

Sport

Blackcaps fit and fired up

by John Edwards

The long, hard road to the cricket World Cup and the accompanying glory begins on October 15 in India when the ICC Champions Trophy brings together the world's eight best cricket nations.

The prestigious biennial tournament marks the beginning of six tough months for the Blackcaps that will culminate in the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean in March.

The Blackcaps will have a full strength team at their disposal for the first time in nearly five years. According to coach John Bracewell, his key players are well prepared and fit for the strenuous months ahead.

Match-winning all-rounders Scott Styris and Jacob Oram would be fit to both bat and bowl at full pace, Bracewell told Radiosport.

This was despite Oram still feeling some discomfort in his back after a day in the field.

The Blackcaps will finally have the services of their world-class fast bowler Shane Bond who has recovered from various injuries and is now fully fit.

His rapid in-swinging deliveries, quite rare at any level of the game, will be needed if the Blackcaps are to dismiss teams on the notoriously flat pitches of the sub-continent.

World Cup champions Australia, however, will once more start as favourites despite never having won this particular trophy.

The Australians may not look as formidable as they usually do on paper. But their depth of talent and the vast experience still available to them through old-campaigners like Ricky Ponting, Glenn McGrath and Adam Gilchrist will swing most tight encounters in their favour.

The eight teams involved will be divided into two pools for round robin play.

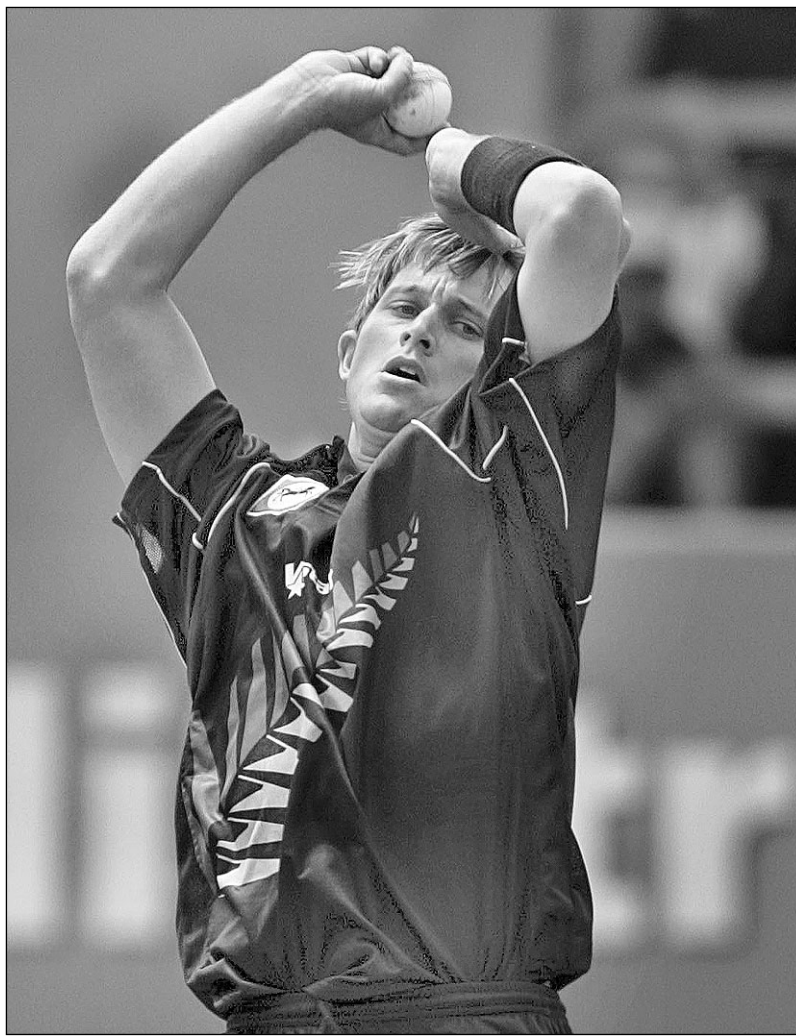
The top two from each pool will qualify for the semi-finals with the final to be played in Mumbai on November 5.

By reducing the number of participating teams to eight, the International Cricket Council (ICC) hopes to reduce the amount of lopsided contests which have featured in past tournaments.

This time around the tournament will be marked by many highly anticipated encounters in the early stages.

The world will get to see a brief prelude to the upcoming Ashes when Australia and England meet on October 21, the day India celebrates the festival of lights, Diwali. India clashes with Australia in Mumbai on October 29 and without doubt the game will be played in front of a capacity crowd of cricket-mad Indians.

Depending on how the tournament plays out, grudge matches galore could be set up in the second round.



SHANE BOND: Back in form and gearing up for the Champions Trophy.

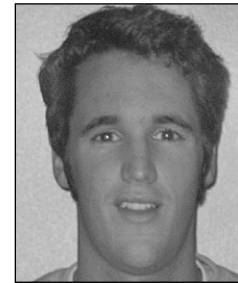
Will England meet Pakistan and settle the ball tampering fiasco once and for all? Or will sparks fly to rival Diwali if Pakistan battle India in a semi-final?

Following the final on November 5, the winner will not be able to keep bragging rights for long because the World Cup is so close, but they will touch down in Jamaica for the opening cere-

mony with a definite psychological advantage.

The Blackcaps Squad to play at the ICC Champions trophy: Stephen Fleming(c), Nathan Astle, Shane Bond, James Franklin, Peter Fulton, Mark Gillespie, Brendon McCullum, Hamish Marshall, Kyle Mills, Jacob Oram, Jeetan Patel, Scott Styris, Daniel Vettori, Lou Vincent.

Save the tape — the ladies aren't worth it



Brenton Vannisselroy

Women's sport doesn't receive enough media coverage — it's a common cry in this country. Well here's the tissues, but I'm not offering a shoulder to cry on.

Women's sport is mostly low quality and in reality lucky to get the attention it gets.

Call me sexist, but read what I've got to say before attempting to look me up and hunt me down.

I watch a lot of sport featuring the opposite sex but I'm tired of the moaning about the supposed lack of media coverage it gets.

The sport media and general sport viewer want to watch elite sport and quite frankly most female sport falls short of elite.

For this reason, it's astounding that female tennis players receive the same prize money as men at Grand Slam tournaments, when their matches are of lower quality and they play best of three rather than five sets.

Only Wimbledon refuses to pay women equally and I agree with the All England Lawn Tennis Club. If women want the same pay they should at least work as hard as the men.

The only reason women's sport gets the coverage it does is because media is increasingly tabloid-driven and sex sells.

Russian tennis star Maria Sharapova, skimpily clad in a short dress, will undoubtedly be watched by larger audiences than a similarly ranked men's tennis player and this obviously has nothing to do with ability.

It was suggested golfers on the US ladies tour should dress more provocatively to attract viewers. This sums up women's sport.

Sport is entertainment, so why should sport that isn't as entertaining be given coverage just because of gender equality?

And just because a team are world champions does not give them reason to receive more extensive media coverage.

The Black Ferns women's rugby team are the best in the world, but let me put this in perspective. Women's rugby is of a lower standard than most schoolboy first XV's and I don't see schoolboy rugby teams on the front of the sports pages.

Australian netball co-captain Vicki Wilson recently praised New Zealand's coverage of women's sport compared to her homeland, so internationally we actually measure up quite well.

I reckon a New Zealand men's netball team would have no trouble beating the Silver Ferns and often do in training matches.

Undoubtedly, if such a tournament existed the male team would be world champions.

But you don't hear them complaining.

New Zealand matches

- New Zealand v South Africa
Mumbai - 16 Oct
- New Zealand v Qualifier 1
Mumbai - 20 Oct
- New Zealand v Pakistan
Mohali - 25 Oct

NZ athletes steer clear of drugs

by Brenton Vannisselroy

While the international sporting arena continues to be plagued by performance-enhancing drugs, New Zealand sport is relatively clear of illegal substances.

The only drug-related judgments made by the NZ Sports Tribunal over the last year refer to marijuana, or the use of stimulants by body builders and power lifters.

The NZ Sports Drugs Agency is about to release statistics in its annual report to show only 15 positive drug tests were recorded in the 2005/6 year.

Of the 15 athletes, 10 had taken cannabis.

The statistics released by the agency for 2004/5 highlight that few athletes test positive for performance-enhancing drugs.

Apart from cannabis use, only one positive test and one refusal were recorded during 2004/5 among elite sports people. Both involved rugby league players.

The league player tested positive for ephedrine and received a two-year ban.

Although pleased with the results, NZSDA executive director Graeme Steel concedes there

will be some athletes taking performance-enhancing drugs as "it is the nature of the beast".

But Steel says in New Zealand it is difficult to cheat by taking performance-enhancing substances for many reasons.

Since the country is so small, Steel says it is difficult to find an environment that is supportive of athletes taking drugs.

"We have got a good sporting culture in New Zealand that rejects the use of drugs."

He says New Zealand's testing is as good as anywhere overseas.

You have to be very cunning and have a lot of resources behind you to get away with taking performance-enhancing drugs, he says.

Steel says around 1500 elite athletes are in the agency's testing pool and most were tested at least once a year.

"We prioritise sports and we prioritise athletes. So, for example, Valerie Vili is tested several times a year."

Performance-enhancing drugs have been a major issue interna-

tionally since Canadian runner Ben Johnson tested positive at the Seoul Olympics in 1988 after winning the 100m gold medal.

Throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, drugs continued to be an issue as cheats seemed well ahead of the testers.

Yet in 2004/5 only a few high profile New Zealand athletes tested positive for drugs. The most recent was tennis number one Mark Nielsen.

Former world junior cycling champion Jeremy Yates, league player Syd Eru and swimmer Trent Bray are three high profile cheats over the last decade.

Helen Quirke, a representative of the New Zealand Rugby Players Association, believes all their players are "completely anti-drugs" and behind the New Zealand Rugby Union's anti-doping stance.

"All of our players believe there is no place for cheating within the sport," Quirke says.

She says drug testing has become part of the sport that the players have accepted and they understand what it is all about.

"We have got a good sporting culture in New Zealand that rejects the use of drugs."

