

# Michael Ridout

**Michael Ridout** (1998-2003) read Sports and Exercise Sciences at the University of Birmingham. He has been working at International Management Group (IMG) since graduating and currently presides over the commercial strategies for a variety of sporting rights holders including Wimbledon, The Open Championship and the Rugby World Cup



**W**hen I went for my first golf lesson at Oxhey driving range at 6 years old, little did I know that the sport I was about to try for the first time would shape the next 24 years of my life...

Golf for me was love at first sight...or maybe first hit! Shortly after that initial experience I took up membership at my first club ("Tricky Ricky") with the help of my DT teacher at St John's School, David Scott. As my game progressed and with the support of St John's I would later play, and perform well in, the Stowe Putter prep school golf tournament. It was at that event that I was approached by John Simpson - at the time the Head of Golf at IMG and managing the careers of, amongst others, Nick Faldo, Colin Montgomerie and Ian Woosnam - who invited my parents and I for a meeting at his office. The message was that if I wanted to become a professional golfer it was time for me to forget about playing any other sport, forget about socialising with my friends and that my life would now be wall-to-wall school and golf - not the most appealing thought for a 13-year-old, despite how much I loved golf.

What did appeal though was John's job. Travelling around the globe from tournament to tournament working with the world's best golfers would certainly suit

me. By the time I joined Taylors' at 13 years old I was already content that I knew what I wanted to do when I was older - something which I came to realise was fairly unusual for someone so young.

My first memory of MTS was, unsurprisingly, seeing the spectacular sports pitches. Having played sport against many other schools at their grounds I can safely say that no other facilities came close to Taylors'. The condition and the standard of the pitches were second to none and the imposing backdrop of the cloisters enhanced the setting. They also seemed to go on forever!

Whilst I have fond memories of the educational side of Taylors' it is the sporting aspects that really stand out; my closest friends to this day are those that I met playing sport at MTS. Of all the years I represented Taylors' at rugby it was the U16B's campaign that brings back particularly fond memories. The success of that season was brought about by the fact that each one of us were such good friends - we all wanted to go the extra mile for one another and our coach, the late great Paul Overton - or CPO as he was affectionately known. CPO was a unique character whose passion for the school was clear for everyone to see and that rubbed off on all of us. I will never forget CPO cycling across the

grounds to get to practice, nor some of his refereeing decisions that may not have got past a "Television Match Official" had one been present.

A rugby tour to Italy followed that season, where the social aspect may have affected our on-pitch performance but a great time was had by all. Trips abroad were not only fantastic fun, they presented great bonding opportunities. Looking back now, I realise how important they were in my personal development. It sounds trivial, but interaction with teachers in a social environment is actually great training for later life when you are thrust into the working world and are expected to deal with "adults" as if you have been doing it your whole life. It's probably fairly unusual to think of school teachers as your friends - but, after golf trips to Spain and Portugal, a ski trip to Whistler, cricket tours all over the UK and the rugby tour to Italy, I was able to call the likes of Geoff Colley, Richard Laithwaite and Harry Latchman my friends as well as teachers.

It was Harry who showed faith - maybe slightly misplaced - in my cricketing ability and I made my debut for the 1st XI whilst still in the 4th Form. I would go on to play for the 1sts throughout the rest of my time at Taylors' and it was a shame that by the time I was 17 the new AS and A2 level system

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ate into my valuable cricket-playing time. Harry was not only a great coach, he was a great friend to anybody who was lucky enough to be coached by him and he always looked out for us. I feel incredibly fortunate to have spent so much time with him over my five years at Taylors' - not only on the cricket pitch and in the nets but also on the golf course. I wish I could have taken his advice on board a little better than I did with regards to my batting, but the temptation to smack a bowler across the line down to cow shot corner was often too great for me to pass up. There were the odd occasions where it paid off though and scoring 3 half centuries in a week including 70 odd on the main pitch (before going for another big shot leading to my bat breaking and looping the ball up to gully - it still haunts me) were very special memories. It was great to see Harry get such a good send-off last year and I hope he's enjoying his retirement.

I left Taylors' with the grades I required to read Sport and Exercise Sciences at the University of Birmingham and as I approached my graduation I applied for the Summer Graduate scheme at IMG. The scheme is run every July and August and it is one of the most applied for graduate schemes in the country so I was fortunate to get an interview and even more fortunate to get a place - I think my meeting John Simpson certainly helped. For the duration of the eight weeks I worked in a division called European Tour Productions - IMG's 50/50 joint media venture with the European Tour. At first I was disappointed not to work within the golf clients division,



as my goal was still to manage golfers; however, it was not long before my goals changed. Whilst the management side of the sports industry looks appealing from the outside the reality can be different. On call 24/7 to some of the most demanding sports stars on the planet isn't easy and it requires a certain kind of patience that I am not quite sure I possess.

Once the eight weeks were complete I had planned to take my summer holiday as I had gone straight from university to IMG, however, I was offered a permanent position in ETP that I couldn't turn down. My primary role was to manage the commercial aspect of the European Tour's website but, being a relatively small commercial team, my role varied greatly. Undoubtedly the



Michael with Jim Henman

biggest perk to the job was to attend up to 15 European Tour events each year to manage the onsite commercial aspects of the TV production. My travels took me from Augusta to Kuala Lumpur and most places in between.

Following six mad years travelling the globe I took up a new role within IMG in April 2012, managing the commercial strategies for Wimbledon, The Open and the Rugby World Cup. Being on Henman Hill with my colleagues to witness Andy Murray's victory at last year's Championships was certainly one of the highlights of my career so far. Whilst there are some obvious perks, there has been more than a bit of hard work along the way. Being involved in sporting events with a global interest brings about certain pressures but I am fortunate to work with a great group of like-minded individuals and somehow, more often than not, everything comes together as was hoped.

For those of you reading this that are still at MTS, or just about to embark on your own careers, then I can't recommend pursuing a career in a field of personal interest highly enough. For me, going into work every day knowing I am going to be doing something that I love makes getting out of bed in the morning far easier. If you would like any more information on IMG or have any questions then I would be more than happy to help out. In the meantime, good luck with the rest of your time at Taylors'. You are incredibly fortunate to be at such a fantastic school so please take advantage of every opportunity that is presented to you and above all enjoy yourselves!