

# Lashings of fun and cricket ... even after 59-hour trek

Stephen Thorpe discovers a cricketing idyll and some fiercely contested action in a Jamaican paradise

**T**he notion that David Cameron, the Prime Minister, had ripped over to Jamaica to witness the climax of the recently concluded inaugural Breds Cup T20 tournament in which the Lords and Commons CC competed, proved unfounded, but another late arrival at last found the trip worthwhile.

Former New Zealand all-rounder Chris Harris showed serious commitment with a 59-hour journey at four days' notice to augment a Lashings International XI led by former Lancashire, Surrey and England leg-spinner Chris Schofield, and was duly grateful when they defeated the Trinidad Red Force by eight wickets in a keenly contested final.

The T20 jamboree attracted three island sides, Westmoreland Jaguars, May Pen Lions and Treasure Beach Pirates – on their home pitch – while the Lords and Commons also somehow found time for a third visit to the gilded shores of St Elizabeth in south west Jamaica.

It was no knockabout event, either, after Red Force advanced to the final after a contentious match against the local Pirates and the young quick Marquino Mindley, who has taken the new ball for Jamaica in first-class matches and already attracted admiring attention from Clive Lloyd, West Indies chief selector. Scores were tied on 128 but former ICC elite umpire Steve Bucknor ruled that the number of fours were decisive after sizes were found equal in a frantic scouring of the scorebook.

Another flashpoint occurred in the final when a nasty lifter from Lashings' Kent paceman Matt Coles struck a helmetless batsman on the jaw after the bowler had just inquired whether he needed protection.

Usain Bolt, that unassuming country boy from Sherwood Content, Trelawny, had threatened to gatecrash proceedings as a nifty fast bowler, but was eventually confined by pressing matters at his sports bar back in Kingston.

But more than the cricket, this inaugural competition was seen as a celebration



Home of legends: Lucas CC where George Headley and Chris Gayle played

of the remarkable transformation of a remote dusty goat pasture into the now highly impressive Treasure Beach Sports Park, the sterling work of the charitable Breds Foundation – and of Jamaica's calling as arguably the ultimate touring destination for amateur club players.

Certainly it's a wonderful place for any sports enthusiast, with Jamaica a veritable crucible of athletic excellence (the latest being Stafanie Taylor, 24, the new West Indies Women's captain who leads the side against Pakistan this month) and you'd be hard pressed as a cricketer to savour a more rewarding all round life experience than a couple of weeks amid the wildly varied mountain terrain, beachscapes and authentic rural hinterland outside the urban centres of Kingston and Montego Bay. Ask the MPs.

The vibrant capital city, though, is a must on any itinerary, with a racy nightlife, some quality restaurants, art galleries, numerous historic sites and a splendid 'olde worlde' atmosphere guaranteed at the best centre of operations,

**The Test ground at downtown Sabina Park may have changed beyond all recognition but remains an arresting amphitheatre**

the Iguaneas Club in the uptown business district.

The Test ground at downtown Sabina Park may have changed beyond all recognition after its radical makeover for the 2007 World Cup, losing its cockpit intimacy and misty views north to the Blue Mountains, but it remains an arresting amphitheatre.

Forty years ago this correspondent played his first match outside England here in the company of Notts stalwarts Derek Randall, Bashir Hassan and Carlton Forbes, when the wayward West Indies pacer Uton Dowe (he of the infamous 11th commandment from the bleachers – "Dowe shalt not bowl") announced himself on a lightning quick track.

It was an eye-opener, literally, after a career on low seamers in Lancashire, and I still get flashbacks, mainly good ones.

Kingston CC groundsman Charlie Joseph is in his 50th year in the job, a legend in his own right after an incredible milestone, justly proud, too, of the Sabina sward and quick to point out he was not actually overseeing the pitch when the England Test was abandoned in 1998!

Within a mile or so are three other grounds steeped in the lore and deeds of great men. Lucas CC in Rollington Town was the alma mater of George Headley, the Black Bradman, and latterly Chris Gayle who, by the way, is recovering well from recent back surgery. On its formation in 1895 it was seen as "the most important event in the history of the island game", affording the chance for



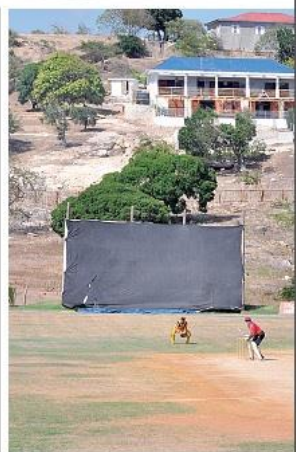
impooverished black cricketers to participate and achieve upward mobility.

The Kensington Club is directly adjacent, Michael Holding and Courtney Walsh's Melbourne CC nearby over at Half Way Tree, and all four establishments continue that trend today.

Jamaica has been in drought and the Lucas ground lies bare and parched beneath the Wareika Hills with water a scarce commodity; they're still highly evocative locations, though, and other well-appointed grounds are associated with the bauxite industry at Kaiser near Discovery Bay on the north coast and at Nain in St. Elizabeth.

The lush green parish of Portland to the north east also has a wonderful, barely acknowledged coastal pitch at Folly Oval, with a dreamy mountain backdrop while the new stadium in Trelawny which hosted the World Cup opening ceremony is about to be renamed the Usain Bolt Sports Academy.

That said, the new showpiece venue is undeniably the faraway Sports Park in







**To the winners the spoils: Lashings captain Chris Schofield receives the trophy from the Jamaica Tourist Board's Torrance Lewis**  
PICTURE: Stephen Thorpe



**Duel in the sun: Lashings in the field against Red Force at Treasure Beach in the Breds Cup final**

sleepy Treasure Beach, the brainchild of Jason Henzell, owner of the award-winning Jakes Hotel and unflagging driver of sustainable community tourism and the Breds Foundation.

His father, Perry, was a renowned Jamaican dreamweaver in film and the arts, and Henzell Jr retains the same visionary acumen; his dedicated team's efforts here over a decade are truly extraordinary, with cricket, and sport generally, offering real opportunity in what is essentially a subsistence-based local agricultural economy. There are two large pavilions, net facilities and donated bowling machine, football pitches, tennis and netball courts and a general joie de vivre – which counts for a lot.

Overall, Jamaica is simply the most alluring territory in the region, geographically and spiritually distinct from its associates Barbados, Antigua, Grenada and St. Lucia in the eastern Caribbean, essentially a real country with multifaceted lifestyles rather than a small island, and retaining a hypnotic vibe embodied

in its reggae music and singular, creative culture. This year's tournament was expertly directed by Brian Breeze, father of Durham's Gareth, and next year's is expected to be an expanded affair with clubs from the Cayman Islands, North America and even further afield.

If the first word went to Kiwi Harris after his monumental journey, then so must the last: "My first overseas trip was to the Caribbean," he said.

"I subsequently toured twice more and it's always been a place I've had strong affection for: I played at Sabina but had never been to this part of Jamaica before, and it really has been worth it. I am quite partial to the aged rums. This is a glorious part of the world, truly God's own country with incredibly hospitable, welcoming people.

"I'd recommend it to anyone, especially those with an interest in sport, and of course, cricket in particular."

**Further information:**  
[www.visitjamaica.com](http://www.visitjamaica.com)  
[www.breds.org](http://www.breds.org)

## YOUNG GUN...

# Growth spurt turned me from a bowler into a batsman

## ZAK CRAWLEY

England U17 and Kent batsman

**Z**ak Crawley is the next academy product looming large at Kent and the teenager believes an extraordinary growth spurt is one of the reasons behind the form that saw him sign a professional contract last week.

Crawley, a right-handed batsman, is not 18 until February but he quite literally stands head and shoulders above many of his peers.

In little more than two years, Crawley has gained a foot in height and now measures up at 6ft 5in – the same as master blaster Alex Hales.

It's admittedly not helped him where his bowling is concerned, but his size has given bowlers plenty to think about already.

"I started off with the ball, I was a rubbish batsman – but then in one U10 district game, I was asked to go in and have a slog and it was the most fun I'd ever had at cricket," said Crawley, who plays his club cricket with Sevenoaks Vine.

"Because I've grown so much, my seam bowling has not been so good as my body has gone through a lot of change – I am 6ft 5in now after being 5ft 5in a little more than two years ago.

"It was quite weird, my perspective changed and I definitely had to adapt but now I find it a massive advantage. I've been told people find it very hard to bounce me and I can get down the wicket on a good length ball, though pace has caught me out on occasion in county 2nd XI cricket.

"In the last couple of years I've been found out slightly in that sense because the pace has gone up, but if I can learn and practise the short ball more I think it will stand me in good stead."

While his rise has been rapid in one sense, Kent have clearly had an eye on him for some time after handing him his 2nd XI debut when he was 15, taking to the field with the likes of England keeper Sam Billings and Alex Blake against the MCCU in 2013.

His big statement came in July however after compiling his first 2nd XI ton in Taunton – a fluent innings that contained 18 boundaries.

"In this game it's all about 100s, kicking on from your



70s, and I think getting that first century is the main reason why I was awarded the contract – that was the turning point," Crawley added.

"It was definitely overwhelming to sign my first professional contract, I didn't expect it was going to happen this year at all – maybe the next summer if I continued my progress.

"But now I'm just looking to get into the first team as soon as possible. I'm not expecting it to happen right away, but if I can get a couple of hundreds and I do my best.

"I'd like to think they would give me a couple of first-team games during the season. A similar season to last year would put me on track."

There are few academies in county cricket that can boast the same track record as Kent – quite refreshingly Crawley's pathway into the 1st XI is likely only to be blocked by home-grown talent, with the likes of Daniel Bell-Drummond, Sam Northeast, Billings and Blake all having graduated through the system.

But Crawley credits Sean Dickson, the South African-born batsman who earned a contract at Kent after impressing in the East Anglian Premier League, as the teammate who has so far influenced him the most.

"Sean is a brilliant player, I'm sure he will be playing a lot of first-team cricket next year," said Tonbridge student Crawley, who is planning to take a gap year after he finishes his studies.

"As the next guy a lot of the time in the second team last season, he would always talk through how he was playing and you try and copy him. I always seem to be batting with him when I get the runs."