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EXCLUSIVE: Cricket in the hood! Compton visits Compton, LA to train with the 'Homiez and the Popz'...
AKA the local cricket team

By [Nick Compton](#)

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/cricket/article-2477650/Nick-Compton-visits-Compton-train-local-cricket-team.html#ixzz2k9sNnmj>

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I am in the 'hood', in one of the most dangerous suburbs of Los Angeles. You might have heard of Compton as the home town of tennis's Williams sisters, but this isn't any quiet suburban outpost. Compton has some of the most dangerous streets in America.

In the last six months alone there have been nearly 700 violent crimes. Just three years ago the FBI ranked it the 15th most dangerous place in the US. It is under gang rule and covered in their graffiti, the birthplace of drive-by shootings and drug warfare. In other words, the Compton name here is plains away from Lord's, the home of the cover drive and the flick off the hip.

So what has brought me to Los Angeles while the rest of English cricket is focused on Perth and my team-mates about to take on Australia in the Ashes?



Contrast: Somerset and England batsman Nick Compton visited... Compton, not your average cricketing town, situated just on the border of Los Angeles

Well, there is cricket here, in possibly one of its most unlikely locations. Compton Cricket Club, founded by English film producer Katy Haber, has been working for years to offer some hope in a society that had been rendered hopeless.

I first heard of the club a few years back, and was intrigued enough, not just by the name, but also by the idea of how cricket was being used to help inner-city kids, to accept their invitation to come over and see if I could help.

Katy, who has been involved in a number of great films including Blade Runner, Straw Dogs and The Deer Hunter, overpowered me with her extraordinary passion for the game. She is also a philanthropist, working with the homeless and disenfranchised youth, and it was in this context that she introduced the game of cricket to Compton.

Her co-founder was Ted Hayes, a dreadlocked 62-year-old activist for the homeless, at the time as familiar with cricket as Buckingham Palace or the Downs at Hambledon, where cricket was first played.



Spirit: Ted Hayes, showing off his bowling skills, is the co-founder of the club

Through their tireless efforts, vision and belief, this remarkable cricket club has since visited both, taking tea at the former and playing on the green at the latter, and in Australia as well.

My first meeting with Ted was instructive. A highly intelligent and eloquent man, he spoke to me of his love of the game, its sense of 'etiquette'. He saw something that could become a catalyst for teaching young Americans what he termed 'civility', something he felt baseball and American football didn't do.

Cricket was a way out for kids, instead of joining gangs, running riot, writing graffiti, doing drugs. 'If the British never did anything right, they did right when they invented cricket,' he said.

To give you an idea — three of the original Compton Cricket Club have since died and that is considered a pretty good survival rate in these parts. One of the victims, Jesse Cazarez, brother of fellow players Emidio and Ricardo, was killed in a drive-by shooting outside his home in February 2009, aged 20.



Celebration: Theo Hayes and Isaac Hayes chest pump after taking a wicket in a game



Tattooed: A cricketer's bowling hand is shown

'He was an innocent bystander caught in crossfire,' said Katy. 'He was supposed to come to a photoshoot that day and if he had done that rather than stay at home to watch the Superbowl, he might still be alive. It's an unsolved crime as the streets don't talk.'

One of Ted's sons, Isaac, and his brother Theo have produced cricket 'rap' songs, which they titled 'Bullets to Balls', in a hope to appeal to the younger generation of black Americans. They want to make the game 'cool'.

'Cricket offered me a way out, a way off the streets and to do something with my life,' said Sergio Pinales, 32, who lost his brother in a motorcycle accident. 'I don't know where I'd be today. Probably gang-banging, causing s*** somewhere. Cricket taught me about what it means to be a good person with meaning and a purpose.'



Proud: Isaac Hayes features for the team, nicknamed the 'Homiez and the Popz'

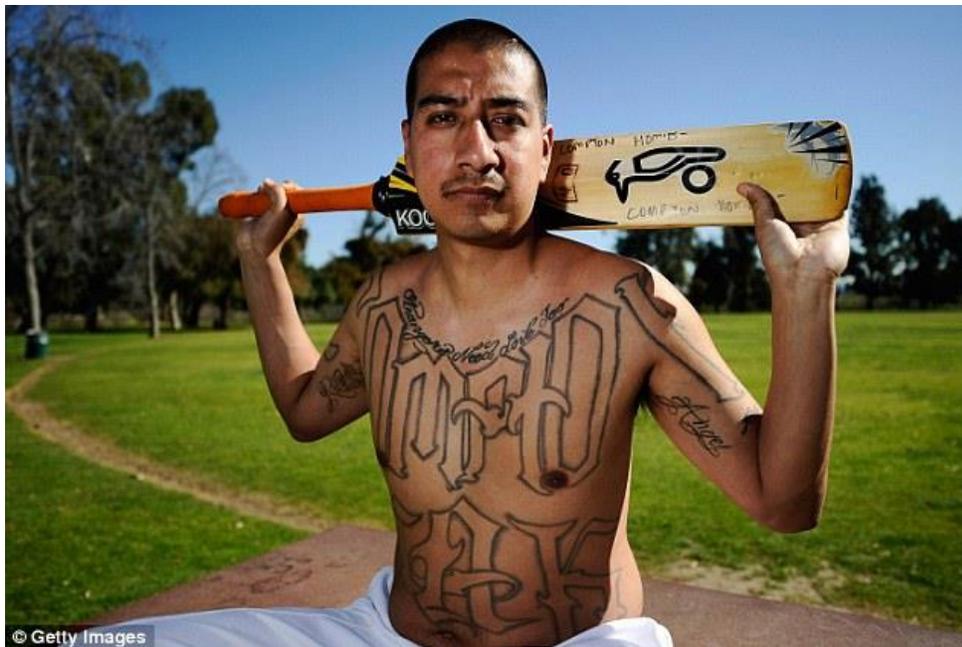


Sergeo Pinales: 'Cricket offered me a way out'

So much so that Sergio returned from the Compton CC tour to Australia in 2010 devastated to see the drug problems that existed there among Aboriginal youth. He went back to school and is now a drug counsellor helping local youth in Los Angeles — and still an avid cricketer.

So is Richard Salgado, considered by Katy 'a real success story on his own'. Richard spent five years in jail, but found such inspiration in cricket to change his life that he is planning to start a programme in a juvenile detention centre near his new home in Chicago.

I've met them both and we've become good friends. Even my grandfather, Denis, had a connection here beyond his name. Katy had contacted him before their first tour and told him of the 'Compton Cricket Club'. She wanted his support.



Success story: Ricardo Salgado was previously in jail for five years

My grandfather had real empathy for the underdog. In his autumn years he tried to promote the game to those who didn't have the opportunity to play it. He even started developing the idea of a 'Denis Compton Trust', to finance expansion of the game to the underprivileged.

I remember once, at his home in Burnham Beeches, he spoke to my father about the very thing Ted mentioned: the etiquette and good sportsmanship the game promoted. He was strong on things like good manners and politeness. He told my father about this 'American cricket team' and wondered how he could further its prospects.

'In good old Compton fashion, he told me he was "delighted" that the team had been named after him,' said Katy. 'I didn't have the heart to tell him that Compton was the name of the suburb!'



Respect: Compton said he really enjoyed his time with the team, getting to know players individually

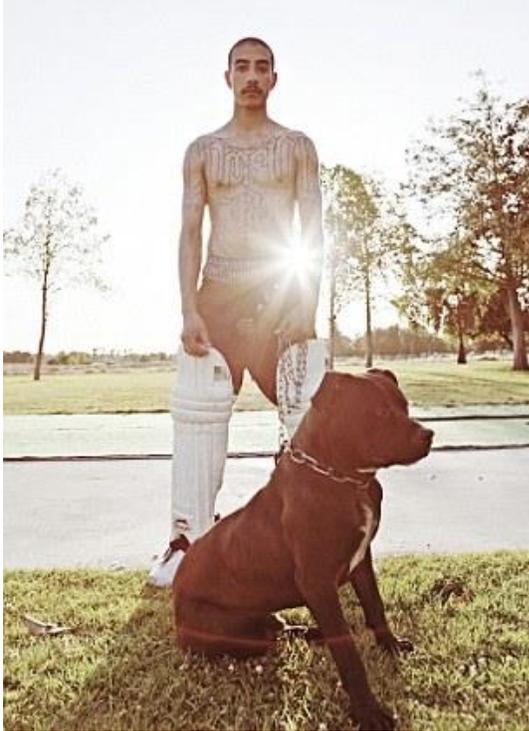


As for the players themselves, when I first met them they were special. Gregarious, outspoken, friendly. It was infectious. They brought out the best in me. I even accepted their pleas to drop the lbw rule: 'Hey, Nick, we like this game but give us a break man. American cricket ain't suited for LBs!'

On my first visit, I went with them like some baby brother to a few of the Compton outposts, and also visited downtown LA, places like 'Skid Row' and 'Crack Alley'. There's no window shopping there.

There's nothing welcoming about Crack Alley, seeing guys with knives and guns. At one point while Ted was driving us down the road he was shouting at me: 'Put the camera down! Put the camera down! Can't film here, you're crazy.'

But it was exciting and I am still taken by what Compton CC can offer the rest of the world, even becoming a cricketing showcase to the rest of America.





Unfamiliar: A cricket player (with pads) and his dog (left) and Ted Hayes (right)



Unusual: 'Cricket outta Compton' is displayed on one of the players T-shirts

Yet obstacles remain. Apart from the obvious cultural ones, there are financial implications, with many of the original members having moved on, with families and full-time jobs.

Recently, Katy and Paul Severn, who comes from three generations of American cricketers who even have a field named after them in Woodley Park, met the ICC, the game's world governing body, and the new chief of the US Cricket Association (USACA) to discuss plans of building a Compton Cricket Academy.

The hope is that the youth from Compton and other areas can be coached, taught and educated about the game. That is where I hope to play a more important role, providing coaching with an opportunity to go into schools and bring the game to life.



Not quite Australia! Compton wasn't picked for the Ashes squad, but got time to train in the USA



Cricket has offered me a great way of life, it has been the catalyst for understanding and developing myself as an individual. This is what Ted Hayes and Katy Haber saw all those years back and it would be great to see it happen here.

Through the Compton Cricket Academy, I see an opportunity to raise awareness and a pathway to convert high achieving baseball players into cricketers with a competitive league here.

I want to actively help raise money and make the academy a reality. With the help of the ICC and USACA, more American-born kids and teenagers will become interested in this game. The next step is to help organise and participate in an international charity match hosted in LA at the beginning of next year, to launch the academy, and above all to raise cricket awareness in the USA. There has also been talk of a Hollywood vs Bollywood celebrity match next year.



Happy family: Compton and the gang pose for a final photo

I truly believe that the academy will be a successful pilot programme that can be adopted by other US inner cities, giving cricket a foothold in America.

It was always my grandfather's dream to give children who were deemed 'at risk' the opportunity to travel and go on tour, and reap the benefits of cricket with its sportsmanship and camaraderie.

He wanted to convey the message of peace and cricket that the original members of the Compton CC have done. I'd like to realise my grandfather's dream. It may not be the Ashes, but it's certainly an exciting new adventure for me and not a bad way to spend the winter.

[gcwingman](#), NYC, 1 week ago

Thanks to long standing dedication of Katy Haber who saw an opportunity, some 25 years ago, to introduce the game of cricket into Compton. (She is pictured in the last photo). She and Ted Hayes have created a new lease of life for these players and have put a community (that many as mentioned above, would not dream of visiting) on the map. Sod Beverly Hills - Compton is where things need to happen - and this is one great story of battling against the odds to help a community in distress.

[Guest](#), OC, 1 week ago

There you go, as suspected it wasn't Compton but it was Katy Haber who started it & it makes some sense now! But yet I don't think they are benefited by any visits by any Brit or anyone else unless they fork out lot money on some new development project which helps the well being of the locals (can't see how cricket does that - even Soccer would be better, but it too bound to fail in the long run). Compton, California, however, has much to offer & teach Britain what real life is all about as compared to the life which is protected by safety nets within safety nets!

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