

# Ferntree Gully Belgrave Mail



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Covering Ferntree Gully, Belgrave, Tecoma and Upwey region

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# Blind ambition



Upwey High School student Daniel Pritchard, 17, will represent Australia in the Blind Cricket Ashes tour of England.

Picture: CASEY NEILL

By CASEY NEILL

DANIEL Pritchard got involved with blind cricket by “freak accident”.

The Upwey High School student met blind Australian fast bowler Lindsay Heaven at a vision expo day and struck up a conversation.

“Before then I didn’t even know blind cricket existed,” Daniel said.

“I was the least sporty person in the world at the time.

“A few years prior I’d just given up playing baseball because of my failing eyesight and I kind of had this mentality that I wasn’t able to do anything.

“He was really forceful in trying to get me down and get me involved. Eventually I agreed just to shush him up.”

But four years on, the 17-year-old will be the youngest player to represent Australia in its battle against England in the Blind Cricket Ashes tour from 26 May to 5 June.

The series will include three one-day international matches and four Twenty20 matches.

“I can’t explain the feeling. It’s surreal to be involved with the best of Australia,” he said.

Daniel was born with a degenerative eye condition that left him severely vision impaired from birth.

At age 11 he could no longer play baseball because of his failing eyesight.

At 13 he’d lost all sight in his left eye and surgeons fought to save the residual sight in his right eye.

He faced many dark days, but blind cricket changed his outlook on life.

The game is essentially the same as standard cricket but players use a hard, plastic ball filled with beads that make a rattling sound.

“Instead of bowling overarm we bowl underarm and the ball has to bounce twice on the pitch as a minimum,” Daniel said.



Daniel Pritchard unleashes a delivery in the Victorian Blind Cricket Association grand final, held in March. His top bowling speed is 89 kilometres an hour.

It’s mandatory for the bowler to ask the batsman if he’s ready, wait for him to respond, and announce ‘play’ immediately before releasing the ball.

“We’re able to use our hand-ear coordination in the field,” Daniel said.

“Once the fielder has the ball...the bowler or wicketkeeper needs to call out their name so they have a sound to aim at. If you’re using your hearing a lot it’s something that’s obviously a lot stronger and you learn how to work with it better.”

A blind cricket side includes players with varying degrees of sight, ranging from 10 per cent of normal sight to completely blind.

Daniel is in the B3 category, which means an object most people can see 60

metres away he can only see at six metres - but he can bowl at a staggering 89 kilometres an hour.

He’s claimed two titles and a grand final appearance since joining domestic side St Paul’s Blind Cricket Club in 2008, collected a string of Victorian Blind Cricket Association accolades, and starred in Victoria’s victory at the recent Australian Blind Cricket Championships.

He now has his eyes on Ashes glory but is facing a hefty travel and accommodation bill for the privilege of representing his country.

“It’s very hard to find sponsors willing to help us out,” he said.

To help Daniel call the Mail on 9751 9300.