DRIVING AMBITION

Also by Andrew Strauss

COMING INTO PLAY

TESTING TIMES

WINNING THE ASHES DOWN UNDER

DRIVING AMBITION

My Autobiography

Andrew Strauss

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For Ruth, Sam and Luca

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a book is not unlike playing cricket. As an author you need to show a fair amount of discipline to get a book finished, just as a cricketer needs to spend hours experimenting and honing a technique. More importantly, to be successful, any cricketer needs a strong support network, from coaches and team-mates right the way through to an understanding family, and an author is no different.

Many thanks have to go to everyone at Hodder, especially Roddy Bloomfield, for the gentle prodding, advice and persuasion they have given me along the way. It was certainly needed.

Given that I have had the opportunity to look back at my formative years while compiling the book, it would be remiss of me not to thank my parents for all the help, advice, nurturing and taxiing they bestowed upon me over so many years. They have lived and breathed every moment of my career, almost certainly going through more anguish and stress than I ever did.

I am also immensely grateful for the endless hours put in by the many coaches who worked with me over my career. Philip Spray, Andy Wagner and latterly Duncan Fletcher and Andy Flower deserve particular mention.

For anyone who is fortunate enough to play international cricket, team-mates become something of a surrogate family during the many weeks away on tour. I have been particularly

fortunate to share a dressing room with not only some fantastic players, perhaps some of England's finest ever, but more importantly some great blokes. They have all played a positive role of some sort in forming my career.

Last, and certainly not least, I would like to mention Ruth, my wife. Luckily, neither she nor I had any idea just how difficult it would be to combine the job of an international cricketer with a 'normal' family life. It takes a special person to deal with all the ups and downs and significant commitment required to be a successful cricketer. She has been a fantastic source of help, advice, solace and sympathy, while all the time having to put up with the considerable needs of our two young boys, Sam and Luca. Hopefully I will be able to share some of that burden now that I have retired, and finally finished the book!

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OPENING UP

On an isolated farm in the rugged, bleak highlands of the Orange Free State, a young midwife is tenderly looking after her baby when she hears a knock on the door. She is immediately nervous. Her country is at war with the British, her husband has been captured and sent to Ceylon as a POW, and there are reports of women and children being rounded up by British soldiers to be taken into holding camps. Their farms are usually then scorched to the ground to ensure that the guerrilla forces combating the British are unable to replenish supplies.

She hesitantly opens the door. Immediately her worst fears are confirmed. A young British officer stands in front of her. He announces curtly that she is to pack up any belongings that she can carry and prepare to be moved out of her farm the next morning. She has until then to get things in order.

As soon as she closes the door, a feeling of panic rises within her. What should she do? There have been rumours that the conditions in the camps are harsh and that food is in short supply. The alternative, though, seems just as unappealing. She could load up her horse and cart, take her young baby and attempt to make the journey to a town thirty miles away, where there are friendly faces. However, it is getting dark and,

in the high altitude of the veldt, temperatures can easily drop to minus 5 degrees centigrade. It is a long shot, to say the least.

She looks at her young son, barely two months old, and shudders at the thought of him in a camp, completely at the mercy of his captors. She makes her decision. She is going to risk the night-time journey.

She rushes to gather as much clothing as possible and proceeds to strap the young boy to her body. She goes to the stables to ready the horse and pack the cart, and within an hour she sets off from her farm in the middle of nowhere. She will have to navigate by the stars, hoping all the time not to be disturbed by British patrols. She is risking her life, and that of her young son, in the hope of remaining free.

I often wonder what would have happened if that young woman had decided against making such a difficult journey. She was my great-grandmother and the young son in her arms was my grandfather on my father's side. Over the course of the next two years, more than 26,000 women and children were to perish in those holding camps, as malnutrition and disease swept through them. It is very likely that neither she nor my grandfather would have survived. It would have spelled the end for this particular line of the Strauss family.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, after such a bitter conflict, the relationship between the British settlers in South Africa and the Afrikaners has never been an easy one. There has been too much blood, too much conflict. I find it very surprising, therefore, that my grandfather, who was brought up for long

periods solely by his mother while her husband was in exile in Sri Lanka and St Helena, would choose to marry an Englishwoman. I am certainly not sure what his father, who had spent the majority of his life fighting the British, would have made of it. Nevertheless, that is what my grandfather did. My grandmother's family had come from Kent to manage a sugar estate in South Africa and she met my grandfather when she started working for the bank in Durban of which he was the manager.

Somewhat bizarrely, as it was really quite rare, my mother's family was also a mixture of English and Afrikaner. Her mother's family was of Scottish and German descent, an interesting combination, to say the least, and they had decided to bring up their children at English schools and with English customs. Her father's family, however, had sailed to South Africa in the mid-seventeenth century, probably from France, and had become as Afrikaans as you could get. The surname Botha, somewhat akin to the English name Smith, gives you an appreciation of his lineage.

I suppose my family were mongrels at a time when tensions between the English and Afrikaners remained high. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, political debates in South Africa centred on two main parties. The Nationalists, who were to introduce apartheid to South Africa, represented the interests of the Afrikaans speakers, whereas the United Party espoused more moderate, Anglophile politics. There were great debates in parliament and on the streets about where the country was heading, but for the majority of white South Africans, that was where their political lives ended. The plight

of the majority native black population was not a subject for serious discussion.

My parents met, as I suppose many couples did in those times, through an introduction by mutual friends. My mother was training as a teacher, whereas my father, being a few years older, was already making his way in the insurance industry. It might seem strange nowadays, but my father had to buy my mother out of her teacher-training contract in order to get married. Married women were not allowed to work full-time and so choices needed to be made.

They were both keen on their sport. The climate and the physical South African culture meant that sport was encouraged by the family and in schools. Rugby, football and cricket were the games of choice for my father, while my mother concentrated on tennis. I get the impression that neither thought of taking their sport more seriously than playing for club teams and socially, but nonetheless it was very much part of their lives and, by osmosis, the lives of their children.

I came into the world on 2 March 1977 in Johannesburg. Being the youngest of four children, I was almost guaranteed plenty of attention. My three sisters, Gillian, Sandra and Colleen, were eight, six and five respectively, and they were no doubt delighted to have a little baby brother to play with. The novelty soon wore off, but by and large we all got on well. It was, it has to be said, a comfortable upbringing. The house we moved into when I was aged two was spacious and

came complete with tennis court and swimming pool. It probably sounds like a privileged existence, but it was not all that uncommon for white South Africans, who tended to spend most of their time outdoors, to have facilities of that nature.

A South African childhood revolved around three things: school, outdoor activities and holidays within the country. The television channels only came on air at 6 p.m., and the lack of programmes for children, and the fact that the language alternated between English and Afrikaans, meant that television played little part in our lives. Most of the time was spent swimming in the pool, hitting balls on the tennis court and running around in the garden.

The annual trips to the Kruger National Park, the largest wildlife reserve in South Africa, and down the coast in Natal were always highlights. Every time I go back to South Africa and visit the wildlife parks, I have a strange sense of déjà vu. My childhood visits must have indented my soul in some way, and as a result I have developed a real passion for the vast wilderness of the African bush.

My father and mother were both fairly strict. South Africans have a straightforward attitude to most things and they call people out on bad behaviour. Although none of us children could be considered to be truly rebellious, there were plenty of scoldings from my father, in particular, who fulfilled the main role of family disciplinarian.

I remember my first school very well, not least because it was a girls' school. My sisters all attended the junior school of St Andrew's in Johannesburg and for some unknown

reason they allowed boys for the first year of preschool. I was one of a handful, all of whom had sisters at the school. My report from that year highlighted the fact that I was good with balls, but that my concentration tended to wane when it came to handwriting. When you combine that with a report from my swimming teacher that I 'seemed to prefer winning to adopting the correct technique', I think it is quite easy to see that my character was pretty well developed by the age of four.

All in all they were happy days: a comfortable lifestyle, a great climate and plenty of innocent fun, especially when I finally joined a boys' school, St John's, at the age of five. I tended to concentrate on sport when I could, playing football for a local club and doing plenty of swimming at school and at home. We were settled, my father was doing well at his insurance company and we seemed to have the world at our feet.

* * *

On the surface, at least, it seems a somewhat strange decision on the part of my parents to leave the country when I was seven years old. Perhaps they were influenced by their own nomadic childhoods, when they both moved around the country frequently. They no doubt also saw it as the last opportunity to take the family abroad while all the children were relatively young.

While the decision was not driven by the political situation in South Africa, it is true that by the mid-1980s the world's attention was increasingly turning to the policy of apartheid and the minority white population's treatment of the other,

majority, ethnicities. Things were getting fraught, with international sanctions as well as frequent demonstrations putting more pressure on the government to address the concerns of the black population. As is so often the case, though, if you weren't directly involved in it, your life continued pretty much as normal.

My father's job was the practical reason we left South Africa and made the long journey to Melbourne. His company were looking to branch out into the Australian market and my dad was given the opportunity to set things up over there, with the option of coming back to South Africa two years later. For young South Africans, who in those days didn't get the opportunity to travel the world in the way it is possible today, it must have seemed like an opportunity too good to miss.

For most people, the idea of living in Australia sounds like a dream come true: blue skies, barbecues, a relaxed lifestyle and a carefree existence. For us, having come from a way of life that was very similar, Melbourne didn't seem quite as exotic. For starters, the weather was not all it was cracked up to be. Johannesburg surely has one of the best climates in the world: hot, but not unbearably so in the summer, with frequent thunderstorms in the afternoon to freshen things up. The winter is one long stretch of blue skies and no rain, with the temperature remaining at a comfortable 20 degrees centigrade. Melbourne, however, more than lived up to its reputation for having four seasons in one day – with temperatures sometimes swinging between 45 and 10 degrees centigrade. For the first time in our lives, we also had to deal with unpleasant, rainy weather in the winter. I think we all found

it quite hard to adjust to. God only knows what it would have been like if we had gone straight to the UK from South Africa.

Adjust we did, though, and in many ways living in Australia was an adventure. My parents, who were clearly keen to experience as much of the country as possible, took us on trips as far north as the Queensland rainforest, as well as dragging us up the mountains in Northern Victoria for some surprisingly good skiing. I found the transition from South African to Australian school an easy one to make, and even my sisters, who were at a much more awkward phase in their development, approaching teenagehood, seemed to adapt well to the new surroundings.

Our house was not nearly as grand as the one we had left in South Africa, and there were no maids and gardeners to maintain it, but it was nice enough, in a Melbourne suburb called Balwyn North, and there were plenty of sports facilities nearby. By then, as I approached eight, sport was taking up more and more of my life. Being decidedly small relative to my peers, in South Africa I really hadn't had the size or strength to hit cricket or tennis balls with any real consistency, but over in Australia all that began to change.

At school Aussie Rules football was the sport to play. Victoria was the hotbed of the sport and it was every boy's duty to make sure they kept the game alive and flourishing. The game was a little bizarre to me, with its high tackles and punching the ball to pass it being in complete contrast to the rugby that I had watched endlessly in South Africa. My father, who no doubt saw the game as sacrilege to the holy game of rugby,

signed me up to one of the only rugby union clubs in Melbourne and ended up doing the coaching for the team as well. He always took an active interest in my sporting exploits, and it is in Australia that I have my first memories of kicking the ball with him in the garden and practising my cricket shots, trying to emulate Dean Jones or one of the other Aussie cricketers.

Cricket, in truth, played a relatively small part in this sporting paradise. I played for the team at school, but at that age games were few and far between. I have one vague memory of us winning a game with one of my team-mates taking a hat-trick, but I can't remember anything of my own contribution. My strongest memories of the sport came from playing Test Match Cricket, the board game with a little ball-bearing rolling down a chute, to be hit by a batsman controlled by a player flicking a lever. Hours were spent playing Test matches at my house or that of my mate, Christopher. Scoring a fifty or taking a wicket was always accompanied by a wild celebration, copied directly from those we watched on TV from the likes of Allan Border or Bruce Reid.

The time we lived there was neither long enough for us to feel completely at home, nor short enough for it to seem like one big holiday. I think my parents had a much harder time adjusting than the kids did. The change of lifestyle definitely had something to do with it, but another factor was that South Africans were viewed with some suspicion by the Australians. The daily news reports of violent oppression definitely seemed to make an impression on them, and to some extent anyone from South Africa was guilty by association.

* * *

As the end of our time in Melbourne neared, my parents had difficult decisions to make. The straightforward option was to return to the easy lifestyle we had left behind in South Africa. I think by then, though, they had started to become a little concerned about what was happening back there. There were signs that the country might combust as the black majority increasingly flexed their muscles against their white oppressors. The future was far from certain at that time and it would have been a significant risk to go back to South Africa expecting everything to be the same as when we had left. The other option was to sit tight and make Australia our new home.

As my parents were mulling things over, my father was offered another business opportunity. Some of his former colleagues from South Africa were trying to expand their business in the UK and wanted him to come over to help them in their endeavours. Facing a tough choice between staying in a country where they felt like outsiders and going back to a country on the brink of political turmoil, my parents had suddenly been presented with the perfect way out.

There were some logistical difficulties to overcome. My eldest sister, Gillian, was nearing her final school exams and would have to stay in Melbourne for three months longer than the rest of us to complete them, before heading to England to pursue her dream of becoming a vet. My father stayed with her, which left my mother, myself and the two middle sisters, Sandra and Colleen, to forge a path ahead in the UK. We arrived at the end of August 1986, jetlagged and disorientated, and headed out to leafy Buckinghamshire, where we were to start our new life.

My school had already been selected by my parents on a reconnaissance visit several months previously. The headmaster, who was mad about rugby, had been persuaded by my South African lineage and the fact that I had played in Australia to find a place for me, despite having no room on the waiting list. The school was called Caldicott Preparatory School and it sat in forty acres of grounds on the edge of the historic woods of Burnham Beeches.

As its name suggests, it was a genuine prep school. Uniforms had to be smart and hair needed to be cut. Work had to be done diligently and on time. In many ways, it was like going back in time to a bygone age. It was one big institution, full of rules and regulations, but I loved it. For a boy who was becoming increasingly fanatical about sport, the school had everything. A beautifully manicured array of rugby pitches and facilities for basketball, swimming, hockey, athletics, tennis, squash and, of course, cricket. I immersed myself in it all with great gusto.

It was around the time of my ninth birthday that my competitive side really started to reveal itself. I simply had to win at everything. I remember as if it was yesterday the tears of despair that I struggled to hold back if I lost a game of tennis to my sister, Colleen, who was a very accomplished player (and five years older than me). It hurt, and I did not like it. The same went for my new school. I desperately wanted to be the best at everything, even going as far as to demand to be given another chance to audition for the choir when my initial tone-deaf attempt wasn't deemed up to scratch. Fortunately, the school encouraged that competitive

attitude. In academic studies, we were all given a finishing position in each subject at the end of term. I always wanted to be number one and was prepared to go through hours of revising Latin verbs or geographical locations in order to get there.

I am sure that my attitude probably grated on a few people, but I was enthusiastic and tried my hardest at everything. On the sporting field, in particular, I was beginning to show some promise. Despite remaining frustratingly small – one competition I could not win – I quickly established myself in all the teams in my age group. I don't think I was significantly better than anyone else at any sport, but I was pretty good at all of them, including cricket.

In my second year, I was captaining the colts side, combining a bit of dodgy left-arm chinaman bowling with my left-handed batting. By the end of my third year, I had made the school's 1st XI, where I stayed till I left the school three years later. When I look back over the end-of-year reports, I am not entirely sure what I did to merit getting into the 1st XI at such a young age. I certainly never scored all that many runs. Perhaps it was my ability to catch the ball and the lack of a wicketkeeper in the years above, because in my first year I set a record for the most stumpings ever (27), thanks to an excellent leg-spin bowler called Richard Toothill.

The cricket coach was my geography teacher, a man by the name of Philip Spray. He had been a decent cricketer himself and was very passionate about the game, while never one to suffer fools gladly. He obviously saw something in me and persisted in making sure that I practised proper shots, rather

than just trying to whack the ball around everywhere. I followed his advice, perhaps through fear of disobeying him, and although I could never hit the ball off the square, a solid cricketing technique was eventually developed.

Caldicott, though, was mainly a rugby school. It held the distinction of winning the national prep school sevens tournament, played at Rosslyn Park, more than any other school, and everyone was proud of this record. The headmaster, Peter Wright, was particularly keen to make sure that we kept that record in place and even arranged an exchange scheme with a school in Cape Town called Bishops, in which Caldicott's best rugby players were swapped with the best from Bishops, ostensibly to broaden their education, but in fact to strengthen the rugby team.

Despite my size, I developed into a pretty good fly-half and captained the side in my last year. Unfortunately, we were unable to keep up the tradition of winning the national sevens tournament, coming unstuck in the final against Millfield. I still remember the kick from our full back that was snaffled up by their tearaway winger, who ran in the try to break all our hearts. So near yet so far.

My father, who had rugby running through his veins, loved coming to watch the games at the weekend alongside my mother. He was a passionate supporter and would dissect the whole game afterwards, discussing with me where it had been won and lost, the poor kicks, missed tackles and so on. When it came to cricket, however, he was a less comfortable spectator. Throughout my time at Caldicott, and more so at Radley College later, he would find a private place to watch me

batting, such as a clump of trees or somewhere on the far side of the ground. I am not sure if he just got nervous or simply didn't want to be disturbed by the incessant chatter of other parents, but that habit remained with him throughout my career. God knows how he dealt with it during a Test match.

Two incidents stick firmly in my mind about my time at Caldicott. First, when I was eleven I failed to make the Caldicott team for an athletics multi-event tournament because I no-jumped three times in the trial. Though I was far better than my replacement, the athletics coach ignored my pleas to give me one more chance and named the team without me in it. It was a serious blow to my ego, as I wasn't used to being left out of teams. (Perhaps the athletics coach was trying to teach me a lesson.) I then turned up to watch my team-mates in the competition, which was being held in London, only to find that one of the senior team had not shown up. I was hurriedly put in the Under-13s team and managed to come stone last in every event. It was humiliating beyond compare, and although the parents all congratulated me for 'giving it a go', I had experienced my worst nightmare. Losing and me didn't go together very well.

The other, far worse, moment, had to do with boarding. The rules of the school stipulated that at the age of eleven, boarding became compulsory. This was meant to prepare the pupils for life at the senior public school, to which the majority of boys graduated. I was fully aware of the fact and was even looking forward to the 'freedom'. When the moment came, however, I found it extremely hard. My parents lived less than three miles

away from the school and I saw them at the end of each week, but they might as well have been on the other side of the world. Plenty of tears were shed in the dormitory over those first few months as I came to terms with living away from home for the first time.

It is quite surprising that I reacted in this way, as two of my sisters had been boarding for a few years and my eldest sister was away at university. Our house had gone from being a very vibrant place, full of energy, fun and sibling rivalry, to somewhere much quieter. In effect, I was an only child during the school term, with just my mum and dad and our faithful dog Zoe for company. I am sure this was one of the reasons that boarding school made sense for my parents – it would allow me to be with friends – but it still took some getting used to.

That is not to say that I didn't enjoy my time at Caldicott immensely. It was a closeted world, but it suited me down to the ground. I loved the sport, I loved the close friendships I made there, and many of life's important lessons concerning respect, treating others fairly, operating as a team and having manners were drilled into me there on a daily basis.

My holidays around this time consisted of either a trip back to South Africa to visit relatives or whatever my exasperated mother could come up with to get me out of the house. For the most part, my sisters were away, supplementing their student loans with holiday jobs, usually involving working in pubs. My father, as always, was working hard, commuting from Beaconsfield to Croydon, where his business was based. He

was gone by seven in the morning and was rarely home before the corresponding time in the evening. Great swathes of time, therefore, were spent at home with my mother.

I have never been at my best with nothing to do. Inactivity usually led to lethargy and by the time I reached teenagehood, sleeping until noon was not out of the question. My mum, therefore, went out of her way to make sure I was as occupied as possible. Occasionally, she took me with her into work, teaching disabled adults in Maidenhead, but mainly she arranged for me to play sport. That meant days spent at the tennis club with other kids who had similarly been dumped by their parents, and the pro, a guy called Peter Willetts, became our surrogate guardian for the day. I also gained membership of Burnham Beeches golf club, and with Rob Easton, who had joined the club at the same time as me, I would spend countless hours on the course or on the driving range trying to emulate the swing of Nick Faldo, who was world number one at that stage.

There were plenty of other activities too, such as trips to Alton Towers. What there was little of at that stage was cricket. Until I was fifteen, cricket largely finished at the end of the summer term, in early July. Two and a half months of holiday were spent doing just about every other sport apart from cricket. I am not entirely sure why that was the case – perhaps it was because I was never really a part of a county set-up, or maybe it was because my parents concentrated on club tennis – but, apart from the odd colts tournament for Gerrards Cross CC, my cricketing education stopped on prize-giving day. Not that it really mattered, though, as the cricketing

education I received at my new senior school, Radley College, was first rate.

I arrived at Radley as a young, naive and rather small thirteen-year-old and was immediately intimidated by the place. For starters, the boys around me (there were no girls apart from one, who was the daughter of one of the teachers and unsurprisingly popular) were more young men than boys. They seemed enormous, with broken voices and tree trunks for legs.

The facilities were at once impressive and overwhelming. The school was set in 800 acres of Oxfordshire countryside. Sports pitches extended as far as the eye could see. There was even a nine-hole golf course, as well as some of the best drama and music facilities you could possibly imagine. The school had its own rowing club, young anglers could practise their fly-fishing on 'college pond' and there was even a pack of beagles for those who fancied country sports. All of this was in addition to the extensive main facilities, which were not surprisingly based around academic work and housing for the pupils and teachers.

It was, in short, a huge institution and it had a whole host of rules and regulations. For instance, there were sections of the grass you were not permitted to walk on; there were jobs, or fags, that the first-years had to do on behalf of their boarding houses; and there were academic gowns that had to be worn all day long. We thought nothing of playing cricket in our break times without even bothering to take off our gowns and we

never once worried about how absurd we must have looked to a casual passer-by.

In fact, it seems bizarre now how quickly I came to think of all that as normal. I never really considered how fortunate I was to be at a school adorned with such incredible facilities and opportunities. It was just how it was. That was my school, and that was my life. It was only much later, having spent some time at Middlesex with cricketers from far less affluent backgrounds, that I really started to appreciate my good fortune.

And I genuinely was fortunate. Every hobby or passion was catered for, from opera singing to hovercrafting, with schoolmasters ready to spend endless evenings and weekends running extracurricular activities. At the same time, the boys were all being primed to get the requisite GCSEs and A levels to go to university.

On the rugby field, our coach was Steve Bates, who was scrum-half for Wasps at the time and, in the days before rugby union turned professional, made his living from being a schoolmaster/rugby coach. On the cricketing side, Andy Wagner, who had played cricket for MCC young pros and Somerset, forged an outstanding combination with Bert Robinson, who had been the school cricket pro for over fifty years, since his days of playing for Northamptonshire.

Under their tutelage, my cricket really started to develop. By the time I was in the second year, I was bolstered up to the colts team (in effect, playing for the age group above mine), and by the summer of my third year I found myself in the school 1st XI. That is not to say, however, that I was the real star performer in the school. That label belonged to Robin

Martin-Jenkins, son of the late Christopher, who was in the year above me and was already being talked about as a future England all-rounder. His contributions to the team, with both bat and ball, were often the difference between winning and losing. In fact, I even had some pretty good competition in my own year, with Ben Hutton, who later went on to be my best man and colleague at Middlesex, showing that cricketing talent can indeed run in the genes, from grandfather to grandson.

Although I was not a stand-out like Martin-Jenkins, I made improvements every year, and once I'd managed to get the particularly unpleasant monkey off my back of never having scored a century – against an Australian touring side, at the age of fifteen – I started to come into my own as a cricketer. By this time, with a couple of others from the school, I was starting to represent Oxfordshire Under-19s in the summer holidays, thus extending my cricket season from two months to four months.

When I look back at the cricket I played at school, what surprises me is that I never really dominated. Surely a future England captain should have been head and shoulders above his peers at that level? Certainly the likes of Alastair Cook and Marcus Trescothick were making significant waves before they reached the age of fifteen. I can't really put my finger on why that wasn't the case. Perhaps it was because I was still playing all those other sports, from rugby to golf and everything in between. More likely, though, it came down to motivation. I think that I was always motivated to prove to everyone that I was good enough to deserve to be playing at the level I was selected for, but not beyond that. I wanted to show people that

I was at least as good as my team-mates, but I never looked towards the real stars of my generation, who were donning their county tracksuits, because I didn't really come up against them. In short, I was quite content being a big fish in what was a very small pond, the Radley 1st XI. Maybe I wasn't confident enough in my ability or even bothered enough to push myself harder, but at that stage cricket for me was a recreation, not a future career.

If I have one criticism about my time at Radley, it is that everything was geared to getting good A levels and proceeding along the well-worn path from school to university and then, in many cases, to the City. Pupils who headed into other careers, from music to drama and of course sport, seemed thin on the ground. Also, I was definitely influenced by my parents, who placed great emphasis on attaining the necessary grades to follow in the footsteps of my sisters, who were making their way in their chosen fields of veterinary science, medicine and accountancy. Cricket as a living did not seem to be on the agenda.

At the end of 1995, I left Radley College, after five incredible years, armed with some lifelong friends, many memories and the more than adequate three As and a B at A level. Those qualifications hide the fact that I really didn't work very hard at school. There were too many other things to do, and my attitude was always to do as little as possible, and leave things as late as possible, before attempting my schoolwork.

I am a little embarrassed about it now, as at times both my teachers and my father were forced to rack their brains to find ways of getting me motivated enough to do my work. Academic

ability was never the problem; diligence and application, on the other hand, were more of an issue. At one stage, during the year before my A levels, I was forced to hand a sheet of paper, devised by my father, to the teacher at the end of the lesson, who would in turn attest to the level of my attention over the preceding forty minutes. My friends thought the whole thing hilarious. I definitely did not.

Fortunately, however, I managed to pull it off in the end, and my next destination was independence in the form of an economics degree at Durham University.