



PHOTO: AFP

COOL CALYPSO: West Indies dasher Chris Gayle dances in delight celebrating his century against South Africa in the Twenty20 World Championships at the Wanderers in Johannesburg on Tuesday. Gayle became the first centurion in this form of the game.

Gayle lives fantasy

CRICINFO, undated



Thirty-six fours, 18 sixes, 413 runs, and a win for the home team -- the first match of the ICC World Twenty20 couldn't have been scripted any better. The bowling of neither team was shown in particularly good light, which only confirmed the belief that this tournament will be about getting huge totals, and then chasing them down.

From a batsman's perspective, the best thing about Twenty20 is the license it gives to attack from the get-go. A rash shot in the first five overs of a 50-over game might elicit criticism, but not in the super-crunched version. For this reason, the two batsmen who revelled on Tuesday night are the two who are likely to have a fairly high success ratio in this tournament, and in future Twenty20 games.

Chris Gayle's style in ODIs isn't very different to what he displayed at

the Wanderers on Tuesday, but often in the one-day version he prefers to see off the new ball: scores of 5 from 30 often convert into a run-a-ball half-century. Here, he just decided to cut off those first 30 deliveries. His shot-selection has improved considerably over the last few years, and there was little that any of the South African bowlers could do once he got into his stride.

Early on, the strategy was to pitch it short or bowl it on a good length and expect the bounce to do the trick. That didn't work, and neither did the fuller length -- when Albie Morkel tried it once, he was smashed so hard over point that the ball cleared the ground and a new one had to be brought out. It was the first century in this form of the game at international level, but it will be a surprise if it remains the only one by the end of the tournament.

In fact, if West Indies had scored a few more runs, there might have been another hundred tonight, as Herschelle Gibbs helped himself to another run-fest on the same

ground where he had blitzed Australia last year. Like Gayle, Gibbs relishes pitches with pace and bounce but little sideways movement, and this track -- and the lightning quick outfield -- were just perfect.

While the batting was electrifying, the performance of the bowlers left plenty of room for improvement. Mickey Arthur, the South African coach, got it right when he said his bowlers showed little variation through the first 15 overs. Albie Morkel bowled one yorker in the tenth over, but apart from that there was little to suggest the team had prepared specific strategies for this tournament. The slower balls were conspicuous by their absence, while the blockhole deliveries were either not attempted or misdirected.

If South Africa were poor, West Indies were downright appalling, putting in such a shocking performance with the ball and in the field that a fabulous batting performance ended up being completely inadequate. Three dropped catches and

23 wides made for a perfect example of how not to defend a target, and while Arthur thought South Africa would have won even without the West Indian largesse -- "We had plenty left in the tank; we won with 14 balls and eight wickets to spare, which translates into around a 30-run margin" -- it surely wouldn't have been as easy.

West Indies might not have liked the way the evening went, but the crowds had little to complain. For R 100 it was outstanding entertainment -- the music, which took off on cue after every boundary, happened so often that it seemed like a three-hour rock concert, while the cheerleaders had plenty to groove to as well. If this match was an indication of how the rest of the tournament will go, expect an absolute blast.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard of the Twenty20 World Championship match between South Africa and the West Indies at the Wanderers on Tuesday:

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Ferguson kicked in the groin

INTERNET, undated

A 'fighting drunk' today admitted punching Sir Alex Ferguson in the groin and head butting a police community support officer.

Forty-three-year-old Kevin Reynolds pleaded guilty to assaulting the Manchester United manager outside a train station before attacking the officer and racially abusing him.

Reynolds appeared at City of London Magistrates Court and was warned he could be jailed when he is sentenced at a later date at London's Southwark Crown Court.

The attack took place on Monday shortly after 4pm when Sir Alex was waiting for his driver outside Euston Station in central London.

Reynolds, originally from Fife but now of no fixed abode, approached Sir Alex, who initially thought that the man staggering towards him was a beggar asking

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Rocking the house

AFP, Johannesburg



The inaugural Twenty20 world championships is taking South Africa by storm, thrilling fans who are drawn to the exhilarating speed of the high-octane game where anything can happen.

The dazzling opening of the 12-nation tournament here on Tuesday saw the 33,000 capacity Wanderers stadium overflowing as fans "rocked the house, T20 style" to a gripping batting display by South Africa and the West Indies.

While records and sixes were smashed around the park with equal aplomb, groups of scantily-dressed dancers on platforms around the stadium roused the crowd to the tunes of in-house DJ Lady Lea.

A convincing eight-wicket win for the hosts over the West Indies despite Chris Gayle scoring the first ever century in international T20 cricket, left the crowd roaring throughout the match.

The lulls in crowd excitement

and slothful progression associated with Test cricket were absent as the short format introduced fireworks, loud music and screaming fans that have been dwindling in other forms of the game.

"Twenty20 cricket is a 21st century sport, and we are delighted to be the first hosts of the world tournament in this exciting new format," said South Africa's sports minister Makhakesi Stofile when opening the event.

The International Cricket Council has placed huge stock on the championships leading cricket into the future by capturing the imagination of younger fans.

"It's exciting, it's something new. It brings a whole new audience," said 16-year-old cricket supporter Lance Bunt from Vereeniging, south of Johannesburg.

West Indies supporter Sameer Wadhwa said he loved the pure entertainment of the game.

"I love it, it is very exciting. This sport is purely for the spectators and the spectators are having a blast," he told AFP.

While many of those in the old-guard view cricket as the traditional gentlemen's game not to be messed with, it is clear the new format of party cricket is here to stay.

Former South African captain Kepler Wessels said Twenty20 cricket was "still finding its place in the pecking order".

"It's just going to gain in popularity, we are going to see more and more of these matches," Wessels told AFP.

Despite the criticism of the shorter format, Wessels feels "everything has a place" and that it definitely has a niche-market.

Twenty20 is anybody's game and the words of bowler Shaun Pollock that there would be no time to choke rang true as South Africa managed to redeem itself after losing to the West Indies in the opening match of the 2003 World Cup.

"Either whack or go home," said fan Neil Watkins of Durban, summing up the "the much better, more competitive and more exciting" game.

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Laporta upset over Henry stay

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona boss Joan Laporta says he is "outraged" that France has chosen to keep Thierry Henry in their squad for a Euro 2008 qualifier against Scotland on Wednesday even though the striker is suspended.

"He has a yellow card and he can't play but the coach wants him to stay," Spanish sports daily Marca quoted Laporta as saying on its Internet site on Tuesday.

"So we have done what we could so that the player returns. I am outraged by this unjust and inappropriate action," he said.

Laporta added that it was a "disgrace" that clubs were required to let their international players take part in national team matches without receiving any compensation in return.

Henry's continued presence with the French national team means he will miss the final of the Copa Catalunya against Gimnastic Tarragona on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old picked up the yellow card during France's goalless draw away to Italy on Saturday for kicking Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro.

Brazil's virtuoso performance



Football

AFP, Wuhan

South American powerhouse Brazil lashed footballing minnows New Zealand 5-0 here Wednesday in a resounding display of skills that proved too much for the hapless Kiwis.

Under grey skies at the Wuhan Sports Center Stadium, Daniela Alves, Cristiane, Marta and Renata Costa all found the back of the net to outgun the inexperienced New Zealanders.

The Brazilians put on a virtuoso show and the score could have been much higher, serving warning to their Group D rivals China and Denmark that the 1999 World Cup third place finishers are back after an early exit four years ago.

Midfielder Daniela, 23, got things going in the 10th minute with a devastating strike from 30 metres that whistled over the outstretched arms of Kiwi goalkeeper Jenny Bindon.

Cristiane, whose relentless pace caused all sorts of problems for the New Zealand defence, made it 2-0 in the 54th minute, slotting her strike into the right-

hand corner from 20 metres. Nine minutes later another rocket by the 22-year-old left-footer banged dangerously off the crossbar.

Daniela, who made her international debut at the tender age of 15, made no mistake minutes later, flicking the ball to 2006 player of the year Marta who weaved up the left before smashing a drive into the net.

Marta added another in the dying minutes to bring her international goal tally to an astonishing 42 in 40 games. Midfielder Renata also scored.

It was the first time the teams had met in the World Cup, and it was a flamboyant demonstration of what makes Brazil real contenders for the 2007 title.

From the opening minutes Brazil's Cristiane as well as Marta looked dangerous, cracking open New Zealand's defense with razor-sharp passing, slicing runs and an onslaught of shots on goal.

New Zealand's best chance came when veteran Wendi Henderson, their only player to have taken part in a World Cup in 1991, broke free in the opening minutes but failed to make the most of her opportunity.



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil's Marta Vieira Da Silva (R) shoots the ball to score her first goal as New Zealand's Abby Erceg looks on during their Women's World Cup football match in Wuhan on Wednesday. Brazil won 5-0.

Marta dreams of Sweden final

AFP, Wuhan

Marta, once described as "Pele in a skirt" by the great Brazilian himself, is dreaming of a World Cup final against Sweden, a team stacked with footballing friends.

A showdown against the European powerhouse would mean Brazil's Marta, the 2006 women's player of the year, could take on teammates from her Swedish club side Umea, where she launched her professional career after arriving in 2004.

"I hope for a final against Sweden," said the 21-year-old, who has celebrity status in her homeland where she started playing street football against local boys at the age of seven.

"Of course I support Sweden a little."

Sweden, beaten in the final of the 2003 World Cup by Germany, is one of the strongest nations in women's football, with instrumental players like Marta's Umea teammate Hana Ljungberg.

But for the time being Marta and her talented Brazilian squad know they have their work cut out in Group D, which also includes Denmark, China, and New Zealand.

"If we're going to win we have to win six games and that's what we are focused on," Marta said.

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