

Trudy Smith:

Hello, and welcome to this week's NextSense Institute Podcast. My name is Trudy Smith and I am your digital host for today. It's a really great pleasure to introduce one of my colleagues, Chris Ashenden, who's going to be talking to us about Cricket. So Chris, can you please introduce yourself to our audience?

Chris Ashenden:

Well, hello there, Trudy. Thanks for inviting me along to be part of this podcast today. This is my first ever podcast. Very interesting experience. So who's Chris? My name is Chris Ashenden. I've been working here at NextSense Institute for quite some time. I'm a teacher of the Deaf here. I work with the high school students in the signing bilingual program. I've got a teaching background of 24 years, so plenty of experience there.

Trudy Smith:

Absolutely. And I'm sure that I could talk to you forever about the teaching experiences. But what I really want to talk to you about today is that you are the team manager, and player mentor, for the Australian Deaf Cricket team. How did you get this amazing job?

Chris Ashenden:

Yeah, well, it's funny story. I got back into cricket about three years ago actually, and that was through NextSense. They were talking with somebody from cricket Australia, they came out to visit the school, to teach some basic cricket skills. Just basic catching and throwing and bowling and batting, and over arm throws, and all of those things. And Cricket New South Wales had somebody named Luke Murphy who came along and he'd been working with Cricket New South Wales and heard of my experience and my exploits in the past. And he was looking for somebody to basically be the head coach for New South Wales Deaf Cricket.

So I got a tap on a shoulder, asked if I was keen, and I thought, you know what? I'd never actually thought of taking on such a role. So I thought, why not? I was at a point in my life where my kids are growing up now and I sort of was looking for a different path in my life. And so I decided, yep, I'll take it on. And I've had many years experience in cricket, but I did take a break, focus on work, young family. And so, happy to be back now. My first role with National Institute Committee Council was in 1994, I had won a Shield for the first time in the Deaf World Cup.

So at that time I decided to be part of Deaf Cricket Australia, the Satellite coaching program. And so from there I've been involved in Deaf cricket. I am an ex Australian Deaf cricketer. I toured England from July to August, 1994, and was part of the first Deaf World Cup in Melbourne, which was from 1995 to 1996. So in the English tour, I broke the world record as a Deaf individual, with a Deaf individual score. I did that twice in fact. The first time was in the first test, 212 knockouts in a debut. Then re-broke, again, that world record, in the third test, with 229 runs. And I believe that those 229 runs are still current as the Deaf world record holder today, which is now 28 years running. I also hold the most runs in a series, in the Deaf cricket, which is 708 runs with six completed innings. And with the highest average as well, of 177.

In World Cricket, Australia won the World Cup. I scored 111 runs in the final, to then be given, Man of the Match. I used to play for the 1st Grade in Western Suburbs, which is a Sydney Grade Cricket. That level is a high level and that was playing for New South Wales. I'm one of the very few Deaf cricketers to play at that level at all. I've also represented New South Wales in the combined Catholic College, under-19, to play in the Lord Taverner's week. And that was representing 70 schools in cricket. So all of those achievements has brought me to the

management role that's become available now. So I've decided to apply for the new position of the team manager and I have been successful.

Trudy Smith:

It sounds like you are the right man for the job. That's a very impressive cricket history and congratulations on all of those achievements.

Chris Ashenden:

Thank you.

Trudy Smith:

I wonder what the responsibilities are for this particular role?

Chris Ashenden:

Gosh, there are a lot of responsibilities, Trudy. I'll point out a few for you. So essentially I've got to be the key conduit for communication between Cricket Australia, the coaching staff, the support staff, the team, and the players. I've got to continue building a positive and inclusive team environment, ensuring that inclusive of all players and support staff. Providing support to players and officials.

I've also got to work in collaboration with the head coach, the support staff, and ensure that communication is culturally appropriate for the Deaf and hard of hearing members of the team, which are the coaches and the players. I'm also assisting with the training camps and the tours, and also professional and personal development for all the players. So a lot of responsibilities right there, but it's something that I really enjoy.

Trudy Smith:

Clearly, and is a lot of responsibility. I wonder... You talked about your adult life in cricket, is it something that you've always played?

Chris Ashenden:

Well, in a sense you could say that, yeah. I started playing cricket when I was just nine years old and that was due to my parents thinking, "You know what? I'll put little Chris into cricket to build some social skills."

Enabled me to feel comfortable around my hearing peers, and also just to enjoy a sport. As the years progressed, I started to become quite good at cricket, representing Southern Districts Cricket Association, now known as Fairfield Liverpool Cricket Association. And I did that for a few years, culminating in representation for Fairfield in the under-16 Green Shield.

My progress really excelled when Neil D'Costa started coaching me. Neil is a very good coach, having coached ex-Australian cricket captain, Michael Clarke, and is currently mentoring Australian cricket player Marnus Labuschagne. He encouraged me to try out for the Western Suburbs Cricket Club in Sydney Grade Competition. My first year in Grade Competition, I played 4th Grade, progressed to 1st Grade within a three year period. From then, I decided I'm going to take a break from cricket and go into university, I should say. Finished university, met my wife and got married naturally and had some children.

So after a long break, even though I did play some cricket from time to time, representing New South Wales in the Webb's Cup, named after former Australian Deaf cricket captain and legend,

John Webb. I decided to get involved again in cricket with Cricket New South Wales. They had approached me to be the head coach for Deaf Cricket New South Wales, which was fantastic.

Trudy Smith:

So you've always been a cricketer and clearly always been very successful. And so I guess all of those experiences, and particularly when you talked about being coached by Neil and all of those mentor experiences that you've had, is going to lend themselves very naturally to you becoming such a great mentor and coach.

Chris Ashenden:

Yes, indeed. Huge. Yeah, fantastic. And the skillset that I've received from them and the experience in cricket just, I've got a good sense, I've got a good eye for detail. And how they helped me become a better cricketer, I can then pass on that skillset to the young ones. Neil was my 1st Grade cricket colleague, so together we really enjoyed that sport.

And here we are now, today. And I've been playing with Michael Clarke, training with them as well. So lots of experience, there's a lot of names. So naturally for me, being with those high level cricketers has pushed me to become a better player like I am today. And also just a better person in general.

Trudy Smith:

This is such a great example of somebody that you've known a long time and worked with for such a long time. I had no idea you were such a prestigious cricketer.

Chris Ashenden:

Thanks Trudy.

Trudy Smith:

Now you're headed to Dubai at the end of this month. What are you most looking forward to?

Chris Ashenden:

Yeah, you're right. Well, first of all, we're going to Dubai because it's the Deaf International Cricket Council, the T20, Championship Trophy. So that's being held in the UAE, Asuman, I think it's pronounced, near Shajar. And that's between the 30th of September to the 10th of October. So there's going to be five teams competing in that championship. So we've got Australia, we've got Pakistan, we've got India, we've got Bangladesh and also South Africa. So in total there's going to be five rounds and then the finals as well. So that's all going to be played in the T20 format. So essentially 20 overs per team, roughly three and a half hours.

What am I looking forward to the most? Just, I guess, having that experience and seeing those different cultures. Going over to Dubai is going to be such a culture shock, very different to what we have here. And I've heard so many stories and especially about the buildings, the architecture over there, the beach, I think it's going to be amazing to see. I'm really looking forward to that. I think that's going to be a really good part in parcel of the championships. And also I'm looking forward to the cricket, of course Trudy.

Trudy Smith:

Of course you are! I have to ask, is Australia going win?

Chris Ashenden:

Well, we're a young team. We hope to be very competitive whilst being there. And cricket is a funny game, you just never know.

Trudy Smith:

You are going to have to come back and tell us all about it.

Chris Ashenden:

Yeah, definitely.

Trudy Smith:

Good, bad, win, lose, and all of the adventures.

Chris Ashenden:

Definitely will.

Trudy Smith:

Thank you so much for your time. You go with all of our best wishes and good luck.

Chris Ashenden:

Thank you. Absolute pleasure. Thanks so much for having me here today Trudy, and to be part of your podcast is a pleasure.

Trudy Smith:

Thank you so much. And thank you to David for assisting us with interpreting today.