

# C.R. Hosts International Cricket Tournament

By Chrissie Long

Tico Times Staff

Hours spent on the pristine green fields of their home country, swinging a paddle at a rock-solid ball has long been a pastime of many foreigners.

They'd spend entire days on the pitch, enjoying a sport that combines natural ability with acquired skill, intensity with patience.

Overshadowed by soccer and other sports, the game of cricket has seemingly escaped the interest of the Americas.

Yet, with Costa Rica's first international cricket tournament, hosted in Los Reyes Polo Club earlier this month, and through efforts to introduce the sport at local schools, a handful of foreigners are creating opportunities to play and watch the game in this country.

"The idea is to bring cricket to Costa Rica," said Richard Illingworth, president of the Costa Rica Cricket Association. "It used to be played here 120 years ago, mainly among the Jamaicans on the Caribbean coast in Limón. ... At the moment, most of our players are fairly old ... and many have something to do British Commonwealth. We want to get Costa Ricans involved."

According to Illingworth, cricket is the second most-played and-watched sport in the world and, if it weren't for China, it would top the list.

"The one part of the world where (cricket) is not as advanced in terms of the amount of people playing right now is in Latin America -- that is South and Central America," said Grant Dugmore, regional development officer for the International Cricket Council. "(Yet) cricket is virtually the No. 1 sport in the Caribbean, and that is right on Central America's doorstep."



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**Jiminy! It's Cricket:** Costa Rica team manager Sam Arthur pitches against Belize in the tournament's first game. Five teams representing countries across Central America met on a field in Los Reyes, just west of San José, to compete in the third annual Central American Cricket Championship.

A handful of cricket aficionados linked up with the International Cricket Council three years ago, and staged the first Central America Cricket Championship. The first tournament was hosted by Belize, a strong team, which won the inaugural games.

The tournament was played in Mexico the following year, and Mexico won.

Yet the home field advantage didn't play in Costa Rica's favor during this year's championship. Despite several hard fought games from the players representing Costa Rica, the Panama team took home the trophy.

The six games were played in Los Reyes,

just west of San José, where cricket players outlined a space on a private polo field.

In a three-day tournament beginning April 4, teams from El Salvador, Belize, Panama, Mexico and Costa Rica competed in four games, lasting several hours each.

"The venue was well prepared and the matches went smoothly," said Timothy Baker, a player on the Costa Rica team. "Overall, it was a very successful event."

Though Costa Rica pulled away with only one win against El Salvador, it boasted the best batsman, Shane Catford, who scored 154 runs for Costa Rica throughout the tournament.

"From a sporting point of view, about half the games in the tournament were very competitive, and about half were runaway victories," said Illingworth. "Panama was really a worthy winner and wiped out everyone who got in their way."

Illingworth is hoping to resurrect some of Costa Rica's history in the sport and come out stronger in the years to come.

Cricket does have a strong history in Costa Rica as it was first introduced 1886, when a significant number of Jamaicans came to the country to work on the construction of a railway between the port of Limón and San José.

Under their leadership, cricket grew to include 45 teams in the Limón province, but died off in subsequent generations as younger Jamaicans turned their interest to soccer.

Between 1970 and 2000, there were several attempts to revive cricket, mainly among British expatriates living in San José.

"At the beginning of this century, we started getting serious about it. Previously, (cricket here) was just a bunch of expatriates playing for the fun of playing on a Sunday afternoon," said Illingworth, who began playing in the '80s. "The idea is for cricket to become a recognized sport in this country and played by Costa Ricans not just expatriates."

For more information on cricket in Costa Rica or to get involved, contact Secretary Penny Houghton at 8320-0823 or [poughton1@gmail.com](mailto:poughton1@gmail.com) or President Richard Illingworth at 2268-2903 or [illings@racsa.co.cr](mailto:illings@racsa.co.cr).  
[clong@ticotimes.net](http://clong@ticotimes.net)

A video report on the tournament can be found online at [www.ticotimes.net](http://www.ticotimes.net)

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