



Batting for the Borough

Celebrating Cricket in our Community

Cricket is currently enjoying something of a revival in popularity among young people, schools and communities across the UK. Matt Dwyer, Director of Participation and Growth at England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) recently stated that 'cricket is uniquely placed to enrich the lives of young people and has the ability to inspire kids in our communities in a way like no other'.

The ECB in conjunction with the charity, 'Chance to Shine', have pledged that 'from October 2017, the ECB will double its annual donation to the children's cricket charity from £1.25 million to at least £2.5 million to expand and enhance its activity in primary schools across England and Wales.'

Merton's own AJ Coaching Cricket Academy (founded by Ali Jaffer, former Karachi Whites batsman and first class cricketer) welcomes this investment and adds: 'During the last decade the way that we coach and educate our children through sport

has undergone a huge transformation. Education and sports alumni have observed that there is far more to being involved in a team sport like cricket than meets the eye. Competitive sports can play a vital role in the education and personal development of young people. Cricket is special because it teaches leadership, teamwork and discipline. It also promotes respect and is wholly inclusive, drawing together people from all cultures and backgrounds.'

This year has been an especially exciting time for Junior Cricket in Merton with AJ Coaching Cricket Academy having been accepted to play in the North East and Central Surrey Cricket Colts league (NEC) this summer. The Academy has fielded three teams with age groups under 8's, under 9's and under 11's, all of whom have enjoyed considerable success not just in terms of match wins but also in terms of building confidence and self esteem.

Director and Founder, Ali Jaffer continues:

'We are really excited about this new development. We want children at the Academy to have the opportunity to receive quality cricket coaching and play league cricket so that they can progress further and have a sense of belonging within the borough of Merton and ultimately, who knows, go on to play for the county or even their country. We will focus on young players at grassroots level and will always strive to encourage a wide range of abilities to come and play the sport irrespective of social or educational background.'

'As part of our commitment to celebrate the resurgence of cricket within our local community, AJ Coaching Cricket Academy will be hosting a series of events including the recent visit of Simon Jones (an integral member in England's triumphant Ashes team in 2005 - Jones' pace and reverse-swing carried him to 18 wickets at 21 in four Tests!) to engage and empower Merton's aspiring young cricketers.'

The Summer is here and after the turmoil and tragedy of recent events in London and elsewhere, let's celebrate the civility and social cohesion that cricket naturally engenders.

Please visit ajcoaching.co.uk to find out more