

In Jamaica, Bolt, soccer & boxing dwarf cricket

In Trinidad, Brian Lara stares at you from posters the moment you venture into Port of Spain. In St John's, Antigua, it's the country's ambassador Vivian Richards who greets you. When landing in Barbados, conversations about Gary Sobers and Gordon Greenidge, Joel Garner and Charlie Griffith begin with flight stewards before anybody else.

But in Jamaica, it is not cricket that welcomes you. In fact, until you've reached downtown Kingston, a 40-minute drive from the airport where there's been a little build up to the one-dayer and the first Test between India and West Indies, there's no sign of cricket.

Instead, there's every other sport and a star accompanying it who greets you the moment you step out of the Norman Manley International Airport. Usain Bolt, in yellow and green, prepares to take off from the starting line. Television channels are busy reporting the national football team's 1-0 victory over Honduras in the ongoing Gold Cup. Father and son & Joe 'tiger' Walters and Nicholas 'Axe Man' Walters & stare at you from promenades with their boxing gloves on.

Jamaica has moved on tremendously in sport and cricket & if not for Twenty20 that Chris Gayle is making famous & is mostly referred to as a game that West Indies were once very good at.

Gayle, no doubt, is a superstar in his own right. He lives in a two-storey house facing the sea and any taxi driver will take you to the gates leading there. Newspapers publishing cricket news carry caricatures of the man in his IPL attire, most taking a swipe at how the left-hander is ignoring the West Indies team.

The batsman continues to make news but nothing like good friend Bolt and his sprint contemporary Asafa Powell. Unlike other islands where Tendulkar and Ponting in this era, and Chappell and Boycott from the yesteryears, were the real 'enemies', Jamaica sees American Tyson Gay as the villain. Didn't he beat Bolt in the IAAF world championships in 2010? The Jamaica Gleaner and Observer are replete with Gay threatening to beat Bolt again this year.

"There's some real competition. Bolt set new standards and the best now want to catch up with him," says Arnold Fred, an inn-keeper.

Finally, you switch on the television to see if there's an update on any cricketing activity here. Daren Powell is making news in the domestic circuit picking wickets and Andre Russell has told the local media that he wants to retire from cricket as a legend but it is the NBA final & Miami's loss becoming Jamaica's own & that is making all the news. Dallas make it to the villain category too.

Cricket just doesn't fill up the air. The humidity makes you break into sweat but youngsters still find great joy in running miles by the beach under the hot sun, wanting to become a Bolt or a Powell. They expect Nicholas Walters to become the world's No.1 boxer after winning his next fight. Even the all-girls netball team is given good coverage.

In Jamaica, sport has a world of its own.