

Out of Luuk: Glenn McGrath captures the wicket of Netherlands captain Luuk van Troost, a player so out of form he steps down from the team for the next match.



### SATURDAY 10 MARCH

Another solid practice session at Montego Bay CC. The squad is gelling well. Back to the hotel with a police-motorbike escort. In eight days we have yet to stop at a red light on the island. Bob Marley's Buffalo Soldier blares out on the team coach. The West Indies, India and Kenya didn't practice today but we felt it important to do so. The other teams are arriving from their warm-up islands. One by one, they check in throughout the afternoon.

There's an excitement in the hotel now the competition proper is almost upon us. For our guys, it's spotting-the-stars time. It's unavoidable; even I find myself pointing out the big names as they walk by. The pool area is pretty crowded with cricketers. Odd to see South Africans, Dutch, Indian and other nations' cricketers fighting over sun beds. There's a welcome party tonight in the hotel grounds. Shaggy is playing – that's the reggae singer, not Andrew Symonds.

### SUNDAY 11 MARCH

All the teams surface for a surreal breakfast gathering. At this early stage everyone is sizing each other up: what does Ricky Ponting have on his toast? Can Sachin Tendulkar's legs reach the floor from that seat? While the other teams relax, we have a pool session at 9am. Big day today. Opening ceremony at 5.15pm. Waiting as late as possible, though, to don the orange blazer. Even though EasyJet doesn't fly here, I don't want to take any chances.

There's a World Cup squad photo on the hotel lawn for all the sides. We line up and a photographer on the roof takes a snap shot of us like a sniper. Then 16 team coaches arrive and depart for the Trelawny ground in convoy. We are ushered into one stand at the side of the ground just for the teams. The Dutch side sits in the row behind the

Bangladesh team and in front of the Sri Lankans. The tournament seems very real now. It's a great show apart from the fact the organisers have forgotten to seat the hosts, West Indies, and they stand around like spare parts. Our time comes to parade around the stadium. The sun has set and the crowds cheer as each team is announced. We line up this time between Ireland and Pakistan. We appear popular in our orange blazers. One Jamaican cheers as we depart, "Go the Netherlands. Ganja is legal there."

### MONDAY 12 MARCH

Departure for St Kitts. We are flying charter with South Africa, Australia and Scotland at 3pm. We're starting to focus mentally on the South African team. Fellow Essex man Andre Nel kindly tells me that the Dutch should "come hard at me and I'll lose it." I tell him we're going to play it nice and pat back his half volleys. It seems to confuse him. Andrew Symonds is having catching practice in front of our rooms. The rest of his squad is in the pool. The Aussies wouldn't be world champions at swimming. The Dutch are shooting the pool tables instead. We don't want to peak too early.

### TUESDAY 13 MARCH

The teams' hotel, The Marriott at Frigate Bay, is a wonderful spa and casino resort. It's a self-contained village and a great place to be based. At 8.30am we set off for our practice session. En route, we pass the South Africans at another local ground. We hear later that their nets were disrupted by wet surfaces but ours are perfect. It's our best session yet. For the evening meal, players are scattered about the various hotel restaurants in little groups. Some of the Dutch management hit the buffet and discover half the South African team. While waiting in

line, Herschelle Gibbs asks our head coach, Peter Cantrell, if we're here on vacation. It causes a sharp exchange.

### WEDNESDAY 14 MARCH

Australia thrash Scotland by more than 200 runs. We, however, have a great practice session. The squad is shaping up. The only problem is light drizzle has started to fall and the forecast is a bit mixed. In the evening we have a reception with the Dutch Ambassador. It's a lowkey affair – drinks, nibbles and speeches, in Dutch. The drinks and nibbles were in English.

### THURSDAY 15 MARCH

Since we play tomorrow, it's our day to practice at Warner Stadium, but the weather has other ideas. It's been raining since 5.30am. Steady and persistent heavy drizzle. It's a rotten day weather-wise and the forecast for a few days is not great. Our visit to the ground is fruitless, but we manage a rain-soaked run about on the outfield until the heavens open and drive us inside the dressing rooms. It's a small ground with tempting boundaries. Five thousand would seem a large crowd. We travel back from the capital Basseterre to the hotel for our final team planning meeting with the squad.

As bowling coach and assistant head coach, I have an important role. None more important than, 'How the hell can we possibly stop South Africa?' Our plans are drawn up – they're ones we started to implement in Pretoria last November in the ICC Tri-Series. We won that tournament and almost achieved success too in the World Cricket League in Kenya. Our game plan is to have one batter go through the innings and the other opener to play aggressively. We work hard on our ground fielding, which many have said is up in the top four of all countries. Our →

# IN AT THE DEEP END

PICTURES: GETTY In St Kitts, the Netherlands found themselves in the same group as Australia and South Africa. Bowling coach IAN PONT traces his fortnight of living with the World Cup's big two



Top left: It could all have been so different as Tim de Lede drops a catch from Adam Gilchrist against Australia – one of five to go down. Above left: Andre Nel takes a wicket, literally. Left: the carnival begins. Above: Billy Stelling prompts celebrations after taking the wicket of Saffer AB de Villiers.

bowlers aim to bowl channels early, then mix in some pace-off deliveries during the middle overs and yorkers aplenty at the end. Confidence is high. An afternoon watching Ireland tie with Zimbabwe lifts the guys even further. If ever we were ready, this is it.

**FRIDAY 16 MARCH**

Playing the No 1 in the world is fraught with danger. It's a pity we start with them. The other pity is that plans only work if players implement them. In a reduced 40-over match, SA smash 353/3, including Herschelle Gibbs' 36 off an over by Daan van Bunge. Daan tried to stop Gibbs by bowling faster, slower, flatter, quicker – but it made no difference. Each delivery was hit full to the boundary. Some out of the ground. Our lads limp along to 130-odd in reply and are outclassed. Only Ryan ten Doeschate's 57 showing the sort of quality we

**“WE NEEDED LARGE GROUNDS, IFFY PITCHES AND WEAKER TEAMS...”**

are capable of. World records tumble: six sixes an over; the most sixes in an ODI innings (18); the highest score in 40 overs. Remove de Villiers and you bring in Kallis. Get rid of Smith and you get Gibbs. Then there's Boucher, Prince, Kemp, Hall, Pollock... the hitting goes down all the way through. Then you face a combination of Ntini, Nel, Pollock, Kallis, Langeveldt or Hall. It's a solid line-up with match-winners all over the place.

We spend time debriefing the team and pass the evening at a restaurant in reflective mood. The SA team is there and very gracious. I chat to Andre Nel who, curiously, is worried about his bowling. The Dutch and the SA guys get on well. It's the Aussies we are not sure about.

**SATURDAY 17 MARCH**

Days like yesterday make you wonder why

you coach cricket. But we are back in the nets having another really good session at the ground despite the gloom that had descended on the guys. The ability to bounce back is what it's all about, and we should cut ourselves some slack bearing in mind who we were playing. The team meeting today was positive, with talk of batting first against Australia even if we win the toss. Our problem is applying the plans again. Bowling at the Aussie line-up is not much fun on a flat track. Like the South Africans, they have hitters all the way. Plus they have Tait, who gets the ball down at over 90 mph. And of course McGrath. It's not the usual team the lads would play week-in week-out. Then Ireland dump Pakistan out of the World Cup. It's sensational. Our guys watch the final overs and are out of their seats cheering the Irish lads on St Patrick's day.

**SUNDAY 18 MARCH**

Today it all comes bumping back down to earth with the shocking news that Bob Woolmer has died, which comes through

during our game with Australia. After Pakistan's exit from the World Cup at the hands of Ireland, Bob's death is both untimely and suspicious. It hits the Netherlands team hard as Bob had worked with many of the squad as a specialist coach recently. A few players find it very tough to focus on the match. The Australians said they drifted in the field for a few overs too, on hearing the news. It seemed pointless playing when a colleague and friend had died.

The match itself was a defeat, with Australia scoring 358 and us getting 129 in 27 overs. We were positive with the bat and suffered five lbw decisions, so I cannot say anyone threw their wickets away this time. In the field we tried hard, but dropped five catches. And of course, we failed to get in enough yorkers in the last 10 overs and went at around 13 an over. It's a small ground and 350 is a par score here for the best teams. For us, it's 150. The experience of playing South

Africa and Australia in this group will never be forgotten by those emerging in the Netherlands team. Unfortunately, we needed large grounds, iffy pitches and weaker teams for us to have a chance to progress. Back at the team hotel all is subdued. The South Africans are also feeling the loss of Woolmer. Such a great man with excellent coaching ideas and possibly next in line for the England coach's job. We'll never know. Tributes pour in and all the teams will wear black armbands for their next matches.

**MONDAY 19 MARCH**

A rest day for us. But we have a sponsor's lunch, which means we can't do very much except eat and drink. It's a lovely reception with the Dutch Ambassador at a sugar plantation high up in the hills. We'll have just two more practice days until our 'big' match against fellow associates, Scotland. They play South Africa tomorrow and it would

help us if South Africa demolish their attack as professionally as they dismantled ours.

**TUESDAY 20 MARCH**

Scotland made 186 and SA knocked them off inside 23 overs by seven wickets. If they had carried on for the whole 50 overs, SA would have made more than 400. It's the demolition we'd hoped for. But the Scots are not downhearted and smacked 55 off their last five overs. Our practice was a bit lacklustre. The lads look weary. The net surfaces were not ideal either. We need to pick it up. However, the weather is throwing up some serious rain showers. It would be nice to play one match in St Kitts without rain around.

**WEDNESDAY 21 MARCH**

Final practice at the Warner Park ground. The wicket for tomorrow looked like a pudding. The ground staff assured us it would roll out well and dry into a belter. Back at the →



Above left: Billy Stelling takes the wicket of Scotland's Navdeep Poonia as the Netherlands finish the World Cup on a high. Above right, top: Dutch fans celebrate the win. Above right, bottom: the World Cup is over for Colin Smith of Scotland, bowled by Holland's Mark Jonkman.

hotel, our team meeting focuses the guys on a 300-run target and restricting Scotland. However, if we bowl first, we'll try to get them out for less than 200. It means starting well. Early wickets if we bowl first, solid partnerships if we bat. We all acknowledge it might be a tight match. A spinner might be useful. Also the new Kookaburra ball does swing early for a few overs.

Selection is difficult, given that no-one has shone against the two best teams in the world. Our captain, Luuk van Troost is under pressure with his form. We may leave it until the morning to pick the side. Also, Jerome Smits, our keeper and vice captain, has a hairline fracture of his thumb. The rest of the day is spent watching the other group matches on TV. Tomorrow is our last chance to show what we can really do.

#### THURSDAY 22 MARCH

There's a strange atmosphere in the team for two reasons. The first is Bob Woolmer's

death is rumoured to be murder, casting a massive cloud over proceedings. The second is our captain, Luuk van Troost, has agreed to step down due to lack of form. Smits plays with his fractured thumb. It's a risk but this is the game we must win.

The team is anxious. On arrival we view the pitch, which is slightly damp. TV pundit Barry Richards says it's flat and is surprised that Smits, the stand-in captain, decides to bowl first after winning the toss. However at 18/4, Scotland are in disarray and the decision is vindicated. Billy Stelling wins man of the match for his 3/12 off eight overs as we center to an eight-wicket win inside 23 overs.

We do a lap of honour to the vast crowd, bolstered by free entry on this national holiday. Most of the ground is bathed in orange: we've given away so many caps and shirts that the whole of St Kitts must be supporting us. If this is World Cup success, let's have plenty more. Back at the hotel the realisation our shot at the big time is over

hits a few of the guys. But tonight will be a night to celebrate. We'll also toast the Irish. A real shot in the arm for us 'amateur' countries. We'll also look back and wonder if the fixtures had fallen differently and we'd beaten Scotland first, if being top of the group and confident may have got us closer to either of the big two. And we'll acknowledge the amazing talent of Ryan ten Doeschate who scored 30 against India and 50 against Kenya in the warm-ups then 50 against South Africa and 70 not out against Scotland in the tournament proper.

That moment I wondered why I coach cricket was answered fully today. Winning a World Cup match takes some beating. And right now, even though we're all united in enjoying it, our thoughts drift towards Luuk's brave decision as well as the dreadful news on Bob Woolmer. As Bob often said, when players do the basics right they have success. At last, we all did ourselves justice. We can at least say that we had a go. 