

WOMEN'S
**SOFT
BALL
CRICKET**
FESTIVAL



Meet the PR & Marketing Manager **Iliyana**

Hi! I'm Iliyana Farfarova and I live in Gateshead. I'm originally from Bulgaria - not known for its cricket, in fact there isn't one single team there. I came to study at the University of Sunderland and now work as the PR and Marketing Manager of Durham County Cricket Board.





Our wonderful coaches Beth Walker, Laura Ellison, Hannah Robson and Marsha Davies.

How did you get involved with Durham County Cricket Board?

It all started with Graeme Weeks - he's the Development Manager at DCCB. He had been on an ECB Leadership course, and as part of that he learned a bit about marketing and promotion and how crucial it is. That's when he realised they weren't doing that. Graeme is a very forward-thinking person and he knew he needed someone with the right skills. He approached the University of Sunderland's PR department. At the time I was doing a Masters Degree in Public Relations and I had already been working in sports PR for a year - promoting the city's volleyball, basketball and netball teams. My tutor thought I'd be great for the job. She put me forward, I got a month's placement to see how things went, and here I am. Not every County Cricket Board has a Marketing Manager so I got pretty lucky here.

What is your impression of cricket in Durham?

It is a much-loved game here, with 114 different and very diverse Clubs, some of which have been around for a very long time. We range from completely urban to very rural and every area has its own personality. Some of the Clubs need more help from someone like me than others do, and that's what makes my job so interesting.

What about women's cricket in Durham?

Even before the Soft Ball Festivals, Durham had been quite successful in recent years in attracting girls' teams to their School Festivals and Lady Taverners Festivals. However, there was no league set up, and we knew from the previous season that some of the girls' teams didn't have enough playing opportunities. Graeme is a real supporter of the female game, and of creating events to retain girls and women. The Festivals gave them more opportunity to play. This time last year, Durham had no women's soft ball cricket teams. By the end of the Festival campaign, we had ran 13 Festivals, with 766 women picking up a bat for the first time and 23 girls' teams entering the events. It was a massive success for us. Now the Clubs need to pick up the baton and run with it.





What was your approach to the Festivals?

The ECB funding allowed us to have four women coaches at Durham Cricket Board, who were entirely dedicated to the Women's Soft Ball campaign. Our Women and Girls' Development Officer Marsha Davies led the campaign and ensured that each cricket Club, that was going to hold a Festival, had an individual development coach to work with.

We started with one big Festival at Murton Cricket Club, where we wanted to show that cricket could be fun. We wanted to get rid of the traditional view of the game; that it's just for men, that the games are too long and that it's boring. What better way to do that than to use our existing girls' teams to enlist their mums who had already been involved in cricket in a passive way?

At the first Festival, we offered free Prosecco and Afternoon Tea to any mums who came along to support their daughters. They thought they were just coming to watch but after the girls had finished playing, we asked them to go and grab their mums by the hand and try to get them to play. It was amazingly successful and such a fun afternoon, with mums and daughters playing together for the first time ever.

After that, we ran another 12 Festivals over 6 Sundays. We promoted it as an event where women could just come and watch if they wanted to - with free Prosecco and Afternoon Tea - but if you decided to play, you got a free T-Shirt. We also extended our invitation beyond just mums, asking them to bring along sisters, aunties and friends for a fun Sunday afternoon. If you brought 3 or more women, your Afternoon Tea was upgraded to a basket with crisps, chocolate and popcorn! That brought even more women along.





Does Soft Ball Cricket have a place in the game?

Absolutely. Since the Festivals, we've had a lot more requests from women. But we need the Clubs to step up now and drive it forward, to keep up the momentum. Thanks to the funding from ECB, Durham has a strategy in place for next summer and it's all based around the Clubs rather than the Board. We've had a lot of interest from the Clubs but we know that we need to work with them to get them up to speed with promotion, social media and local media.

What are the challenges for Clubs?

It is important that we hand over to the Clubs now. Some were quite sceptical about women's cricket to begin with. Others were very excited. A lot of people now understand the opportunity that Women's Soft Ball Cricket offers but they need to be shown how it could work for them. In the early months of 2018, we'll be helping Clubs with social media training so they can encourage more girls and women to play. We'll also be building a marketing support package to help clubs further. The main challenge for Clubs is about finding the right people - those willing to spend a little time learning how to really use their social channels, get the message out there and get the women in.



What are the benefits of Women's Soft Ball Festivals to the Clubs?

More volunteers. More helping hands. More money. We see a massive market and potential in women's cricket and, let's face it, if you limit the sport to one gender, you're missing out on half the market. Women tend to be more social and are far more likely to talk about things they enjoy (especially on social media). By having women in a Club, you create a family atmosphere. If women are involved, everyone is involved, and that brings in people of all ages, as well as revenue for Clubs.





What are the benefits to the Counties?

The same as for Clubs really. There is a huge, untapped market in women's cricket. It's about creating the right offer for women, and for that the Counties need to be on board and feed down to the individual Clubs. The presence of women can make a huge difference to the culture but they need their own game.

What made the Festivals for you?

The fact that women were centre stage in a traditionally male-dominated environment. The whole day was about having fun, with a dance warm up and music throughout the day. We had coaches there too, just to encourage everyone, not to dictate how to hold a bat. We created a warm, friendly, women's atmosphere, with stalls run by local businesses selling jewellery, handmade gifts, cosmetics and make up and all sorts. We also had activities like sand art, bouncy castles and face painting for the younger kids and All Stars. The thing that surprised us most was that after the first festival, women wanted to start playing competitive games in a team. We expected this to happen by the third or fourth Festival but we were excited to see that it was happening much quicker.

What's next?

We'd like to create a proper Women's Soft Ball league for next season. It's more of a commitment but we do now have a few teams that could well be ready for a competitive league. At Sacriston Cricket Club, for example, they got a lot of women to come along on a wet, miserable day to the Festival. Some of them enjoyed it so much that they entered other competition so they could play together again. We see an opportunity there. We have a few more Clubs that we think might be ready - Burnopfield Cricket Club, Chester-le-Street Cricket Club, Middleton-in-Teesdale Cricket Club - so we hope we get enough interest to be able to set this up.



What is your marketing plan going forward?

We have the potential to put together enough teams to form a league and play for fun, but we do still want the Clubs to promote the game to more and more women.

Originally, we didn't think the idea of Women's Soft Ball Cricket on its own was enough to bring new people in. So we created Ladies' Days with the offer of Afternoon Tea, Prosecco and the opportunity to play if they wanted to. Our plan now is for the Clubs to replicate the 1-person-brings-3 strategy - it almost creates the team by itself.

Another thing that really worked was Facebook and email marketing. Women tend to be very involved on social media so it's a great way to bring them in. We used our Facebook page to its utmost. Everyone that came to claim their Afternoon Tea was asked for their details, so now we have a strong database for next year. This is something that Clubs can do. There are two women full-time coaches at Durham Cricket Board and we are immensely proud of them. They will be driving the SBF campaign next year. Their plan is to encourage all Clubs to always have at least one female coach or volunteer because it makes a massive difference.

Essentially, we want the Festivals in 2018 to be for women and girls of all abilities. We'll have our usual offer for women who have never played before. So we'll still have Afternoon Tea and Prosecco - but all driven by the Clubs. Plus hopefully, we'll have a women's league and girls' league running on the same day.





The success of the Festivals has been incredible. It's been massive and puts us in a place where we've wanted to be for a long time. Now we have the opportunity to really grow the women's game - which is what we're here to do and I'm proud to be a part of it.

