

# BULLETS TO BALLS

JUST SOUTH OF LA, IN ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST DANGEROUS CITIES, THE GENTEEL, RELAXED VALUES OF CRICKET ARE FLOURISHING. EVEN HARD-NOSED COUNTER-TERRORISM TYPES ARE TAKING NOTICE.

BY SCOTTY STEVENSON

**THIS IS NOT YOUR USUAL CRICKET STORY. THERE WILL BE NO MONEY HERE. THIS IS NOT A TALE OF MANICURED LAWNS AND LOUNGE CHAIRS AND MCC TIES AND THE ROSY-CHEEKED, RED-NOSED ARISTOCRATIC POMPOSITY OF LORD'S. THERE AIN'T NO GENTRY ON THESE STREETS. THERE'S NO IPL CIRCUS, NO MILLION-DOLLAR CONTRACTS, NO SHORT-CLIPPED, FRESHLY ROLLED SUN-BAKED PITCHES.**

Search high and low – you will uncover no batting averages, nor bowling figures. You've never heard of the players you're about to meet, but you've heard of their city: Compton. This is not your usual cricket story; this is the story of the Compton Cricket Club. And this is some crazy shit.

I call Ted Hayes. Ted Hayes is the reason Compton plays cricket. His phone goes to message service. His voicemail says "Shalom and Jerusalem". It also says he'll get back to me.

I call Katy Haber. Katy Haber is the reason Ted Hayes plays cricket. She says hello. I ask her where her accent is from.

She says she is British. "Why do you think I started a cricket club?"

I don't answer that. If there's one thing the British do better than Americans it's a rhetorical question.

I've gone from Hebrew greetings from an African-American man to Beverly Hills Brit. Why should I be surprised? This is, after all, a story about cricket in one of the most dangerous cities in America (the FBI's assertion, not mine). Of course the co-founder of a club whose team is known as The Homies & the POPz is a Bafta member. What else was I expecting?

Katy Haber. All five foot and a little bit of her – once upon a time director Sam Peckinpah's "right-hand man", she tells me. Her credits include *Straw Dogs* and *The Getaway* and *Blade Runner* (with Ridley Scott). Now she's the matriarch of a cricket club that includes ex-gangsters, the formerly homeless and the currently paroled. It's a long way from McQueen and MacGraw.

One other thing: she was recently photographed for a Marie Claire Australia feature. Indelible polychromatic proof that absolutely no one ages in LA.

"People have this idea that the Compton Cricket Club was some sort of cute idea, but we have been in this now for 16 years and there is nothing cute about what the young men in this team have achieved," she says.

Achievements: four tours to the UK (including the occasional royal tea with Prince Edward), a recently completed tour of Australia (the first American-born team to embark on such an affair), an official presidential designation from Bill Clinton as goodwill ambassadors and, now, an unsolicited approach from the – long title warning – Los Angeles Police Department Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau (LAPD CTSOB).

The bureau wants to spread the cricket word through LA's most notorious communities. I had to find out why.

In a career spanning at least 10 iterations of the standard issue assault rifle, commander Blake Chow has seen some violence. Now, through partnerships with programmes like the Compton Cricket Club, he says the LAPD has begun to make inroads into





TED HAYES



ISAAC HAYES



communities that less than a decade ago viewed the police with fear and loathing in equal doses.

"In counter-terrorism our role is to keep regions safe from threats and in order to do that we must work alongside agencies like the FBI, but also alongside our communities," says Chow, in an exclusive magazine interview with *SKY Sport The Magazine*.

"These places [Compton, South Central and others] are still dangerous but they are getting better, and it is in no small part due to programmes like the Compton Cricket Club - outreach programmes that give alternatives to kids on the street. The Compton Cricket Club under Ted Hayes and Katy Haber is one of the best we've seen, and that's because it is an organisation that teaches sportsmanship and respect."

Respect. You carry a gun in Compton if you want

respect. That's the way it is. So what good can a bunch of cricketers do in this city? I ask Theo Hayes.

"Hollywood has glamorised the violence in Compton and desensitised us with regard to it. You wanna know what goes on here, forget the movies, watch the news. That's the real deal right there."

Theo Hayes is living proof of the Compton Cricket Club's impact on the lives of young men who might otherwise be dead. The son of founder Ted Hayes, Theo by his own admission was messing up life. "Put it this way: the police knew all three of my names." He was sent to his father, joined him as an activist for the homeless and discovered cricket.

"I was all for it man," he recalls. "I'm the kinda cat who doesn't care what sport it is; I was ready to go."

And go he did - touring the UK with the original LA Krickets in 1995 (a team of homeless men who had

come into contact with Ted Hayes through his Dome Village housing project in LA), before settling into the side as its long-standing captain.

"We believed that 1995 team was the most significant cricket team on the planet. A homeless cricket team from America playing cricket in Hambledon. Home of the game. Damn!"

Damn. Talk to Katy Haber about damn. What's a woman like you doing in a place like this?

"I decided I needed a little bit of a career change," she says.

A career re-write is more like it.

"I found out about Ted's work [as an activist for the homeless] and we became friends. Oh, and the Beverly Hills Cricket Club needed an 11th man for a match, so I asked Ted to play."

I believe the word you're looking for is providence.

Though reluctant at first (an understandable reaction, you might say), Hayes got the bug. He got the "civilising qualities of cricket". He learned to bowl with the sort of action that would convince you each leg and arm had absolutely no synaptic connection with his brain and even less in common with each other. A windmill meets a cartwheel, by way of a full body dislocation: poetry in motion. Street poetry.

"If I was to walk into a Compton High School with the legend Brian Lara and he started talking to these kids about cricket, they'd be like 'You gonna get this nigger off our stage or what?'. They have no idea who Brian Lara is."

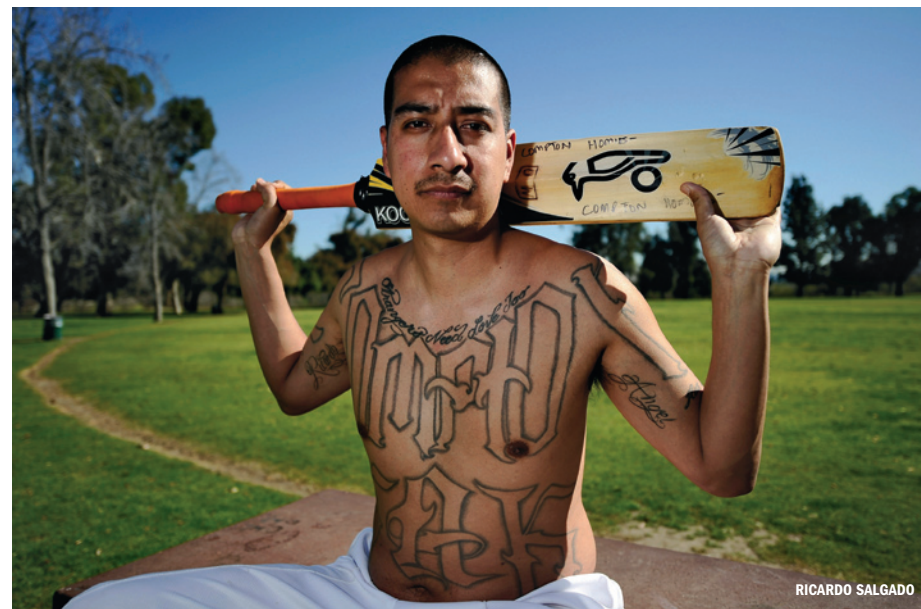
Hayes knows all about the street. His downtown-LA Dome Village was a symbol of hope in the hardship of America's homeless. It was here that the Compton Cricket Club was spawned. Ted Hayes is the Pop in The Homies and the POPz.

Says Theo: "When I was sent to Ted to sort my life out I learnt about his dynamics and I quickly discovered cricket is a game for fathers and sons."

So will he be trying to emulate his dad's, um, intriguing bowling style?

"That guy's got his own thing goin' on there and if that style ever catches on I'll be damned! Mind you he's effective at what he does which is mostly bowl wide and down the legside. When he asks me how many overs he should bowl, I usually tell him that we'll start with one."

Comedy. There's a lot of it at the Compton Cricket Club. Laughter in the face of real life: the best medicine of all. And for the Homies and the POPz the biggest comedian of all is wicketkeeper is Ricardo Cazares.



RICARDO SALGADO



RICARDO CAZARES



"He's a riot," says Theo. "That man'll sledge a batsman right out of his wicket."

That's the laughter. Here's the real life: Ricardo Cazares has a dead brother.

Jesse Cazares was 20 years old when a car pulled up outside his house. Jesse never reached 21. The bullets weren't even meant for him.

In 16 years, Jesse remains the only member of the team to lose his life to gang-related violence. The Compton Cricket Club can't bring back Jesse Cazares, but they have saved many more just like him.

*From bullets to balls/From gats to bats/Situation kinda backwards/Like I wear my hats/We playin' cricket.*

You can't have a cricket team in Compton without the requisite soundtrack, and Theo Hayes, along with brother Isaac, is bringing the rhymes to the reason with "Bullets", a cricket anthem unlikely to find favour with the establishment (although venerable British broadsheet *The Guardian* recently ranked it No 1 in the top XI cricket songs), but one that may well resonate with the club's inner-city youth audience.

"If I was to walk into a Compton High School with the legend Brian Lara and he started talking to these kids about cricket, they'd be like 'You gonna get this nigger

off our stage or what?'. They have no idea who Brian Lara is, but they know hip hop and so that's another way we're trying to spread the word."

And word is spreading, according to Chow of the LAPD's counter-terrorism bureau, which has partnered with the Compton club to promote the game. "After September 11 and the constant media attention there was a proliferation of ignorance regarding certain communities in America," he says. "The Muslim community in particular has struggled with this, and with cricket a big sport for many in that community, this is a perfect chance to do something special."

Something special: a dreadlocked, do-ragged, moustachioed collection of Latinos and blacks, many of them former gangsters and "juvies". They're the homeless and homies, the activist and the movie producer. America's cricket team.

After three tours to the UK, the Homies and the POPz recently toured Australia, in the process becoming the first American-born cricket team to do so. While it wasn't so successful on the pitch, the tour again proved just how life-changing the Compton Cricket Club has been for this unlikely band of brothers young and old.

"I mean, look at us man - a bunch of guys from Compton playing cricket in Australia, seeing the world. That blows my mind!" says Theo. And he has high

hopes for the future. "Anybody who knows anything about America knows that when a sport takes off in this country it can only get bigger."

Haber agrees. "When inner-city kids realise that they can turn their lives around, that they have the power to curb gang violence, that they can play this sport and learn how to respect authority and become a gentleman through doing so, that's when we know we are making a difference."

"And we are making a difference. The talent base for American sports is right here, in places just like Compton, just waiting to be discovered."

So who will discover it? New Zealand Cricket? This is, after all, the organisation involved in a recently brokered deal to promote the game in the United States in partnership with the USA Cricket Association, an Australian marketing company and an Indian businessman.

The man who brokered the deal to form the new entity, Neil Maxwell, told *cricinfo.com* that Cricket Holdings America "should have a capitalised value in the ballpark of between \$80 million to \$100 million". The deal came complete with a photo opportunity beside a Beverly Hills sign, the same sign Ted Hayes drove past on his way to his first cricket match.

Maybe that's just a coincidence. Or, maybe there is some money here after all. ☺