

JONATHAN AGNEW



As the number of people taking part in active sport continues to decline throughout the UK, this weekend's Sport Relief is a timely reminder of the many ways that sport is good for us. This is the seventh staging of the event, which is held every two years, and after the phenomenal success of the 2012 weekend that raised more than £50 million, Sport Relief has been

expanded well beyond its traditional centrepiece, the sponsored mile. This year there are three cycling events hosted by London, Manchester and Edinburgh and more than 600 Swimathons, David Beckham will appear in a special episode of *Only Fools and Horses*, and up and down the country millions of pounds will be raised to emphasise that while sport promotes a healthy lifestyle, it is also a unifying force.

I will be on World T20 duty with England's cricketers in Bangladesh, a welcoming but desperately poor country where, for many, survival is a daily challenge. For those cricketers who have not visited Bangladesh before – even those who have travelled on the subcontinent – the desperation etched into the faces of begging children will come as a dreadful shock. So, too, the pain of the men, stripped to the waist and buried beneath a mountain of hardware on their bicycles, which they now agonisingly pedal through the teeming, dusty streets. Somehow they still manage a smile and a wave, especially if they make the connection between us and cricket, but it makes me ashamed

to think of the things I find to complain about in the course of my day-to-day life.

Sport Relief is already established in Bangladesh where much of the country floods in the monsoon season and resulted in 18,000 children drowning last year alone – that's 50 each and every day. For example, for £5 the Monorhardi SwimSafe project not only teaches a child to swim but also how to rescue those who cannot.

Also present in Bangladesh will be the Afghanistan cricket team, whose players will testify to the extraordinary manner in which cricket has played a unifying role in their country.

There is no history of cricket being played in Afghanistan until the refugees who fled to Pakistan to escape the conflict returned home. Now there are league teams in 28 of the 34 provinces, and this week the Taliban sent the national team a good-luck message. For Afghanistan, full Test status cannot be far away, completing a remarkable sporting story.

'Sport is also a unifying force'

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