

Bolt considers Australian cricket offer

Olympic sprint star Usain Bolt told Australian media yesterday that he is considering an offer from former test leg-spinner Shane Warne to play Twenty20 cricket in Australia next season.

The Melbourne Stars franchise, for which Warne is the marquee player, confirmed it has opened negotiations with Bolt through his management company about playing in the Big Bash League (BBL). Bolt, who defended his 100 and 200-metre titles in London to take his Olympics gold medal tally to six, played junior cricket in Jamaica and has expressed a love for the sport. In an interview with Channel Nine, Australia's Olympic broadcaster, Bolt said: "If I get the chance I will definitely try because I know it's going to be a lot of fun. I don't know how good I am. I will probably have to get a lot of practice in." The Big Bash League involves eight teams comprising international cricket stars and local players and will run from December 7 to January 9. West Indies captain Chris Gayle is the league's leading scorer and star attraction. Friend of Gayle's Bolt, who says he is an allrounder, is a close friend of Gayle's and famously bowled him and hit a six off Gayle's bowling in a charity match in 2009. Melbourne Stars president Eddie McGuire, a broadcaster with the Australian television network Foxtel, first raised the prospect of Bolt playing for the Stars in an interview with the sprinter at the London Games. Warne then followed up that approach with a more formal offer. "He (Warne) contacted me and asked me about if I am serious and if I really want to do it, then he can put in a few words that should get it done," Bolt told Channel Nine. "So we will see if I get the time off. I will try. "Twenty20, I love it. Just the fact that it is so exciting. It's about going hard the whole time, not just about playing shots. It's about being aggressive, and I like that style of batsman." Stars chief executive Clint Cooper said the franchise would continue its talks with Bolt when he has time to consider other things. "We're going to wait until the Olympics is over and re-engage with him and his management company," Cooper said. "We've got a couple of spots left on our (team) list." Cricket Australia's Big Bash League project manager Mike McKenna told Fairfax media he would not rule out the possibility of Bolt playing in the competition. But he said he would need assurances the sprinter was being picked on merit and not as a novelty to attract spectators and television viewers. "We'd be very keen to have someone like Usain Bolt involved in some way in the BBL," McKenna said. "He's very keen on cricket. He's been close to the Australian cricket team, and I'd imagine he is pretty quick between the wickets. Beyond the novelty "But we would want to make sure that any athlete can play another code to an appropriate level. The competition has gone beyond the novelty factor." McKenna said Bolt would have to weigh the potential impact on his athletics career. "Whether it's a risk he wanted to take standing in front of (fast bowlers) Brett Lee and Patrick Cummins, I don't know," he said. "If he plays for Melbourne Stars and there's a crunch game against the Renegades, no one is going to hold back. There won't be any place to hide if you're Usain Bolt. But he's obviously a very talented athlete, so he may be able to do it." Jamaica Gleaner