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Citation:

Fletcher, T and Piggott, D and North, J (2020) "The 'blazer boys' were getting all the chances": South Asian men's experiences of cricket coaching in England. *Sport in Society*. ISSN 1461-0981 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2020.1799979>

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Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Sport in Society* on 04 August 2020, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17430437.2020.1799979>

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**“The ‘blazer boys’ were getting all the chances”: South Asian men’s experiences of cricket coaching in England**

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**Abstract**

In the United Kingdom, recent research documents an over-representation of White participants, coaches, and decision makers within sporting contexts. In contrast Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups are under-represented at all levels of sport: from players, coaches, and managers in sport governance. Recent research into the experiences of BAME men and women in sports coaching also shows that inclusive sporting environments, including a diverse workforce, are highly motivating for entry into, and progression through, the coaching pathway. However, significant and powerful barriers exist that prevent the progression of BAME individuals into higher level coaching qualifications and job roles. These barriers lead to the privileging of White men and are therefore described as both raced and gendered. This paper is based on a research project commissioned by the England and Wales Cricket Board in 2014 to explore South Asian male players’ and coaches’ experiences of coaching and progression through coaching pathways. We draw on data collected from 33 semi-structured interviews carried out with a sample of male South Asian players and coaches, from two different geographical areas - London and Yorkshire - and from a sample of clubs with different levels of ethnic diversity. Our analysis showed that South Asian players participate in an environment and culture where they are unlikely to engage in coaching and, even when they do, will not feel supported in progressing to higher roles of influence and power.

Key words: Cricket, Coaching, Racism, South Asian, Whiteness

**Introduction**

The success of the England cricket team at the 2019 International Cricket Council (ICC) Men’s World Cup hosted by England and Wales has already stimulated (or restimulated) discussion about the power of sports events to increase interest and participation in the sport. Indeed, in mid-August, 2019, amidst the most recent Ashes contest, and only a month after England triumphed over New Zealand in the World Cup final at Lord’s, the first author received a message from a prominent sports journalist for a leading UK broadsheet newspaper, asking for comment on the potential of the World Cup win and, in particular, the rise of England fast bowler Jofra Archer<sup>1</sup>, on participation among African Caribbean communities in the UK. Cricket, like any sport, has to compete for participants, and the latest figures from Sport England’s Active Lives Survey shows a decline in adults (16+) playing cricket twice a week:

in 2016 this number was 364,600 and by 2019 this had declined further to 292,200 (Sport England, 2020a), almost half of what it was 20 years ago.

In that time, some aspects of the game have developed substantially, while others have been seemingly more resistant to change. Among these changes, globally, we have witnessed growing interest for shorter formats - most notably Twenty20 - and arguably, a declining appetite for Test matches, significantly increased following for the women's game, and the diversification of playing nations, globally. In the UK we have also witnessed a more pronounced commitment to social justice among cricket's administrators and policy makers (discussed below). Not only is this reflected in the work of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and partners, but also through its commercial sponsorship deals, such as the England teams' lead cricket partner, Natwest's, 'Cricket has No Boundaries' campaign, which aimed to showcase and celebrate diversity and inclusion through the lens of cricket.

And, what of that World Cup winning England team? Over the last five years, across all three formats, the starting line-ups have regularly featured two Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)<sup>2</sup> players in Adil Rashid and Moeen Ali, whose family origins are in Pakistan, and since 2019, Jofra Archer - the team's latest star, whose origin is in the West Indies. In recent times, the ECB has proactively used the representation and success of its BAME players as part of its marketing strategies. Moeen Ali in particular, like Monty Panesar before him (Burdsey, 2013; Aldred, 2015), has become somewhat of a cult hero among many White and British South Asian supporters alike (Burdsey, 2015).

The ECB's attempts to reach out to under-represented groups was well illustrated in June 2018 when it partnered with broadcaster Sky to make the second Test of England's series against Pakistan into what they called 'The Participation Test'. During the lunch interval on each day of the Test, Sky showcased some of the ECB's equality and diversity work - initiatives which ranged from shining a spotlight on disability cricket and the women's game, as well as its programmes to encourage more young people into cricket: Chance to Shine, a national charity, which aims to give more young people (mainly those in state schools) access to cricket, and All Stars, the ECB's newest initiative aimed at getting children aged between five and eight into the sport. Of particular interest to us was the launch of the ECB's South Asian Engagement Action Plan (see <https://www.ecb.co.uk/south-asian-action-plan>).

We will explain the South Asian Engagement Action Plan shortly, but to set the scene, this paper focuses in on the experiences of existing and aspiring South Asian cricket coaches as part of the broader agenda of BAME inclusion in cricket, and the analysis of its structures, successes and difficulties. We begin by providing a short overview of current literature into cricket, South Asians and coaching. In subsequent sections we present our data, which highlights how South Asian male cricketers feel marginalised from a 'coaching system' that they feel is both separate and exclusionary.

### **ECB's South Asian Engagement Action Plan**

Before we detail the content of the Action Plan and the positioning of this paper, it is important to place the strategy within historical context. Cricket, like so many other sports, has a well-documented relationship with racial inequality, but legislation pertaining specifically to 'race' and ethnicity is a relatively recent phenomena. The first campaign of note was 'Hit Racism for Six' (1996), which was

established to lobby the ECB to address racism in the game. In response to criticisms from the campaign towards the organisation, the ECB formed a multi-ethnic Racism Study Group (RSG) which was responsible for publishing *Going Forward Together: A Report on Racial Equality in Cricket* (ECB, 1999). The ECB also responded with its 'Clean Bowl Racism' initiative, and subsequently appropriated the title 'Hit Racism for Six'. During the same period as the publication of *Clean Bowl Racism*, the ECB launched its Inner-city Community Cricket Project, amidst much publicity and government support. However, the initiative was dismissed by some on the basis that it promoted the notion of the development of cricket in urban areas as being synonymous with tackling issues of racial inequality, and thus, reconstructed 'old myths that portray the inner cities as black, urban cricketing wastelands' (Miller, 2005: 245). In subsequent years, the ECB has aligned itself much more closely with a number of anti-racism organisations and initiatives, including being signatories to the current Equality Standard for Sport, the ICC's Anti-Discrimination Policy and the Racism Awareness Campaign of the Professional Cricketers' Association.

Indeed, in its most recent strategy document *Inspiring Generations 2020-2024*, the ECB acknowledges how 'we (the ECB) must do more to encourage a broader cross-section of people to engage with cricket and make it more accessible for those who already do' (ECB, 2019: 9). Via six priorities, the ECB proposes to grow and nurture the core; inspire through elite teams; make cricket accessible; engage children and young people; transform women's and girl's cricket; and support communities.

The ECB's South Asian Engagement Action Plan is part of this wider strategy. Spanning five strategic areas (recreational cricket; elite cricket and professional coaching; attendance; media, marketing and communication; administration and culture) and comprising 11 points (Figure 1), the plan aims to create more opportunities for South Asian communities to engage with cricket while building strong(er) relationships between South Asian communities and the ECB, the Counties and individual clubs.

Figure 1: ECB's South Asian Engagement Action Plan (ECB, 2018: pp.12-13)

<b>Strategic area</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Recreational cricket</b>	<i>1. Facilities</i>	Provide access to year-round cricket facilities in urban areas; reducing the challenges of availability, quality and cost.
	<i>2. Formats</i>	Provide the right range of playing opportunities which best reflect the format that people want to play.
	<i>3. Children and schools</i>	Increase cricket provision in the most ethnically diverse primary schools.
	<i>4. Women and girls</i>	Retain, develop and expand the female coaching network to enable the delivery of more women's and girls' cricket.
	<i>5. Talent and identification</i>	Improve the connection between 'non-traditional' cricket environments and the talent pathway.

<b>Elite cricket and professional coaching</b>	6. <i>Talent development and retention</i>	Introduce talent pathway education and support
	7. <i>Financial support</i>	Financially support talented young players where needed.
	8. <i>Elite coaching</i>	Support the development of elite South Asian coaches.
<b>Attendance</b>	9. <i>Match day experience</i>	Optimise the match day experience for South Asian fans, by increasing the cultural awareness of the customer journey.
<b>Media, marketing and communication</b>	10. <i>Integrated media, marketing and communications</i>	Use the right media channels, content and voices to engage with South Asian audiences.
<b>Administration and culture</b>	11. <i>Our people</i>	Increase the diversity of the cricket workforce, improving inclusivity, and creating a cohesive working culture for all.

The plan focuses on ways to use cricket to make a positive difference to/in South Asian communities. Each action has specific targets and a timeframe attributed to it. The short-term actions focus around 10 cities<sup>3</sup> with the largest South Asian population and biggest demand for cricket, and will involve a number of pilots which will be reviewed before the long-term expansion of the action plan nationally. The ECB recognises, the ‘South Asian Engagement Action Plan does not exist in isolation. It represents just one aspect of ECB’s overall ambition to make cricket a game for everyone’ (ibid.). In this paper, we pay particular attention to priority 8 (elite coaching) and relatedly, priorities 5 (talent identification) and 11 (our people).

### **Cricket, South Asians and coaching**

The ECB is keen to engage with South Asian groups to meet its twin strategic aims of raising participation levels and fostering elite development (Ratna, Lawrence and Partington, 2016; ECB, 2018, 2020). The ECB’s strategy to engage with and drive up interest and participation among these groups makes sense. Sport England’s Active Lives Survey shows that, overall, while people from BAME communities are no longer less likely to participate in sport than White Britons, participation by South Asian groups in sport in general is still relatively low (GOV.UK, 2019). But cricket is rather different. Despite only making up approximately 6% of the overall British population, research for the ECB identified that a third of its grassroots playing base and 40% of ticket purchasers for the 2018 ICC Champions Trophy were of South Asian origin (ECB, 2018). Moreover, alongside the thousands who play traditional club cricket every weekend throughout the summer, thousands more play in city-based park leagues and other, more informal formats of the game (Hylton et al., 2015).

The proportion of South Asians playing cricket far outweighs the overall proportion of South Asians in the UK population and thus, for many, will represent a success story of cricket’s inclusivity, meritocracy and egalitarianism. But the research we have been involved in suggests that ethnic diversity at

grassroots level is not necessarily transferring into other aspects of the game, such as coaching. Using information published on the websites of the 18 "First-Class" Counties in England and Wales, for the 2019 season - excluding those registered as overseas - only 30 of 362 male players (8.3%), ten of 106 female players (9.4%) (seven registered to one County), seven out of 118 managers/coaches (5.9%) and nine of 79 male Academy players (11.4%) were from a BAME background. So, compared to a BAME population that represents about 11% of the British population, these figures (excluding those related to coaching) do not immediately appear too serious. However, notwithstanding the clear need to have greater BAME representation at the upper levels of the game and in professional clubs, research has consistently identified that BAME representation on the pitch is only a partial win because their *experiences* of participation can often mask social exclusions and problematic recruitment policies, rendering cultures of inequity invisible and unremarkable (Bradbury, 2018; Burdsey, 2010, 2011; Fletcher, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Fletcher and Spracklen, 2014; Fletcher and Walle, 2015; Fletcher and Swain, 2016; Fletcher and Hylton, 2016; Hylton and Chakrabarty, 2011).

In the UK, recent research documents an over-representation of White participants, coaches, and decision makers within sporting contexts (Bradbury, 2013, 2016, Bradbury et al., 2018; Fletcher and Hylton, 2016; Kilvington, 2019; Rankin-Wright et al., 2019). In contrast, BAME groups are under-represented at all levels of sport: from players, coaches and managers in sport governance. Evidence suggests that 97% of the UK coaching workforce is White, meaning only 3% of individuals who coach in the UK are from BAME backgrounds. This latter percentage decreases further in the context of qualified coaches, where only 1% are from BAME groups (Norman et al., 2018). Further evidence of white privilege is evident in professional sport. In their study of European football for instance, Bradbury et al. (2014) found that only 1% of all senior coaching positions at elite level professional clubs and national teams across Europe are held by minorities. Evidence points to other inequities too whereby 82% of qualified coaches in the UK are men and 92% are able-bodied (McConkey et al., 2019).

Recent research into the experiences of BAME men and women in sports coaching found that inclusive sporting environments, including a diverse workforce, are highly motivating for entry into, and progression in sport (Rankin-Wright et al., 2017, 2019). Evidence from the UK, Europe and Australia and US among others, also suggests that while playing experiences within a sport can be positive as a whole, and entry into coaching fairly smooth, significant and powerful barriers exist that prevent the progression of BAME individuals into higher level coaching qualifications and job roles (Agyemang & DeLorme, 2010; Borland & Bruening, 2010; Bradbury, 2018; Cunningham et al., 2012; Kilvington, 2019; Norman et al., 2014; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017, 2019). Research also describes how coaching can be a difficult profession for BAME groups to progress in due to institutional and individual factors. For example, BAME coaches often lack a social or professional network to support their professional development (Norman and Rankin-Wright, 2018). This is reflected in a lack of mentoring, or opportunities to develop their coaching expertise, as well as inaccessible, infrequent and costly training courses (see Bradbury, 2016). The nature of the coaching appointment process, described by BAME coaches as informal, closed, and lacking transparency, excludes and marginalises many BAME coaches from new opportunities (Rankin-Wright et al., 2019). These networks are described as privileging White men and are therefore, described as both raced and gendered (ibid.). Borland and Bruening's (2010) examination of the underrepresentation of Black females as head coaches in collegiate basketball adopts an intersectional approach to exploring whiteness. They argue that

college athletic departments are hegemonically White and male. The conscious or unconscious outcome of such raced and gendered processes means that employment opportunities tend only to be available to coaches with similar characteristics and thus ultimately, prevent the progression of BAME candidates. More broadly, there are also questions of how BAME groups may feel excluded and Othered by, among other things, the White curriculum and White colleagues. In an Australian context for example, McDonald (2016) emphasises how the relationship between sport and education can also serve to (re)produce ideas about 'race'.

The interplay of these social, cultural, economic and institutional barriers demonstrate that practices of institutional racism reproduce whiteness in sport coaching and are underpinned by patterns of hegemonic White privilege embedded within the core structures of decision-making bodies at the highest levels. These practices construct what could be described as a 'glass ceiling' for many existing and aspiring BAME coaches (Norman et al., 2018). Thus, according to Rankin-Wright et al. (2019), 'understanding the coaching journey for BAME coaches, who are often on the margins of decisions regarding policy and practice, should be mandatory practice for NGBs' (p.618). They go on to suggest that this may involve specific consultations with them, and improved ethnic monitoring and diversity in organisational leadership and governance, which might involve specific positive action interventions (also see Bradbury et al., 2018; Kilvington, 2019).

A diverse and talented workforce is widely accepted as a business necessity in the contemporary global marketplace, and is underpinned by two broad arguments. The first is a social justice case: everyone has the right to be treated fairly in the workplace, regardless of sex, 'race', disability status, sexuality, age, or any other characteristic. The second argument is commonly referred to as 'the business case'. Diverse organisations perform better on a range of measures (Beech et al., 2017). According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2016), companies with a diverse leadership operate more effectively and innovatively by understanding their customers, being more open to change and recruiting the best talent. According to Fletcher and Hylton (2018), organisations need to capitalise on diversity for five reasons: 1. Taking advantage of diversity in the labour market; 2. Maximising employee potential; 3. Managing across borders and cultures; 4. Creating opportunities and enhancing creativity; and 5. Appealing to a wider participation base.

It is our contention that to support the wider participation and performance objectives noted above a diverse coaching workforce is crucial, providing role models and evidence of equitable career development pathways to support, for example, South Asian engagement with and success in the sport.

## **Methods**

This paper is based on a research project commissioned by the ECB in 2014 to explore South Asian male players' and coaches' experiences of coaching and progression through coach education pathways.<sup>4</sup> The project brief stated that the ECB is concerned that the apparently high proportion of cricket players from South Asian backgrounds are not extending their engagement into coaching. The study explored the experiences of participants in different playing and coaching contexts, social and cultural contexts, and at different stages and performance levels of their cricket participation and coaching. To achieve this, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a sample of male

South Asian players and coaches, from two different geographical areas - London and Yorkshire (identified by the ECB) - and from a sample of clubs with different levels of ethnic diversity. Respondents were initially recruited through contacts and networks known to the research team and facilitated by the ECB and County Boards. These contacts served as 'key informants' to recruit more participants who themselves recommended other participants (snowballing). In total, 33 interviews (mix of face-to-face and telephone) were carried out with South Asian players and coaches in the Yorkshire and London areas. Of those, 17 were located in London and Essex and 16 were located in Yorkshire, 18 had been born in the UK and 15 were migrants. Participants self-ascribed their ethnicity as follows: 'Pakistani' (n=7), 'Indian' (n=7), 'British Asian' (n=6), 'British Pakistani' (n=6), Bangladeshi (n=3), 'British' (n=2), 'British Indian' (n=1) and 'Yorkshireman/Pakistani Muslim (n=1). Perhaps unsurprisingly, participants born in the UK were more likely to preface their ethnicity with 'British', and only those who had migrated described themselves as 'Pakistani', 'Indian' or 'Bangladeshi' respectively. For the sake of anonymity, all respondents have been given pseudonyms. Respondents are identified as either 'Player' or 'Coach', followed by a code to depict which geographic region they were from - i.e., 'Y' for Yorkshire or 'L' for London, and their personal number (see Table 1).



Table 1: Respondent profiles

Pseudonym	Diversity within club (H – High number of South Asian players / coaches; M – Mixed number; L – Low number)	Role (player or coach)	Location	Age	Born in or migrated to the UK	Ethnicity (self-defined by the participant)
CoachY1	H	Coach	Yorkshire	31-40	B	Indian
PlayerY1	H	Player	Yorkshire	21-30	B	British
PlayerY2	H	Player	Yorkshire	41-50	B	British Asian
PlayerY3	M	Player	Yorkshire	31-40	B	Pakistani
PlayerY4	M	Player	Yorkshire	<21	B	British Pakistani
CoachY2	M	Coach	Yorkshire	21-30	B	British
CoachL1	M	Coach	Essex	31-40	B	British Pakistani
CoachL2	M	Coach	Essex	31-40	M	Pakistani
PlayerL1	M	Player	Essex	<21	B	British Pakistani
PlayerL2	H	Player	Essex	31-40	B	Indian
PlayerL3	H	Player	London	21-30	M	British Asian
PlayerL4	H	Player	London	31-40	M	British Pakistani
PlayerL5	H	Player	London	41-50	M	British Pakistani
PlayerL6	H	Player	London	41-50	M	British Asian
PlayerL7	H	Player	London	21-30	M	Indian
PlayerL8	H	Player	London	21-30	M	Indian
CoachY3	M	Coach	Yorkshire	51-60	M	Indian
PlayerY5	L	Player	Yorkshire	41-50	M	Pakistani
PlayerY6	L	Player	Yorkshire	21-30	B	British Asian
CoachY4	L	Coach	Yorkshire	41-50	B	Pakistani
CoachY5	L	Coach	Yorkshire	21-30	B	British Indian
CoachY6	H	Coach	Yorkshire	41-50	B	Yorkshireman/ Pakistani Muslim
CoachY7	H	Coach	Yorkshire	41-50	B	Indian
CoachY8	H	Coach	Yorkshire	41-50	B	Pakistani
PlayerY7	L	Player	Yorkshire	21-30	B	British Asian
CoachY9	L	Coach	Yorkshire	21-30	B	British Asian
CoachL3	M	Coach	London	21-30	B	British Pakistani
CoachL4	L	Coach	London	31-40	M	Pakistani
CoachL5	H	Coach	London	<21	M	Bangladeshi
PlayerL9	H	Player	London	41-50	M	Pakistani
CoachL6	H	Coach	London	<21	M	Bangladeshi
CoachL7	H	Coach	London	31-40	M	Indian
Coach L8	H	Coach	London	31-40	M	Bangladeshi

Interview guides were created for both sets of respondents, and were guided by the research team's prior experiences of sport coaching, cricket and indeed, working with BAME groups. All team members involved in data collection were White males and while it could be argued this positioned us as outsiders to the research participants, rarely did it feel this way. On the whole, participants were very pleased to speak with us because, as identified below, they considered this research to be a rare opportunity to speak out about various injustices they had experienced (see Fletcher, 2014). For the coaches, interviews focused upon current or previous playing experience, how they had made the transition into coaching, their experiences of progressing as coaches, and their opinions and experiences of wider organisational drives and initiatives towards the recruitment of South Asian

groups in coaching. Interviews with players focused upon their entry into the game, what enabled and/or constrained their entry, their coaching ambitions and aspirations, and their thoughts and experiences of wider organisational drives and initiatives towards the recruitment of South Asian coaches.

Prior to interview, all participants signed a consent form. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview summaries were written for all 33 interviews to provide an overview of the emergent ideas and themes for the research team. Data were thematically analysed by all members of the team and then cross-checked by other members in order to share and confirm the findings. This also ensured rigour in the data analysis and interpretation stage of the research (Morse, 2015).

Some limitations in our sample must be acknowledged. Firstly, our sample was specific to coaches and players with aspirations of becoming a coach. Therefore, whilst not everyone will have been coached themselves, they all recognised the value of coaching. Secondly, while we acknowledge the heterogeneity within and between South Asian groups, the vast majority of respondents in this study were Muslims and therefore, some of the barriers identified are specific to them and are not necessarily applicable to other South Asian groups. Thirdly, our respondents were all located in two regions and thus, to make greater claims to generalisability, further national and perhaps international data collection is needed. Finally, all respondents were male and thus, our findings are inevitably male-centric.

## Findings

Reasons for low participation in coaching among South Asian groups are complex. In what we present next, we have attempted to capture this complexity with the development of three broad and interrelated themes:

1. **Coaching is low priority and low value** for many within South Asian communities, with no perceived career pathway and with few experiences of receiving impactful (formal) coaching...

*...combined with South Asian cricketers often playing in...*

2. **Separate systems and pathways**, which are less formal and feel separate from the 'mainstream' (White) British system, and therefore have little access to governance networks and hence, knowledge of coaching pathways and qualifications...

*...and...*

3. **'The cricket system' is currently exclusive**, with very few South Asian coaching role models and a very strong sense that county coaching roles (and therefore level 3 awards) are protected *by White gatekeepers for White coaches*.

Taken together, these perceptions and experiences perpetuate the feeling that White privilege underpins a system that reproduces racialised differences and inequalities in cricket. The effect of which means that South Asian players participate in an environment and culture where they are unlikely to engage in coaching and, even when they do, will not feel supported in progressing to higher roles of influence and power.

#### *Coaching is low value and low priority*

Cricket was seen to be a highly enjoyable social activity linked to the sporting traditions and cultural pastimes of the countries of origin of the players and coaches we interviewed. However, engagement in the sport was conditioned by other commitments, which made more intensive involvement in the sport, for example through coaching, difficult. Coaching was also perceived as low value because it was not considered a legitimate career. Instead, coaching was something to be done for leisure. For these individuals coaching was a mainly voluntary activity, which would be undertaken *in addition* to their prioritised everyday commitments. Given this, coaching was both low priority and low value for many. A number of potential barriers to becoming a coach were identified, and these can be summarised as: family, work and religion/faith.

The centrality of family came through strongly in the research. Many respondents stressed that it was difficult to justify time away from their families to coach and/or undertake coaching qualifications because they already spend a great deal of time apart due to work and cricket playing commitments:

Come the summer it's like the wife is a widow. I'm always on the cricket ground with the kids etc. I take my kids along, be involved with the club, as soon as the winter kicks in, it's just family time. (Player L9)

While it was acknowledged that change is occurring, a number of respondents also emphasised that playing and coaching sport continues to be of low value within many South Asian families. Instead, as is argued by a number of academic studies (e.g., Fletcher, 2020), South Asian families typically prioritise education, meaning that many South Asian youths are not given the support they need to advance their abilities in sport, including converting into coaching:

The biggest problem for South Asian background is the backing... There's a lot of cases - still - that don't have the backing. They'd rather their son be a dentist or a doctor or something else. They don't see coaching or even being a professional... as being a good job. (Coach Y2)

Parent participation is key and there are some parents who drop their children off, don't know or care what they do and then come back, pick them up at a given time and they think they've done their parental duty which is a sad step. Even now, that shouldn't happen. They should be there. (Player Y3)

Clearly, the notion that some families marginalise the importance of sport over other activities such as education is not isolated to South Asian families, but nevertheless, this was raised consistently by our respondents, though most notably among Pakistani Muslim respondents. It is important not to homogenise South Asian groups, or indeed, South Asian culture, nor assume that the people interviewed in this research are representative of wider South Asian communities. However, we can only report differences where they occurred in the data. Whilst the narrative identified here was more

negative than positive in terms of familial support and involvement there were individuals with very positive experiences. Similarly, it should be noted that lack of parental support and involvement does not automatically mean an individual will not pursue coaching or discourage others from it, and vice versa (Fletcher, 2020).

Closely related to family and familial obligations, religion and faith was also identified as a barrier to pursuing cricket coaching. Mainly, respondents said that their everyday commitments to their faith restricted the amount of time they could devote to sport:

It's a difficult one because any club, the training starts at six o'clock but as a Muslim family, we have commitment to school and we have to go to mosque so by the time we get back at seven o'clock, you're late so you're back of the queue already. (Coach L2)

For those who regularly attended places of worship, becoming a coach had very little value because their everyday commitments to their faith meant that they were unable to attend regular scheduled training sessions to actually coach.

In addition, work was identified as a strong and recurring barrier to entry into coaching. As we have already stated, interviews reinforced the notion that within South Asian culture(s) there is a strong emphasis on developing a career. Pertinently, and as emphasised by both players and coaches, as BAME groups generally are disproportionately deprived, they tend to prioritise paid work, which means they have very limited time and financial resources available to invest in coaching. According to Coach L3:

Some of them work, that's all they do. They work, sleep, eat... A lot of them are taxi drivers, shift workers, restaurant workers. So what would constitute working class. So for them to a) volunteer is very difficult because they don't know what hours of the week they are working and when; and b) volunteering isn't a high priority in their lives. They don't get the concept of volunteering. For them it's a headache rather than a rewarding process.

Coach L3 went on to explain that a major barrier is that the majority of roles are voluntary and thus, unpaid:

The biggest restriction I would say is the word 'voluntary.' Within an Asian community they still don't get that word 'volunteering.' They still don't get why people do stuff for the kindness of their heart outside of giving money to charity and stuff like that. And therefore, if I am volunteering why am I paying 350 quid for a level two coaching qualification?

The perceived lack of career was also a barrier for some existing coaches' ambitions to progress. Some said that they had no ambition of going beyond their current Level 1 or Level 2 qualification as they saw limited opportunities beyond this point:

Coach Y4: I don't see the point. What's the point in doing it when I've done my Level 1? It's not as if I'm going to make money out of cricket. I've never seen it as a point where I'm going to make any money from - I know some coaches do. They charge but I've never seen it as a money making exercise.

Coach L6: I need to know what's right on top. Is it worthwhile getting up there? Level 1 was only for my portfolio, but Level 2, Level 3, I need to know what doors [would open].

On a related point, the price of coaching courses was considered a barrier. Respondents stated that it is hard to justify spending £200-500 on coaching courses when there is no guarantee of recouping this fee through paid work (see Bradbury, 2016). Pursuing (additional) coaching qualifications were thus, a long way down their list of priorities. As Coach Y6 stated:

It's [the price] ridiculous. I think if you're a White lad or whatever, it's still a lot of money. It's a lot of money. It doesn't matter what colour you are, money's money, and it's hard to come by for everyone. But there'll probably be more pressure from somebody with a South Asian background, working-class, to make better use of that money than to put it on a coaching course.

Some of the current coaches were aware of existing schemes facilitated by County Boards and local clubs that help to sponsor individuals through their qualifications. However, there was a view that such initiatives need to be marketed at and communicated with specific ethnic groups more effectively than they are currently.

Clearly then there is a need to change perceptions of the value of coaching as a career, and the availability of paid coaching positions. It would also be helpful if coach education (and certification) were more accessible, flexible, cheaper and less demanding of time (Bradbury, 2016; Piggott, 2013). Our respondents said that having South Asian people in coaching positions at County level was vital in changing these perceptions. This theme is analysed further below but, it is important to highlight it here also as it was thought that having South Asians in these roles would have a number of longer-term impacts on the inclusivity of cricket more broadly.

#### *Separate systems and pathways*

That cricket maintains a culture of whiteness (see below) at a variety of levels serves to perpetuate not only the dominance of White people (mainly, though not exclusively, men), but the exclusion of BAME groups. Previous studies have identified how, under these conditions, and when faced with White racism, BAME groups will actively seek out separate spaces of play (see Fletcher et al., 2014; Hylton et al., 2015). Indeed, many of our participants felt that they were part of a different system and with a distinct style of cricket. The South Asian 'system' (as depicted by participants in this study, but not necessarily generalisable beyond it) was described as informal; established early in life, both in the UK and the Asian subcontinent, through 'street cricket'. It is in stark contrast to the 'mainstream' system (consistently referred to by our participants as being 'White') which is highly organised and affiliated to the governing body (Fletcher et al., 2014; Hylton et al., 2015; Long et al., 2015; McDonald and Ugra, 1998; Ratna et al., 2016). Formally, there is no distinction between different ethnic groups and their approaches to cricket. Rather, our participants were identifying a difference in how different ethnic groups have been socialised into the sport and thus, approach it. The ECB has subsequently recognised this as part of its South Asian Engagement Action Plan, specifically point 5 (talent and identification) above. This perceived separate system provided a very distinct experience of coaching in that, in most cases, there was an absence of it:

We played on our own, no coaches there [in Pakistan]... In Pakistan and Asian countries, you have to work hard and learn things, no coaching, nothing. (Coach L2)

I did not have a coach because we start from street cricket. When we have club, you know, local club, we don't have a coaching system. (Player L5)

Understandably, our participants were more likely to appreciate the value of coaching others if they could recall experiences of being coached themselves. Some connected this informal, unmediated, introduction to the game with the similarly informal and transient way in which team and club cricket occurs in many South Asian communities. This transience was used to explain some of the challenges faced when trying to create an effective club identity, retain players as committee members, and encourage others into coaching after they had finished playing. This was captured best by Player Y3:

For most the club model doesn't exist, it's a team model whereas in the White communities it's a club model so you will be part of that club. You and your kids will be part of that club for a long time because it's your club, whereas here we don't have that. We have a team, you'll be part of the team but the club doesn't matter... The guys before I was at this club were predominantly White guys and they had a real sense of belonging, and of club. They'd come in every Tuesday night to the clubhouse and those that were handy with a hammer and nail would be fixing everything, they'd be doing what needs doing and they'd do that because they'd been there a long time... That was their community; that was their club.

As a result of this perceived separate system it was felt South Asians lack access to formal networks and thus, an understanding of coach education pathways. Also, because they play in clubs and teams that often eschew a traditional club structure and identity, there are simply fewer opportunities and incentives to take up coaching. Indeed, without a tradition of volunteering, and without a strong club identity, it makes it less likely that South Asian teams and clubs will consistently be able to engage members (players or otherwise) in coaching roles or develop effective club structures (e.g. junior squads) as vehicles for coach development.

Moreover, South Asian players often lack the social networks and relationships with influential people needed to develop their clubs and access coaching. The significance and influence of this network was believed to be more challenging for existing coaches who were trying to progress within the system:

Has anything hindered my coaching opportunities? I think that the initial early levels, I have been fine, but the more elite level, a certain amount of networking is required and this network may not readily exist for the South Asian community. (Coach Y3)

In addition, there was a sense that because many South Asians experience their cricket from outside the 'mainstream' system they do not get selected for representative teams, or subsequently invited onto coaching courses. Respondents often referred to experiencing unequal opportunities as players (especially with regards to County clubs). Several reasons for this were proposed; namely that scouts are disproportionately targeting mainly White (often private) schools; and alternative spaces for cricket (e.g. Sunday and/or mid-week competitions) are not currently monitored, recognised or scouted:

It's the players who are going to go on to coaching, so you've got to sort the players out first and then go on to coaching. How many players from our background are selected through the ranks? They don't go to boarding or private schools so they can't go forward. (Player Y1)

I didn't think they (White coaches) gave enough of a chance to some of the players that didn't come from private schools, what we call the 'blazer boys'. The blazer boys were getting all the chances because the coaches that were coaching were from private schools so they'd get selected. (Coach Y4)

Many of the respondents had aspirations of progressing in cricket as either players or coaches (or both), however, they did not necessarily think the 'system' was providing them with either the resources or opportunities to do this. Most respondents said this study was the first time they had heard of the ECB being proactive towards South Asian under-representation. The extent of this lack of communication was evident in the fact that many of the participants did not know anything about the coach education pathway, in particular, how to access information about it. However, there was clearly a latent demand for coaching courses:

At our cricket club there's a number of players, if you say "Do you want to be a Level 2 coach?" I could guarantee you now nine out of ten of them wouldn't even know where to start. [But] you've got to educate people and encourage them more. You've got to go down to grass roots. (Coach Y6)

Many of the coaches said they first became involved with coaching through recommendations from existing coaches. Rarely had they accessed information about coaching directly from the ECB or other information sources. Thus, those who knew people in the system (e.g., other coaches, sport development officers/managers) held a much more positive attitude than those who did not:

I'm lucky because I've got two guys here that I can tap into, but had they not been here, then it's a different question because then it would be difficult for me to do that. But because I've got [name] and [name] here, I'm connected. (Player Y3)

The importance of this observation is that the majority of respondents believed the ECB should be communicating information about the courses much more effectively, rather than relying on the current 'word of mouth' system. This would inevitably mean reaching out and targeting South Asians specifically with relevant and inclusive strategies. Targeting these communities is not straightforward however. As we have noted elsewhere (Fletcher et al., 2014; Hylton et al., 2015; Meir and Fletcher, 2019), engaging with South Asian communities demands being flexible about the forms of cricket being played and the spaces in which play is taking place. In other words, in order to expand the coaching base, it must be acknowledged that cricket is being played in a variety of forms and spaces *in addition* to those recognised by the ECB and County Boards:

I think if a county board representative turned up at a park pitch on a Sunday and said "Hi, I'm from [X] County Board, do you have any of your guys here who would like to become coaches? We would love to see you at this venue, at this day, and this is how much it will cost you". Now I don't think that approach or that conversation has ever happened... Make them aware that these opportunities are there... They don't get literature, they don't get mailshots from the ECB. These are park cricketers. (Coach L4)

Respondents in this research suggested that the ECB needs to be more proactive in their attempts to communicate with, and actively recruit, potential South Asian coaches. The most common way of encouraging communication identified by the respondents was for representatives of the ECB and County Boards to personally go into South Asian communities where cricket is being played and share

information about what opportunities are available and how these can be accessed. This raised further questions about the 'system' and its inclusivity/exclusivity. This is similar to recommendations for coaching support in other recent UK based research (North, Piggott, Rankin-Wright, & Ashford, 2020).

### *The exclusive cricket system*

There was a deeper and more pervasive feeling that playing and coaching opportunities were being denied on the basis of 'race'. Some felt their voices were being ignored, whereas others felt that attempts to reach out and listen to South Asian views were little more than tokenistic 'box ticking' exercises on the governing body's behalf:

There's still a big divide. If you had to interview most Asians, their immediate reaction to lack of privilege and disadvantage is "It's racism. It's because we're Muslims, it's because we're Pakistani". (Coach Y7)

That's an issue for me, my colour of skin - I don't want to go down that route, I've had a good time here growing up with English friends, neighbours, lovely, brilliant, wouldn't change it - but when it comes to that hierarchy, pushing up, I really feel that you<sup>5</sup> [sic] want us involved in the game, just for that box ticking. (Coach L1)

There is an increasing array of research questioning the commitment of sporting institutions to make positive and meaningful changes in how they tackle racial inequalities (see Carrington et al., 2016; Dashper et al., 2019). When applied specifically to coaching, respondents felt that their chances of progression into more advanced roles, for example, with the Counties, would be denied (or heavily restricted) on the basis of their 'race':

All the clubs prefer White coaches. They don't prefer South Asian coaches for the county. I mean they have a different value for White coaches. (Player L6)

Whilst it was acknowledged that more South Asians are accessing entry level coaching qualifications there was a perception that the higher up the system they go, the more exclusionary it becomes (see Norman et al., 2018). What the respondents meant by this was that as individuals move from Level 1 to Level 2 to Club Coach and so on, there is a marked reduction in the proportion of South Asian attendees. This was also the case for the representation of coach educators:

In terms of attendees, Level 1 was a healthy mix... Level 2, there were a few Asians, but not to the same level as Whites. Club Coach was predominantly "White White", much higher than Level 2. I don't think there are many, if any, Asians on the Level 3.

*[What about the coach educators?]*

There was one Asian... He was on the Level 2. The others were White. (Coach Y3)

Coach Y3, who has ambitions of gaining his Level 3 qualification noted that he was finding it difficult to get on a course. He was reluctant to identify the existence of racism, but it was evident from his interview that he had doubts about whether his application was treated fairly compared with White applicants.

The lack of South Asian coach educators was highlighted as an issue on the basis that the players and coaches believed that other South Asians would be 'put off' from courses where they did not feel



represented. This was coupled with a perception that access to higher level coaching qualifications and jobs were restricted to, and 'guarded' by, White people:

I've asked the ECB; I've asked, "Can I volunteer?" I've applied for a job with the English deaf cricket team. Now, okay, they said, "Thank you very much, we're not interested". Then I replied back to human resources, "Can I, at my expense, so I can learn, can I shadow the selected or appointed official, the coach?" Didn't hear anything. It's a closed door. (Coach L1)

Similarly, respondents were suspicious of how open and fair the selection and recruitment processes for higher level courses are. Coach L7 in particular, highlighted how the nomination/endorsement process is largely self-perpetuating in that, to gain an endorsement, one would likely need to be part of an already established network which, frequently, they are not:

I'm not exactly sure how it works, but it seems to me it's not easy to break into. My perception is that there's some sort of little network where you need some sort of nomination. It goes to some sort of board meeting and they say "yay" or "nay". It's a bit exclusive. (Coach L7)

Respondents were also asked their views on the appropriateness of coach education resources. There was general agreement that, in terms of the depth and clarity of information, examples, visual support etc., they were fit for purpose. However, given some of the communication and English language difficulties experienced by some South Asians there was some debate over whether resources could be made more accessible by, for example, being translated into different languages. Language barriers were identified as an issue lying principally with first and some second generation South Asians who have not been educated in the UK. However, given that many South Asians may opt to become coaches after they finish their playing careers, this is an issue that will likely affect the current generation of older/recently retired players:

With some of the South Asian community... work that I've done... there are many, many players' parents who say actually we would love to become a coach but the language is a barrier; understanding is a barrier. (Coach L4)

There was also evidence that some South Asians do not feel comfortable on the courses because they do not fully understand what the coach educator is saying. Moreover, some said they would be uncomfortable questioning/challenging a White coach educator due to language or communication issues. Similarly, language could also be a barrier when South Asians are expected to perform skill demonstrations as part of the course.

In addition to language issues, the technical content of resources (the 'what' of coaching) was also perceived to be a barrier insofar as they promoted a traditional 'English' style of play, very different to the more fluid, attacking and expressive style participants associated with the Indian subcontinent. Many respondents spoke about the ECB's 'coaching manual'<sup>6</sup> and the influence this has on their motivation to become a coach and their subsequent progression:

I strongly believe that a lot of South Asian people don't necessarily like coaching qualifications: "Why should I play like that? If I can hit a ball from outside off through mid-wicket for six, why should I then be playing that through the offside?" Because the coach and manual says, "that's what you're meant to do!" (Coach L3)

Such perceived barriers are important to address – even if they may be mistaken in some senses – as they clearly have an influence on South Asian players’ perceptions of their place in the ‘system’ and the value they attach to cricket coaching in general. Crucially, these differences are not the result of South Asian cricketers (or South Asian culture(s)) not valuing the benefits of being coached *per se*, rather that their perceptions of coaching are contingent on evidence that many do not have (or have not had) *access to*.

## **Discussion**

We have tried to outline and illustrate some of the nuanced mechanisms and processes that contribute to the marginalisation of South Asians from cricket coaching (especially higher coaching) roles. Our respondents referred to a separate South Asian cricket system, composed of clubs and teams with transient membership and a lack of identity. The perception that cricket is run by White people for White people therefore, leaves many South Asians feeling outside the (White) ‘system’.

The presence and privileging of whiteness has been a consistent constraint or barrier for many in this study. Whiteness is a concept used to describe how social processes and practices privilege some people over others (Mills, 1997; Dyer, 1999; Garner, 2007; Gillborn, 2008; Leonardo, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Whiteness (process) does not refer to White people (social identity). Many of those who benefit from such processes are White, however most of these privileges are unwittingly received due to institutionalised or seemingly benign ‘everyday’ practices (Mills, 1997; Fletcher and Hylton, 2016, 2018). Those most conscious of the privileges of whiteness do not receive these privileges easily. Privileges, even within cricket, often accrue to White people in a number of ways, many of which have been identified by respondents in this study. For example, the South Asian cricketers felt that players were more likely to be nominated or endorsed for coaching positions/courses if they were part of networks containing influential White gatekeepers. Whiteness can also be manifest in cricket hierarchies that consistently lack diversity and retain a White, male superstructure (see Norman et al., 2018; Rankin-Wright, 2019). Similarly, if scouts continue to prioritise predominantly White private schools and avoid informal cricket spaces, they are unlikely to increase the number of South Asian players in development and County squads. Consequently, there will continue to be only a small number of coached South Asian players progressing into coaching and therefore, minimising the pool of role models for others to aspire to. This is exacerbated further by South Asian cricketers self-excluding themselves from formal structures because of their lack of acceptance in these structures and systems (see Hylton et al., 2015). Whiteness can be manifest in privileges of being scouted, entry to clubs, communication about courses, just as the outcomes of such racialised processes can result in predominantly White structures such as the constituency of clubs, organisational hierarchies and even attendees on higher level coaching courses.

The result of conscious or unconscious ambivalence toward White privilege leads to a legacy of what has been described as ‘White supremacy’, where systematic insidious processes of privileging manifest themselves across a plethora of arenas as racial outcomes (Omi and Winant 2002) and include, but are not restricted to, housing, education, health, economics, media, or leisure (including sport) (Gillborn, 2008). Proactive NGBs are likely to identify these patterns to endeavour to disrupt them through early interventions.

## Conclusion

The rules that govern cricket, as any other sport, are not based on a specific faith or belief system, therefore participation creates links between people from different backgrounds and cultures and with different experiences. At the community level, for example, researchers point to the potential for cricket to build relationships and social cohesion across 'race'/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and disability. Governments in liberal democratic societies rarely declare that their intention is to worsen or maintain poor social conditions. Yet, despite the number and diversity of policy documents produced over the past 20-30 years, which have declared their intention to improve the opportunities for BAME groups, women and girls, people with disabilities, the working class and others in sport, inequalities persist in both participation and representation (as players, coaches, managers and in decision making positions), while many sports governing bodies still obstinately refuse to discuss some of these issues (Dashper et al., 2019). Some sports organisations are often reluctant to pursue policies that require significant investment of resources and there has been a consistent failure to take proactive steps in seeing the policy process as a framework that enables intervention and change both within their sports and within their own structures (Dashper et al., 2019).

Indeed, we cannot assume that improved representation of BAME groups in coaching roles would signal either the end of racism or indeed, of White privilege. There is no silver bullet; the only way to fully understand what is required and therefore, to instigate meaningful change is to fully understand the needs, wants and desires of those for whom the change is intended. Cricket cannot transform the social system; certainly not in isolation. If cricket is to contribute to meaningful social change it must be supported by other organisations, policy makers etc. The goal of creating a socially inclusive world, which is both necessary and realistic, cannot be solely a matter of the right policy or the right time. Those who occupy a position of relative power and influence (e.g., White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, men) need to be wary of blindness towards their privileges (Fletcher, 2014; Fletcher and Hylton, 2016, 2018). It is vital that these privileges are subject to critique, especially when a strong thrust of a sports organisation's work is to promote social change with the aim of improving lives and reducing barriers to opportunities (Dashper et al., 2019).

Cricket, the ECB and partners are well placed to address some of these concerns. We recognise the progress that has been made within cricket and cricket policy, at least in terms of defining the 'problems' within the game, as identified in the ECB's South Asian Engagement Action Plan. Their primary commitment going forward must be in moving beyond identifying and defining problems to combating and eradicating them. Indeed, identifying and documenting mechanisms of marginalisation and exclusion is a relatively straightforward task. The more important challenge is to scrutinise what is needed to mitigate (or ideally, eradicate altogether) these mechanisms and subsequent injustices. It requires more than simply identifying injustices or indeed, suggesting potential solutions although this is important. What cricket - and any sport - needs is commitment and resources from the top, not to mention a workforce that is skilled in, knowledgeable about, and enabled to serve the communities it represents.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, what remains conspicuously absent is a meaningful discussion of other BAME groups, notably Black communities. This is highlighted elsewhere, notably in Sport England's (2020) *Sport for All: Why Ethnicity and Culture Matter in Sport and Physical Activity* report, which indicates that Black young people are significantly underrepresented in cricket. While we welcome

the ECB's current focus on South Asians, and we would warn against any policy that homogenises BAME groups into a single 'BAME policy'. The UK's cricket community goes beyond White and South Asian groups and these communities must be listened to. Indeed, while we were writing this paper we have been witness to the growing prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the UK, USA, Australia, Canada among others. The strength of reaction to the Black Lives Matter movement has encouraged all institutions and organisations, including those involved in sport, to take a good look at their culture and practices. Like many other sporting organisations, the ECB has made a firm commitment to 'race' equality, but in particular, has committed to examining ways of increasing participation and representation of the UK's Black African Caribbean communities. As a group of scholars committed to race equality and social justice, we welcome any such initiative(s).

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<sup>1</sup> Born and raised in Barbados, Archer qualified for England thanks to his father, who is English. Archer qualified to play for England in March, 2019. This was earlier than expected, following the England and Wales Cricket Board’s (ECB) [decision to relax its residency ruling.

<sup>2</sup> Black, Asian and minority ethnic is a popular acronym used in policy circles in the UK, used to denote the diverse positions and identities of racialised ethnic groups not included under the label of ethnic majority in

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the UK. The term includes a huge amount of internal diversity and acknowledge that there are a multitude of experiences of racism, making the use of a catch-all term less than ideal.

<sup>3</sup> Birmingham, Bradford, Kirklees, Leeds, Leicester, London, Luton, Manchester, Sandwell and Slough.

<sup>4</sup> The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of colleagues Leanne Norman, Kevin Hylton and Steve Gilbert to the original report, which is available here: <http://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/782/3/LMU%20-%20South%20Asian%20Cricket%20Coach%20Project%20-%20Final%20Report%20-%20Draft%202%20-%202014-11-2014.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> It was common for respondents to incorrectly associate members of the research team as being representatives/employees of the ECB. In this example, the reference to 'you' was a conflation of the research team and the ECB.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to point out that the ECB no longer has a single technical manual for coaches, but the perception of a White English 'hidden curriculum' of old-fashioned techniques – forward defensive, high elbow, line and length – was nevertheless a pervasive perception among our respondents.

<sup>7</sup> Space does not allow us to make substantive recommendations here. To see our original recommendations, please see Fletcher et al. (2014).