



'HOW I BUILD MY BODY'

Kate CROSS



my sister was the wicket keeper, which explains how I became a bowler. I was always at my brother's local cricket club, too. From there, my story is a simple one of being in the right place at the right time, surrounded by the right people.

'I always wanted to play with the boys, and I was lucky that my brother's team let me in to play for the under-11s at nine-years-old. Politics came into play as I grew older and began challenging for a place on the senior team, mainly because there'd never been a girl playing for a first team in our league. But the Lancashire women's cricket set-up was quite well established, and I made my senior debut for them at 13-years-old which is quite ludicrous really.

'Although I was picked for the England Academy at the age of 16 and aspired to play for England, cricket was still just a hobby while I studied psychology at university, mainly because playing sport professionally wasn't a career option for women at the time. By the time I graduated, I'd developed a love/hate relationship with cricket, and I decided if I didn't do well during the next season playing at county level, I'd leave. As it happened, I had a great season, finally got picked to play for

MEET THE ELITE

Kate Cross is an England cricketer who plays domestically for North West Thunder. A fast bowler, she was the first female to be accepted into the Lancashire Academy in 2006 and was one of 18 women to be awarded the first professional contracts by the England Cricket Board in 2014, after helping England to win and retain the Ashes in the same year.

MY JOURNEY

'I grew up in a hugely sporty family - dad was a professional footballer, my older sister trialled for England netball, and my older brother played cricket professionally - and we were always playing cricket in the back garden. My brother was an opening batter by trade and

England and suddenly there were professional contracts on the table, so I became a full-time cricketer, making my England debut at the age of 23. My cricket journey has involved breaking down many barriers, but I did those things not because I wanted to be the first woman to do them, but because I loved cricket and wanted to play as much as much as possible.'

TRAINING

'Cricket's a strange sport in that you don't get fit from playing it, but you must be fit to play. I train with Lancashire at Old Trafford six days a week, with a more structured routine in the winter and a greater focus on performance and preparation for matches in the summer. That said, the structure of my week is fairly consistent throughout the year, with three strength sessions a week, two or three conditioning sessions (either a bike or run), and a couple of speed sessions, in addition to my cricket skills sessions (where I usually bowl three times a week and bat and field at least twice). As a fast

bowler, I need to be able to run at speed, have lots of endurance (I can cover up to 14km in a few hours of play), and have excellent core strength. The action of fast bowling involves a high risk of injury - especially in the back and around the intercostal muscles - so strength training is crucial for keeping my bones dense enough to withstand the impact, as I can experience up to seven times my bodyweight through my knees and ankles. I have three very different strength training sessions, but they all interlink to help me get into bowling positions. The first covers general strength with back squats, single leg exercise like lunges, a push and a pull, and some core work; my second session is more bowling-specific, with lots of isometric holds to help prepare my muscles and tendons for the positions I'll get into while bowling. My third session is called a "priming" session, which I do before a game to fire up all the muscles I'll use with more explosive, powerful and dynamic movements.'

NUTRITION

'Back when I was going through some of my worst times with my mental health, food became my crutch and I used it to either punish or reward myself. It wasn't until I started working really hard on my mental health, which coincided with starting to work with the most incredible nutritionist, that my relationship with food

completely changed for the better. She flipped my mentality by teaching me the real basics, such as knowing which foods are good for my body and which aren't and how to make healthier choices. Now, I fuel my body for its purpose as an athlete, and I get to eat a lot more food which is amazing. Eating well has helped me lift heavier, run further and faster, and be a better cricketer, so I feel more confident. In fact, it's completely changed my life.'

'My greatest achievement...'

'Five years ago, my career highlights would have focused heavily on the wins and the accolades, but now, I think about all the amazing opportunities I've been given through cricket, from travelling to incredible places and working with different communities, to being able to talk openly and honestly about mental health and some of the difficult parts of my life I've gone through. Talking about my journey and seeing how it has resonated with others is bigger than sport and bigger than anything I thought I'd be able to achieve as a professional cricketer. That said, it's a real goal of mine to get another Ashes series under my belt. We've got a big Ashes series happening this summer and we've been marketed alongside the men's team for the first time, already selling more than 65,000 tickets. The way women's sport is moving - and the way women's cricket has developed - it feels like there's opportunities to be had just with how we showcase ourselves. We haven't won the Ashes for a while, but we're on the hunt for trophies now and really want to try and win the Ashes back. There's a lot of excitement around it. We just need to deliver.'

Words: Joanna Ebsworth | Photography: the England Cricket Board/ Getty images



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