

## Graduation 2013

### Acceptance Speech by Honorary Graduate Alastair Cook

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Professor Jules Pretty; thank you for your kind words, and guests. It gives me great pleasure to be here today to accept this honorary degree from the University of Essex. It is a pleasure to receive the honour from the University which has a good reputation for excellence in Sports Science, teaching and research. For we all know how important this is in the professional area of sport where success and failure are usually decided by very fine margins.

I would like to thank the university today, for helping me keep a promise that I made to my mum ten years ago. As we all know, the fashionable thing to do when we finish school is to have a gap year before going to University. Clearly the thought of having a year off to go and play cricket abroad was very appealing to me, so the first, as Mr Pretty said, of many gap years as it has turned out, I happened to go and play for the under 19s in the Bangladesh World Cup. Cricket that year went as well as it possibly could for me and I ended up being a regular start of Essex first eleven. So at the end of the year, I decided that I should not go to University to concentrate full time on my cricket career. However, my mum as a teacher had always drummed the importance of education into me. So telling her that I was not going to go to university was always going to be a little bit tricky. Anyway, as part of my bargaining strategy, to her, I made a promise that one day I would definitely get a degree. So ... (applause) so I should say without the hard work, a lot of drinking and partying, mum, here is the degree I promised.

It is great to see so many people here today, people from Maldon Cricket Club and Essex County Cricket Club who without their support and guidance, I would never have achieved what I have done so far in my career. And it means a lot for me to see them here today. And obviously as it's the first game of the county championships season at Essex and I hope that's going well as well. Obviously, throughout my life, there have been a number of people who have helped me along the way. I'll probably miss a few out here but from my grandparents \*\*rolling? a wicket in their garden and spending hours out therewith me, to St Pauls who taught me the discipline of a routine at a very early stage and the staff at Bedford school who bent over backwards for me, whether it was opening the swimming pool early for me to go swimming to get fit or Derek Randall, who I badgered for every minute of his spare time to feed the bowling machines at ungodly hours like at 7 o'clock in the morning. To me thought, it shows how much a bit of hard work and a bit of dedication, where back garden cricket can lead.

2013 is going to be a very exciting year for the England cricket team. To have the opportunity to play back-to-back Ashes series, home and away and an ICC championships trophy in front of our home crowd, it's going to be a very special time for us as England players and an opportunity we are desperate to take. For me as captain, the thought of being given the chance to pick up the urn is an incredible thought and the chance to follow the great England captains of the past, Mr Mike Brearly, Mr David Gower and of course, recently Mr Andrew Straus, is truly an honour that I am desperate to take.

We know that if we want to achieve that success, it is going to take a huge amount of hard work, determination and skill as I have shown in getting my degree again today. But I know that looking at you guys in the dressing room, sorry, you guys?! The guy in our dressing room... I wish I could have you guys in the dressing room! At least you'd laugh at my team talks! Um, the desire to improve and the hunger to work hard is there and I know as a team, we are heading in the right direction.

So hopefully, with a little bit of luck, thrown in there as well, we will be sitting in the square of the Sydney Cricket ground with a beer in hand as a team like we were in 2011, celebrating something that hopefully will be very special.

Thank you again for this huge honour and I am very proud to accept it.

Thank you.