

HIV Fight Like Cricket

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UNAIDS Country Coordinator for Guyana and Suriname, Dr. Ruben del Prado has likened the fight against HIV to that of cricket, where a team effort is crucial and everybody's contribution makes a difference.

"Every wicket counts in cricket, and it's the same with the fight against HIV and AIDS - everybody's contribution makes a difference," he said at an HIV forum at the Dorothy Bailey Youth Health Centre in Georgetown last week which was attended by members of the South African cricket team.

Dr. del Prado was referring to the nail-biting one-wicket victory of the South African cricket team over Sri Lanka in the Super 8 stage of the ICC World Cup 2007 played at the Guyana National Stadium at Providence, East Bank Demerara Wednesday.

Accompanied by Minister of Health, Dr Leslie Ramsammy; Deputy Major of Georgetown, Mr. Robert Williams; UNICEF Guyana Representative Johannes Wedenig, and del Prado, the South African visitors were escorted into a crowded hall, full of young people, media and onlookers.

Under banners calling 'Unite For Children, Unite Against AIDS' the event unfolded, hosted by local schoolchildren.

Noting that teamwork can defeat AIDS, Ramsammy told the assembly that HIV was a global problem.

"We are all in this together, and AIDS can only be beaten if we work as a team". Ramsammy was joined in this by UNICEF Representative Wedenig, who said it was heartening to see the peoples of South Africa and Guyana joining hands in a common cause.

The cricketers showed what was possible by making healthy choices in life. "Knowledge is power", Wedenig said, "and by empowering children with knowledge to protect themselves, we can win."

Speaking on behalf of the South Africans, the team's fielding coach, Jonty Rhodes, said that as well-known sportsmen, they had the opportunity to highlight problems.

South Africa had a high prevalence of HIV, he said, so the national cricket team was committed to doing all they could to raise awareness about HIV, and fight the stigma and discrimination that surrounded it.

In a light-hearted question and answer session with the participating youth and media, the final question from a young man in the audience was: "What would you do if HIV was a cricket team and your team had to defeat them?"

Jonty jokingly quoted what he has just 'learned' from del Prado sitting next to him: "Cover your stump before you hump," to roaring laughter from the crowd.

The world-famous right-handed batsman who revolutionised fielding in his playing days, reiterated the importance of knowledge and teamwork, skills and endurance to successfully fight HIV -- similar to a winning a cricket match. The visit was organised by the partnership between the International Cricket Council (ICC), UNAIDS, UNICEF and the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS, to highlight the situation of children and young people living with and affected by HIV.