

## **Using cricket to guard against AIDS**

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WITH THE COMING of Cricket World Cup (CWC), the opportunity is being taken to warn people not to be caught off guard where the death-dealing pandemic is concerned and to draw attention to the problems the disease poses for children and adults living with AIDS.

It is estimated that 250 000 people in the Caribbean are living with AIDS, half being women and one-third between the ages of 15 and 24. While nothing can be done for those who already have succumbed, the search goes on for a vaccine while anti-retroviral drugs are being produced and provided to prolong the lives of those patients with the disease.

But prolonging the lives of AIDS patients is a separate challenge from ridding them of the stigma and discrimination which they still attract.

In an effort to help fight the stigma and discrimination, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has teamed up with UNIAIDS, UNICEF and the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS to highlight during CWC 2007 the situation of children and young people living with and affected by HIV.

A series of 30-second public services announcements, featuring top cricketers speaking about how HIV affects children, has been produced. These will be made available free to regional broadcasters.

This is an off-the-field activity.

On the field, meanwhile, the players and officials will be wearing the red and blue ribbon of the Unite For Children, Unite Against AIDS campaign during their first matches and during the final.

While these plans have attracted no adverse criticism, that of the National HIV/AIDS Commission to use a cricket theme to warn against the spread of the disease, has drawn criticism from one of Barbados' well-known citizens, Senator Sir John Stanley Goddard. He does not favour the display of a billboard showing "an attractive young woman dressed in her white cricket clothes, complete with bat, pads and gloves . . . with a condom in her outstretched right hand" who advises: "It's Your Wicket, Protect It! Use A Condom Everytime!"

Sir John sees this as an exercise in "shock and awe" with the implication being that sex is a game in which the player is being told that "he or she can play it safe and avoid all risks by the use of a condom", and he questions if sexual intercourse "is just another sport or game like cricket".

However, the use of a double entendre can tend to create problems. Gabby uses it most effectively in his popular "cricket" calypso, Hit It, which many of the young women, who Sir John claims through the billboard display "are being degraded" love to dance to, and no doubt get the message.

The message on the billboard seeks to warn young women that they do need to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS.

There is no doubt young women in our country who are sexually active need to know, with or without any billboard advice, they must "protect their wicket", for HIV/AIDS does not make sport. To do otherwise is a deadly risk. All risks can of course be avoided by not "getting involved in the game".