniel didn't make the tour, Middlesex suddenly had an unbeatable combination on their hands: van der Bijl took 85 Championship wickets at 14.72, Daniel 67 at 21.70. Forty-nine of van der Bijl's 85 wickets were bowled or lbw and Middlesex accrued 80 out of a possible 88 bowling bonus points through the season.

Van der Bijl was not a professional cricketer and had just joined the paper company Wiggins Teape. He had already turned down an approach from Glamorgan but it emerged that his new boss,

Derek Smith, was a Middlesex supporter. Permission for six months' leave was sought and granted and the platform laid for one of the greatest single-season performances in county cricket history.

"We had a magical time," remembers van der Bijl. "My wife Bev and I brought our young daughters over and although they went to school in London, the headmaster allowed us to take them all over the country. He viewed it as a great education. That was the privilege of playing cricket; it was not just the playing itself.

"I learned so much about everything, including my bowling. Anyone can bowl an away-swing, but I honed my skills – I really learned how to bowl a yorker for example – because I was playing so much and with and against so many different people, who just lived for cricket, and loved to talk the game. I absorbed so much. I went back to South Africa and had the very best season of my career."

