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The Betfair betting guide to England's tour of South Africa
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***The Betfair betting guide to
England's tour of South Africa***

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Betting on cricket

by James Pacheco

Betting on cricket has been around almost as long as the game itself.

Back in the late 17th century, when it was played mostly by the poor, the gentry took an interest solely because it provided attractive betting opportunities. Eventually, the aristocracy found that many aspects of the game, such as leadership, honour and honesty, mirrored what they aspired to, and started playing it as well as just betting on it.

As the game relied increasingly on its rich patrons, so the sums of money bet and the numbers watching went through the roof. Reports from the early 18th century talk about small fortunes being bet on the outcome of a single match and the more popular encounters between rival villages attracting as many as 20,000 spectators.

Since then, cricket and betting have remained close bedfellows. Mention the words "Headingley 1981" or "Botham's Ashes" and most people recall Ian Botham hooking short balls for six on his way to an unbeaten 149 not out and Bob Willis taking 8-43 to allow England to level the series. A handful of the England players who featured that day will have fond memories of the match for another reason: some of them backed England to win the Test at 500-1 with the local bookmaker after they had been asked to follow-on and looked destined to go 2-0 down in the Series.

From the two month slog of an Ashes series to the quick-fire slog of a T20 international via the grind of the County Championship, betting on cricket is extremely popular. If there's professional cricket being played somewhere in the world, odds are that somewhere out there people are betting on it. And nowhere more so than on Betfair. It's not unusual for a run-of-the-mill ODI to see £10 million traded on it on Betfair and Test matches that have gone the distance have seen as much as £25 million traded on them. **

Why is betting on cricket on Betfair so popular?

The primary appeal of Test cricket is its longevity. Over the course of five days you have plenty of time to assess the wicket, conditions, run rates and the strengths of the two sides. For the majority of the match a single wicket or boundary is unlikely to dramatically affect the odds; this means you can dip in and out of the market without needing to be glued to the action. Cricket appeals to patient bettors who feel their reading of the match will be rewarded when it eventually comes to a conclusion.

Limited-overs cricket is extremely volatile – a trader's dream. A key wicket or a big score does dramatically affect the outcome of a match and, in the absence of the draw*, there are only two outcomes. It's not unusual for a side trading at 3.0 in a close run chase to go odds-on if they strike a boundary, or for a side in command and trading at odds-on to become outsiders if they lose a set batsman during a run chase.

In other words, markets are extremely volatile – ideal for trading. If you continually lay the

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shorter price in a match where the favourite keeps flip-flopping, you can very easily find yourself with a green book in which you win on both outcomes.

In other words, different forms of the game appeal to different people. It's also readily available. Virtually every ODI or Test match taking place in the world is broadcast somewhere or other on TV, not to mention websites. And for those not lucky enough to actually watch the action, there are ball-by-ball commentaries provided by the likes of ESPN Cricinfo or the BBC to keep the cricket punter up to date. So there's no excuse for not knowing what's going on!

Just as different forms of the game appeal to different people, so do different markets. Gone are the days when you wager solely on the winner of the match. Top scorers, the toss, totals, boundaries and opening partnerships are just some of the things you can bet on with Betfair.

Good luck.

*The possibility of a tie does, of course, exist in ODIs although it very seldom happens and traders can hedge by backing a tie at extremely large odds.

** It's always worth remembering that those sums aren't the amount of money being actually risked on the match, merely the amounts processed through the exchange. They are however a good reflection of the sheer amount of Betfair customers betting on a match at any given time and the fact that the "action" on the exchange goes on from well before a ball has been bowled till the end of the match.

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Introduction to England's Tour of South Africa

by James Pacheco

An interesting thing happened between December 2008 and January 2009 – Australia lost a three match Test series on their own patch. What's more, Graeme Smith's side actually had the audacity of going 2-0 up, meaning the one game that the home side won was no more than a dead-rubber, if you believe such a thing exists in Test cricket.

The Series will best be remembered for South Africa chasing the second highest target in Test history, when centuries from AB De Villiers and Graeme Smith allowed the tourists to get 414 for the loss of just four wickets in the first Test, and the emergence of JP Duminy on the world cricket scene. The little left-hander was unbeaten on 50 when they chased that mammoth total and scored 166 in the first innings of the second Test in a partnership with Dale Steyn which was worth 180 runs and set up yet another memorable win.

Enough happened in the series to get the statisticians excited, but the fact Australia had lost at home was the obvious and overwhelmingly important headline. Ricky Ponting's men went some way to addressing the balance by doing the exact thing to the Proteas that had been done to them, winning the return series 2-1 in March and also taking the first two matches in the process. But it was no longer a case of Australia ruling the Test cricket roost and the others competing for second spot. Instead, we now had a Test Match triumvirate consisting of Australia, South Africa and India, who had also beaten Australia back in November 2008, albeit on home soil.

When England beat Australia in the summer of 2009, the victory was a sweet one for English cricket but didn't quite carry the same kudos as South Africa's achievements. Firstly, England had won the Ashes back in 2005 and secondly both victories had been on home soil. It did however prove that whatever England's deficiencies were in the 50 over format (Australia beat England 6-1 in the ODI Series that followed the Ashes and again in the semi-final of the Champions Trophy which they won) and in T20 (they failed to make the semis of the World T20 staged in England) they were certainly a force to be reckoned with in the game's longest format.

It may seem misplaced to assess a team's strength based on how they fare against Australia but such is their dominance that it's actually a fair yardstick. But a better way still of assessing where South Africa and England are in the pecking order of world cricket is to see how they fare against each other. In all three formats. Between November 13, 2009, and the January 18, 2010, these two sides will lock horns in two T20s, five ODIs and four Test matches. And there's plenty of needle between these two sides.

For starters, the last time they met England were eliminating South Africa in the 50 over Champions Trophy at Centurion in controversial circumstances after Andrew Strauss denied SA skipper Graeme Smith (himself a centurion that day) a runner, in a close run chase. Secondly, to say Smith and England's South African-born star batsman Kevin Pietersen don't get on is like saying Tom and Jerry are friendly housemates. Smith has called KP "a traitor", the Hampshire batsman has responded by branding Smith "an absolute muppet". Then there's the small matter

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of skipper Andrew Strauss, Ashes hero Jonathan Trott, wicket-keeper Matt Prior and the aforementioned Kevin Pietersen all being born in the Rainbow Nation.

All in all it promises to be a wonderful Tour and if you're planning on having a bet on Betfair on any of the matches, you've come to the right place. Read on for an explanation of how to go about betting on the three different formats, a briefing on the two teams, a quick-fire interview with South Africa star JP Duminy, a chat with England premium all-rounder Stuart Board and a guide to the five grounds that will be used on the Tour; the latter written somewhat appropriately by South African-born England-based Essex all-rounder Ryan ten doeschate.

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Betting on Test Cricket

By Ed Hawkins

Patience is a virtue. A sentiment which has never been more true when it comes to betting on Test match cricket. Whether it's tying your money up for a potential five days of action or waiting until the last session of 15 for a wager, staying power is a necessity.

The beauty is that impatience isn't too bad, either. If you want a successful bet within a few minutes of the first ball being bowled, this is the game for you.

Tests are still considered the pinnacle for cricketers, even if the reputation has suffered in the wake of the invention of T20, and the five-day game is increasingly popular with bettors. The sheer number of betting opportunities regularly sees tens of millions traded on a single game. That is because Test matches offer something for every sort of punter. Whether you are someone who likes to bet only on the match outcome and sit back and watch or the sort who likes to take profits by backing and laying (or trading in Betfair parlance) over the course of an hour, a session or a day, Tests satisfy.

One could write a book about winning strategies for Test match betting but for those who just want to try to turn a profit on the most straightforward of markets, the match odds, then there are some important rules to remember.

For a start, when punters analyse the respective players of South Africa and England ahead of their four-Test series, it is best not to get too bogged down on the abilities of the named batsmen. Instead ask yourself this: which team is the most likely to take 20 wickets?

In this example South Africa is the answer you will come up with. That is why they are as short as [1.53] for a series victory with England [4.90] and the drawn series [5.5].

However, England are a dangerous side and are capable of springing a surprise when you least expect. Often in a series they will produce performances throughout the spectrum. They were good, bad and indifferent in their recent Ashes victory.

What will be important for the tourists' chances of getting a win in their hand luggage will be the toss. It is often advisable to wait for the coin flip before parting with your cash because as a rule it is often better for teams to bat first as pitches get worn over five days of action. A worn wicket can be exploited by the most average of bowlers. South Africa may well start a match as short as [2.00] for the first Test in Centurion but they could go odds-on if they were to bat first. Likewise England, who should be around [9.00], could have a couple of points shaved off if they bat first.

The movement of prices is what makes Test betting so thrilling. One of the oldest ploys for profit is to trade on the odds of the draw. For that first Test at SuperSport park, the stalemate is likely to be around [2.20].

Now, many bettors will lay those odds reckoning that draws are a thing of the past given today's

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fast scoring rates. Normally, they are right. Laying the draw has proved one of the most robust of strategies.

However, it can often pay to back the draw. Why? Because if the side batting first go in at lunch just the one wicket down then the draw price will plummet to around [1.70]. See what we mean about not having to wait long for a winner?

Other in-running opportunities present themselves thanks to the rules of the game. After every 80 overs, the bowling team get a new ball, which increases the likelihood of wickets. Nothing moves a market like a wicket.

Oddly, the market will not anticipate a new ball. The bowling team will not shorten. Nor will the batting team lengthen. That is because a Betfair match odds market is reactive rather than proactive. Be smarter than the market and anticipate what's about to happen at the wicket rather than reacting what's just happened.

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Top batsmen and bowler markets in Test matches

by Ed Hawkins

Top Batsman

The Betfair market cannot split Andrew Strauss and Kevin Pietersen - both are [3.85] to be top England series runscore. However, Strauss is far more consistent than KP, who has driven bettors nuts with his failure to deliver on this market. In the last six series, Pietersen has finished as top bat only once. By contrast, Strauss has delivered an astonishing four times in the last six.

There are other reasons why Strauss should be the favourite. The skipper smashed 656 runs on his last, and only, Test tour to South Africa in 2004.

South Africa's Mr Consistency is AB de Villiers. He has not dominated like Strauss but is always there or thereabouts. In his side's last five series, AB has made the top three runscore in four of them, heading the lists twice. Crucially, one of those was against England last summer.

When the sides last met in South Africa, Jacques Kallis almost matched Strauss run for run, with a whopping series tally of 625.

Top bowlers

There are few more deserving bowlers for favourite status than South Africa's Dale Steyn. With an ability to move the ball both ways at 90mph it is not surprising that he has copped time and again as top bowler.

In the last five series he has managed the feat four times. Interestingly, the one occasion he failed was against England. Perhaps spinner Paul Harris, with three top three finishes, could be value.

Stuart Broad would get the nod for England. His ability to do tricks with the old ball make him a better bet than James Anderson, who often needs favourable conditions to take wickets.

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ODI Betting

by Ed Hawkins

In the cricket family, 50-over cricket is not as loved as it used to be. Suffering from middle child syndrome – Tests, of course, came first with new kid on the block T20 conceived later – it has often tried to reinvent itself to grab attention.

There have even been murmurings that the 50-over format should be scrapped altogether as it provides neither the warm glow and traditionalism of Tests or the heart-pumping excitement of T20. It will, however, always have a special place in the heart of the sports betting public. Betting on 50-over matches has been the staple diet of cricket bettors for some time. Where some are put off by the length of Test matches and its subtle nuances or consider T20 too unpredictable, the 50-over stuff is tried and trusted.

That is because, although there is potential for surprising results, the favourites often dominate. And when it is the punter who decides the jolly in a contest through sheer weight of money, it should not be difficult to work out why ODIs – as they are colloquially known – are so loved. In the most recent World Cup in 2007, Australia, the defending champions and favourites, copped at prices as low as [2.50] before a ball was bowled in anger. It was a tournament dominated by favourites. In the 19 matches played between the top eight sides in the betting, 17 were won by the jolly.

It does not bode well for England's chances of success against South Africa in a five-match series. South Africa are [1.28] with England [4.10]. If you wanted to swim against the tide, this rather quirky stat might help provide buoyancy: four of England's last five series victories have come when they have been outsiders.

If backing the short-priced favourite and sitting back and hoping for the best isn't your thing, worry not. Plenty of in-running betting will of course be available on Betfair so you can make money without having necessarily picked the winner before the off.

The key is to try to look ahead. Just because we do not own a crystal ball should not stop us pretending. When backing or laying you need to be doing so not on the basis of what is happening currently but what could be happening in five or 10 overs time. If a wicket was to fall, what would that do to the scoring rate? Would the next player coming to the crease be able to adapt to the conditions? Could the captain bring back a main strike bowler to take another wicket?

We should not be afraid of taking big prices about a side either, although not to the same extent as in T20, when a match can turn quicker. Thanks to the introduction of the batting team choosing when to take a five-over powerplay, teams are able to stay 'in' a game for longer than they used to.

When the batting team so often leaves the final powerplay for the "death overs", it makes it very likely that they will be able to score at upwards of eight an over, a rate which could see them come in sharply on the match odds market.

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This is a good example of looking forward: a team batting second may be pushing prices as high as [4.0] or [5.0] when needing eight an over in a non- powerplay situation. But if we know that a powerplay is available we can gamble that they will score at the required rate in the future which will almost certainly shorten the odds.

Another ploy is to look out for the inevitable overreaction to a batting side losing a wicket in the first 10 overs as they take risks to get the innings off to a fast start. The market will react as if batsmen will fall at such intervals throughout the innings, which might not be the case at all. The same is true when it comes to sides scoring quickly in the first 10 overs. The market will presume a fast-scoring rate will continue for the next 40. Invariably it will not and the bowling side will regain ground.

It can be a cat and mouse format but, usually, it is the bigger beast that proves triumphant.

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South Africa v England ODI Series

by Ed Hawkins

It is inevitable that when the words South Africa and 50-over cricket are mentioned in the same breath, exhalation soon after often becomes short and shallow. Too many times bettors have been let down by the Proteas.

Failures in the last three World Cups when highly-fancied, not to mention the recent Champions Trophy disaster when on home soil, have led to accusations that South Africa cannot handle the pressure that comes with high-profile tournaments.

Guilty as charged. However, a five-match series against England at home does not fit into such a category. Whereas previously South Africa have perspired to the extent that bat and ball has been difficult to grip, they are unlikely to have to mop their brow.

Graeme Smith's side are as short as [1.28] with England [4.10]. It is tough to make a case for another South Africa let down against a weak England outfit when one considers the sheer weight of statistics that scream they cannot be beaten.

In two-team 50-over contests South Africa have lost only two one-day series at home. Ever. Both of those came against smart and irrepressible Australia sides. Their last defeat was 16 series ago in 2002. Unsurprisingly, South Africa have hardly broken sweat when facing England at home. They have handed out lessons in limited-overs cricket, thumping them 4-1 and 6-1 respectively. The anomaly is the recent match head-to-head record. England, believe it or not, have won the last five, including a win of some ease in South Africa that effectively knocked out the hosts from the Champions Trophy. As impressive as that victory was, the previous four came with a caveat. South Africa were exhausted following an arduous Test series win in England last summer and perhaps their minds were on the beaches of Cape Town and Durban already.

There would be greater confidence in England carrying on their good form had they picked the right players. However, a recall for opener Alastair Cook is a retrograde step. All things 1980s are the height of fashion at the moment but the pick of Cook is straight from an era when slow and steady at the start of an innings was all the rage.

South Africa have, on the face of it, made a similar move by pairing Smith with Jacques Kallis at the top of the order. However, Kallis' T20 exposure has allowed him to shake off the image of a 50-over holding man.

In the bowling department South Africa have the edge, too. Wayne Parnell and Dale Steyn are death bowlers which few sides, let alone England, can match. England pin their hopes on the sharp but not Sat Nav-savvy Saj Mahmood.

Undoubtedly only those with extremely deep pockets will want to play South Africa so the value will lie in the correct score market. A look at the five venues (Johannesburg, Centurion, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban) helps us to uncover a wager.

South Africa have formidable records at each of them. Oddly England's best victory chance could

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come at Cape Town where South Africa have a win percentage of 89. With the game under lights, the match could be decided by the toss. Of the last 14 floodlit contests at Newlands, only two have been won by the team batting second. There is a similar bias at Durban's Kingsmead ground. Five of the last seven under lights have gone to the team batting first.

It would reasonable to reckon that England are capable of pinching at least one of these matches. A 4-1 South Africa victory will be the favourite on the market. A 3-2 success for the hosts will be at much greater odds (perhaps [6.00] but that might be too much of a leap of faith with regard to England.

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Top batsmen and bowler markets in ODIs

by James Pacheco

Top runscorer

If you are thinking that the rules for 50-over top-bat betting are similar to T20, then give yourself a pat on the back. There is more room for bending them, however.

Sometimes punters have to recognise an emerging talent and grab the opportunity to take big prices while they last. This could be the case with regard to South Africa's JP Duminy and England's Eoin Morgan, who is currently priced at [6.40].

Neither are openers but both have form, which suggests they are worth supporting. Duminy was the top runscorer in the recent Champions League while Morgan impressed with 147 runs in the Champions Trophy in South Africa. Paul Collingwood [6.00] top scored for England in that tournament and he has to be respected given such a strong trend.

Graeme Smith did likewise for South Africa with 206 runs, followed by AB de Villiers and Jacques Kallis. Smith was South Africa's second highest runscorer when the sides met last summer.

Top bowlers

Wayne Parnell was the top tournament wicket-taker in the Champions Trophy (despite South Africa failing to qualify for the semi-finals) so he should trouble England's batsmen.

England have an ace card of their own. Stuart Broad was second to Andrew Flintoff in the wickets list in the 2008 series and he pipped James Anderson for honours in the Champions Trophy.

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Betting on T20

by Ed Hawkins

Depending on who you speak to T20 is either the saviour of cricket or its slayer; taking the game to another level or eroding the traditions; high-octane entertainment or a mind-numbing slogfest. Whatever the truth, there is no doubt that it is one thing at the least: unpredictable.

And that makes it tremendously popular for bettors. A game which can swing one way or the other in the space of a single delivery can entice like few other sports, not to mention the format's predilection for producing results which students of the game would not even have dared whisper as a prediction.

Who can forget Zimbabwe, the runts of the international game, defeating the might of Australia in the inaugural World T20 in 2007?. Or what about the Netherlands, who went off at 14.00, clogging the arteries of every England supporter in the same competition two years later to produce a heart-stopping victory?

Before having any sort of wager on a T20 match, a maxim like 'expect the unexpected' should be as well-versed as your credit card details.

On the face of it, the two T20 meetings between South Africa and England in Johannesburg and Centurion severely test such a motto. South Africa (67%) have one of the highest win percentages of any side in the thrash and bash format while England one of the worst at 40%. The last time these sides met in T20 the only surprise to speak of was just how dominant the South Africans were, coasting to a seven-wicket victory in June.

It is a bungee jump of faith indeed to back England but the format's history for upsets allows you to feel confident that you will spring up to safety as the ground fast approaches. In the previous World T20 tournament, there were 14 matches between the top eight sides in the world and an incredible seven of those were won by the outsiders.

Of course, value does not disappear as soon as the first ball is bowled. With boundaries and wickets making greater impact on the match odds market than they should in a contest which can last only 40 overs, there is tremendous scope for betting in-running.

For example, South Africa, with free-flowing opening batsman like Graeme Smith, will shorten dramatically in the betting if they were to get off to a fast start (say eight runs an over) in the powerplay overs. But with those only accounting for six of their allotted 20, and England's batsmen also afforded a similar opportunity, the market can overreact.

Bettors expect such a scoring rate to continue for the rest of the innings, when it rarely does. It means that prices become inflated very quickly and this helps with T20's reputation for "big-price" upsets.

The success of spin bowlers is one reason that teams so rarely go on as they have started. A lay of a team scoring quickly when a twirler comes on can often pay dividends with the scoring rate likely to drop. England, in particular, have struggled against spin in all forms of one-day cricket

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and are vulnerable on such occasions.

Timing is everything when betting in-running and often there is no point taking big odds about a team with the match approaching its close. The tipping point in the second innings between a good wager or a bad one is often the run rate. If the batting team needs fewer than 10 runs an over, they could be a decent bet but any more and the rate can be unmanageable.

Opening batsmen like Smith and his probable partner Jacques Kallis will see plenty of support on the top runscorer markets. And why not? Thanks to opening batsmen getting the opportunity to bat for longer than any of their teammates and during the powerplays (when runs are easier to come by) they are outstanding value if they go off at around the 4.00 mark.

England, true to the unpredictable nature, have used five different opening combinations in just 10 months but are likely to pair Andrew Strauss and Joe Denly this time round.

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South Africa v England T20 Series

by Ed Hawkins

One of the misconceptions about any form of sports betting is the belief that in order to part with your hard-earned, you have to convince yourself that the team you are backing is better than the one you are opposing.

It is a psychological comfort rug which cossets and cosies as you place your stake. But be warned: you are going to have to get your hands on a large and luxurious one to back England in their two T20 matches against South Africa.

It is a task which is surely beyond the most insecure of fantasists. England are inferior to South Africa, which is why the hosts are [1.61] for victory in the first of the two-game contest with Andrew Strauss' men [2.58].

But here's the rub. We do not need to convince ourselves that England are the better side to consider supporting them in one way or another. We merely need to expand the mind to come to the conclusion there is a possibility that events could transpire that make them a better bet than the market suggests, here lies the concept of value betting.

It is a crucial tactic for T20 betting. To remind yourself of the format's appetite for devouring short-priced jollies, have a scan back to our section on the hows, whys and wherefores on T20.

A decent case could be made not for an England victory in this series, but South Africa failing to win it. In others words, a lay of the hosts at [2.5] could be the way to go with England needing to win in either Johannesburg or Centurion to deny them.

It would be very easy to write off England just by looking at the form guides of the respective sides; South Africa have won twice as many games as the visitors. Despite that obvious gulf, England do have strengths which need to be recognised.

They are a useful outfit when they play on good batting wickets. Four of their last five victories have come on belting tracks which have given their strokemakers the confidence they crave to open their shoulders and hit through the line of the ball. Against Pakistan at The Oval, India at Lord's and New Zealand at Christchurch and Auckland, England's batsmen were thrilling.

The good news is that Jo'burg and Centurion are good batting tracks. In T20 internationals at The Wanderers the average run rate is a healthy eight runs while the number was the same at SuperSport Park in the 11 Indian Premier League games earlier this year.

It may not escape your attention that England batted first in all four of those matches. It is important that they do so again against South Africa if they are to chalk up a victory.

You see England, surprisingly, have a better run rate than the mighty South Africans when it comes to batting first. They average eight runs per over to South Africa's 7.74. It may not look much of a gap but it is a statistic which will keep layers of South Africa interested.

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There is a problem. There always is with England. What if they have to bat second? You'll be out in the cold.

On the eight occasions that England have had to chase down a target, they have frozen solid with panic, unable to swing those arms like when the pressure valve is released in a first innings. They have won only twice.

Such a record is an impediment to getting against the South Africans but it does not make a lay a bad bet. A coin toss is a 50-50 event. All you have to hope is that the coin comes down in their favour. And they remember to bat, of course.

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Top batsmen and bowler markets in T20

by Ed Hawkins

Top runscorer

Punters backing any batsman outside of the top two for either individual innings or series batting honours will be hoping for someone to buck the trend. Put simply, any player outside the top two almost always represents bad value.

Common sense dictates that openers score most of the runs. They get the chance to bat for longer and do so during the powerplay overs. Statistics back up such a statement.

If we look at the most recent T20 tournaments – the second IPL, the World T20 in England in 2009 and the inaugural Champions League – openers have dominated. Six of the top three runscorers in each of those competitions have been Nos 1 or 2.

South Africa have sprung a surprise by ditching Herschelle Gibbs in favour of Jacques Kallis, who will pair up with Graeme Smith at the top of the order, while England raised eyebrows by including Andrew Strauss. He should open with Joe Denly.

Top bowler

There are two strong trends to follow to find a winner on top bowler markets. We want to be with a paceman who bowls at the start and end of an innings, or a spin bowler.

The former pick up wickets because they are bowling at the optimum time for taking wickets. The new ball could swing at the beginning while at the death, batsmen are taking risks.

Fast men Dale Steyn and Wayne Parnell should do this job for South Africa. James Anderson and Stuart Broad are likely to get the gig for England. Look out too for South Africa's Yusuf Abdullah, who has had success in the IPL.

Otherwise, spin bowlers are often underrated. Roelof van der Merwe and Johan Botha are two of the best around for the hosts. England may pick only one from Adil Rashid and Graeme Swann.

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Meet the South African Test team

by Andrew Hughes

The South African Test squad has not yet been announced but we can make some educated guesses at the make-up of the First Test line-up. Makaya Ntini will have a nervous wait but may keep his place. Two other issues need to be resolved. Firstly, who will partner Graeme Smith at the top of the order, with Neil McKenzie, Ashwell Prince and Imran Khan all having been tried there this year? And will spinner Paul Harris lose his Test spot to all-rounder Roelof van der Merwe?

Key Players

Graeme Smith may not be the best captain around, but he is an essential part of South Africa's Test team, if only for his dominating presence and his monumental batting efforts. Without their talismanic skipper, the Proteas seem to lack a certain resolution and his consistent performances at the top of the order explain why he is likely to be around the [4.5] mark in the top South African series batsman market.

Dale Steyn will be keen to stake his claim to be the best strike bowler in the world. He has been effective all over the world but is particularly deadly on home turf and he will be raring to inflict damage on the England batting order. If Ntini doesn't play, he will be the senior fast bowler and will relish that role.

Likely First Test team:

Graeme Smith
Neil McKenzie/Ashwell Prince
Hashim Amla
Jacques Kallis
A B De Villiers
J P Duminy
Mark Boucher
Paul Harris/Roelof van der Merwe
Makaya Ntini
Dale Steyn
Wayne Parnell

Strengths

South Africa's Test successes during the last two years have been built on a solid, at times, stodgy batting effort, to which they have added the flair of J P Duminy. They sell their wickets extremely dearly and like Australian teams of old, fight to the last man. Dale Steyn is probably the best fast bowler in the world and they have a range of other quick bowlers to pick from, as well as some healthy competition for the spin-bowling slot. It is not hard to see why they are [1.57] to win the Test series.

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Weaknesses

The opening partnership issue needs to be resolved. Graeme Smith would prefer Neil McKenzie, but the selectors may not agree. The composition of the attack also needs careful consideration. Makaya Ntini is a tireless bowler who gets through more than his fair share of work and if his international days are over and younger bowlers like Wayne Parnell or Morne Morkell are brought in, then Jacques Kallis may need to bowl more overs. Not an ideal situation for a man who is also a key batsman and experiencing the wear and tear expected of a cricketer in his thirty-fifth year.

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Meet the South African ODI team

by Andrew Hughes

The headline news is the omission of Herschelle Gibbs and Makaya Ntini, perhaps signalling the end of their respective limited-overs international careers. Also significant is the return of two former Kolpack players, Charl Langeveldt and Ryan McLaren. Left-arm seamer Lonwabo Tsotsobe and opener Alviro Petersen are both given another chance at international level.

Key Players

Jacques Kallis is the best all-rounder in the world; he averages over 45 with the bat and goes for less than five runs per over with the ball in the 50 overs game. He is likely to open with Graeme Smith and to do the bulk of the scoring as the skipper drops anchor.

A re-shuffled Proteas batting line-up is also likely to feature A B De Villiers at three, moving up a place and taking on extra responsibility. He has the highest strike-rate of all the front-line batsmen in the squad and will be expected to give the innings momentum from the marquee position he has long been earmarked for.

Squad in Full:

Graeme Smith
Hashim Amla
Johan Botha
Mark Boucher
A B De Villiers
J P Duminy
Jacques Kallis
Charl Langeveldt
Ryan McLaren
Albie Morkel
Wayne Parnell
Alviro Petersen
Dale Steyn
Lonwabo Tsotsobe
Roelof van der Merwe

Strengths

Despite slipping to third place in the ICC rankings after failing to win the Champions Trophy on their home turf, SA remain a formidable outfit. Jacques Kallis and Graeme Smith are better

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suiting to this format than Twenty20 as it gives them longer to build innings and they are strong in every department, with the addition of the hard-hitting Ryan McLaren giving them yet another all-rounder to lengthen the batting order. They are as short as [1.28] to win the series.

Weaknesses

The omission of Herschelle Gibbs means that the batting line-up will be shuffled. Kallis is likely to open with Smith, Alviro Petersen will play at five and Albie Morkel will bat at six. An experimental line-up may take some time to bed down and has to be seen as a risk. The two spinners, Roelof van der Merwe and Johan Botha will need to raise their games after some rather flat performances during the Champions Trophy, most notably against England, when they proved far too easy to score from.

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Meet the South African T20 team

by Andrew Hughes

South Africa have made four changes to the squad that reached the semi-finals of the World T20 this summer. Out go Herschelle Gibbs, Justin Ontong, Robbie Peterson and Morne Morkel and in come former Kolpack players Ryan McLaren and Charl Langeveldt, hard-hitting opener Loots Bosman and keeper Heino Kuhn.

Key Players

Wayne Parnell has been a revelation in T20 cricket since he broke into the national squad and was the bowler of the tournament in World T20 this summer. The likes of Dale Steyn, Jacques Kallis and Albie Morkel can come nicely onto the bat when the slog is on, so Parnell's ability to find the blockhole in the death overs is priceless and as a left-armer he can create uncomfortable angles for batsmen looking to score quickly.

Roelof van der Merwe has been one of the stars of South African one-day cricket this year. As well as being a handy lower order biffer and a wholehearted close fielder, he is a spinner who gives the ball a fair rip. His partnership with Johan Botha is crucial for South Africa's containment strategy in the middle overs with van der Merwe also likely to take a wicket or two.

Squad in Full:

Graeme Smith
Yusuf Abdulla
Loots Bosman
Johan Botha
Mark Boucher
A B De Villiers
J P Duminy
Jacques Kallis
Heino Kuhn
Charl Langeveldt
Ryan McLaren
Albie Morkel
Wayne Parnell
Dale Steyn
Roelof van der Merwe

Strengths

On paper, South Africa have the strongest T20 team in the world. Even though they are without Herschelle Gibbs, they have plenty of batting firepower with all-rounders down to number nine. Their bowling is a good balance of pace, accurate seam bowling and nagging spin and the addition of Charl Langeveldt's experience and canny use of swing only strengthen that. They are

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also the best fielding unit in the world.

Weaknesses

It's been said that they crumble under pressure, although if that is true, it has tended to happen in international tournaments rather than these one-off series. Of more relevance here is the fact that they have announced that everyone in the T20 squad will get a game, suggesting that these two matches are as much about looking at new players as winning. Another criticism that could be made is that they have lacked the ability to adapt if the game isn't going to plan, with Graeme Smith not being the most flexible captain in the world game.

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Interview with JP Duminy

In the introduction to this book we discussed how the emergence of JP Duminy had been one of the more memorable elements of an already brilliant Series when South Africa beat Australia on the Aussies' home patch. Since then he's become one of the Proteas' key men in all three forms of the game, was one of the few positives for the Mumbai Indians in this year's edition of the IPL and top-scored in the recent T20 Champions League. So we decided he was the man to sit down with for a quick-fire Q&A ahead of the South Africa v England Series.

What sparked the sudden rise from fringe player to star man of the international stage?

JP: I put it down to a shift in my mental approach. The turning point was obviously the series in Australia. I'd had a bit of time travelling with the team, getting to know the guys, and finally understanding what was required. I had to overcome a bad start from 2004, and it took a while to make the changes, but that Australia series set me on my way.

Right, on to the upcoming England Series. After what happened in the ICC Champions Trophy the last time you met (England denied Graeme Smith a runner) will there be extra niggles this time round?

JP: Definitely. The incident you referred to, plus the fact that they knocked us out of the Champions Trophy in South Africa will add some niggles to this series. We were also turned over in the last one-day series in England. We have a big incentive to go out and show everyone what we're really about. But what's in the past is in the past and I'm sure the Series will be played in a good spirit.

If you could choose one England player to miss the Series who would it be?

JP: That's already been taken care of, Andrew Flintoff.

Now then, time to spill the beans on your team-mates. Who is the.....

Joker/Prankster: Charl Langeveld, it's fantastic to have him back in the team.

Lousy in the morning: Besides myself I can only think of Mondli (Zondeki) but he's not in the squad this time round. All the other guys are jacked up in the mornings.

Metropolitan: Bouch (Mark Boucher) has taken over from Herschelle.

Resident DJ: Again Bouch, he's got good taste and a wide variety.

Ok, we're giving you a £100 charity bet as a thank-you for contributing to this Betfair E-Book. What's the money going on?

JP: I'm a big Man United fan so it will be on United winning the league this year. I'd like the proceeds to go to the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town. It's a specialist hospital that does a great job for the community but relies on private funding.

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Meet the England Test team

by Andrew Hughes

The big news is Steve Harmison's omission, in favour of his Durham teammate Liam Plunkett. Ravi Bopara can't feel too aggrieved to be left out, after his miserable Ashes, though he might wonder how Ian Bell has earned another chance. Steve Davies is the reserve keeper, Adil Rashid has been preferred to Monty Panesar and Luke Wright becomes the first player to audition as the new Freddie Flintoff.

Key Players

Kevin Pietersen is so important to England's hopes that he will be rested from one-day cricket if it is necessary to get him fit for the First Test. He is the one batsman in the England line up capable of taking the game away in a session and is likely to be as short as [4.0] to be top England series batsmen. If he is fit and at his best, he will give the tourists a great chance of earning a famous series victory.

In the absence of Harmison and Flintoff, James Anderson is England's spearhead. If the ball is swinging, he can be deadly, but he needs to crank up the pace and offer a threat even in unfriendly bowling conditions. If he can do that, England have a chance of exposing the likes of Jacques Kallis and A B De Villiers early on.

Squad in Full:

Andrew Strauss
Alastair Cook
James Anderson
Ian Bell
Stuart Broad
Paul Collingwood
Steve Davies
Graham Onions
Kevin Pietersen
Liam Plunkett
Matt Prior
Adil Rashid
Ryan Sidebottom
Graeme Swann
Jonathan Trott
Luke Wright

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Strengths

This is a much stronger, more confident England team than that which limped home from the West Indies last spring. Regaining the Ashes has greatly improved confidence as well as the authority of coach Andy Flower and captain Andrew Strauss. The continued success of Graeme Swann, the maturing of Stuart Broad and the emergence of Jonathan Trott are three exciting features of a team that appears finally to be moving forwards after the stagnation of the post-2005 period.

Weaknesses

Batting is still a problem and if Kevin Pietersen isn't fit for the Test series, it is difficult to see how England can win. The likes of Ian Bell, Paul Collingwood and Alastair Cook have been struggling for a while and if Trott is bats at three, he will be under severe pressure from the start. With Flintoff out of the picture, the old problem of balance has re-emerged with Matt Prior batting at six a less than desirable solution. The bowling also looks dangerously one-paced in the absence of Flintoff and Steve Harmison.

England are currently 5.0 to win the 4-match Test Series

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Meet the England ODI Team

by Andrew Hughes

The big surprise is the omission of Owais Shah, probably paying the price for some sloppy fielding and erratic running between the wickets. Ravi Bopara misses out but his Essex team-mate Alastair Cook is back after impressive county performances. Jonathan Trott was an obvious selection and should have been there for the Champions Trophy whilst fast-bowler Sajid Mahmood returns. Kevin Pietersen has been selected but there is a chance he may not be completely fit for the first one day international.

Key Players

Andrew Strauss has defied his critics by excelling in 50 overs this year. He played a lone hand throughout the long Natwest Series with Australia this summer and may have to do the same again. He will need to lay the foundation and look to bat for at least 40 overs whilst the likes of Pietersen, Trott, Eoin Morgan and Matt Prior try to accelerate.

Since the retirement of Darren Gough, England have lacked a bowler capable of finding the block hole in the final overs and none of the regular pacemen have shown themselves able to master this art. Sajid Mahmood's ability to bowl reverse swing at high speed could therefore be crucial to England's chances.

Squad in Full:

Andrew Strauss
Paul Collingwood
James Anderson
Tim Bresnan
Stuart Broad
Alastair Cook
Joe Denly
Sajid Mahmood
Eoin Morgan
Graham Onions
Kevin Pietersen
Matt Prior
Adil Rashid
Graeme Swann
Jonathan Trott
Luke Wright

Strengths

After the horror show of the Natwest Series this summer, England recovered and acquitted

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themselves well in the Champions Trophy. They showed signs of having worked out a game plan for the 50 over format and reaching the semi-final will have done their confidence a world of good. Their bowling looks solid, with Ryan Sidebottom, James Anderson and Stuart Broad supported by some excellent spin options in Graeme Swann and Adil Rashid whilst Paul Collingwood's slow-medium cutters may well come into play should they find themselves playing on a slow pitch. England are [4.1] to upset the form book as they did in the Champions Trophy and win this series.

Weaknesses

The Champions Trophy was played on early-season, low-scoring pitches that suited England. Six weeks on with the South African season in full swing, it is likely that the pitches will be a lot harder and the tourists may be required to regularly pass 300 to win the series, something that they have not shown themselves to be capable of too often in the recent past. If Kevin Pietersen isn't available for a significant part of this series, it is hard to see how they will score enough runs at a rate that will trouble the home side.

England are [4.1] to win the five match ODI Series

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Meet the England T20 team

by Andrew Hughes

Selectors resisted the temptation to pick T20 specialists such as Graham Napier or Dimitri Mascarenhas and instead will pick from their 50 over squad for the two T20 games, with Paul Collingwood captaining the side and Andrew Strauss sitting out. Kevin Pietersen will not be available and is instead likely to join the squad at some point during the ODI series.

Key Players

In the absence of Pietersen, Jonathan Trott is the key batsman in the middle order, the only batsman with the explosive power to regularly clear the boundaries. He will be returning to the land of his birth and, like Pietersen in 2004-05, may have to cope with some barracking from the locals. He needs to be able to handle it and to give England's batting impetus.

Adil Rashid could prove to be England's trump card. Leg-spinners seem to do particularly well in T20 cricket and on South African pitches that are unlikely to offer much for Graeme Swann, it could be the young wrist spinner who comes into his own. Rashid has already impressed with the accuracy of his bowling and the maturity of his batting. He could surprise the home side.

Squad In Full:

Paul Collingwood
James Anderson
Tim Bresnan
Stuart Broad
Alastair Cook
Joe Denly
Sajid Mahmood
Eoin Morgan
Graham Onions
Matt Prior
Adil Rashid
Graeme Swann
Jonathan Trott
Luke Wright

Strengths

England are one of the poorest T20 sides in the world but this group of players have played a lot of cricket together recently and the continuity of selection will help, particularly if the South Africans use these games as a chance to try out new combinations. We can expect further improvement from the likes of Eoin Morgan and Graham Onions. And England's fielding is

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usually at its best early on in a tour, so expect them to be full of enthusiasm for these two games.

Weaknesses

The squad is severely lacking in power-hitters. The likes of Alastair Cook and Joe Denly are odd selections and England may yet rue the decision not to pick more big-hitters. Paul Collingwood's leadership is also a weakness. He is not tactically astute and comes across as an avuncular sergeant major rather than a captain. In their T20 outings to date, England have looked short of ideas and rather conservative in their approach.

England are 2.6 to win the first T20I

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Interview with Stuart Broad

With Andrew Flintoff now retired from Test cricket and question marks over his availability to play ODIs in the future, England are in desperate need of a world-class all-rounder and Stuart Broad may be just the man to fill the void. He was England's leading wicket in the recent Ashes success and has scored five half-centuries in Tests. We went to meet the Nottinghamshire man as he recovers from a shoulder injury.

Hi Stuart, first of all we hope your shoulder improves. We suppose it underlines how being involved in all three forms of the game is so demanding...

Well yes it is, but then that's why we spend a lot of time doing recovery sessions and working in the gym to make sure physically we are able to deal with that. There's not many of us that do play in all three forms. Paul Collingwood, Jimmy Anderson and Kevin Pietersen (when he's fit obviously) *all do* so it makes it tough in a way, but that's where little breaks like the one we've just had are so crucial to give the body a bit of rest. You're always getting little niggles as my shoulder problem proves!

We read Shane Warne saying that trying to be an all-rounder would ruin you.

Heaven knows he's done enough to be entitled to an opinion, but personally I've set my goals to be constantly improving, and my batting is one area where I can try to do that. I know that batting at seven in Test cricket would come with a huge added pressure of expecting extra runs, and I see myself as a good number eight at the moment, but it's a challenge to continue to improve. If that leads to the opportunity to go in at number seven for England then I'll jump at that. That's up to the hierarchy. I don't see it ruining me because it won't happen unless I show I'm ready for it

The tour starts with the T20s. Is that a good way to build up?

Yes, I think so, and we then have five One Day Internationals before the Test series, so there's time to acclimatize and be ready. We know how good a team South Africa are, but we've got the confidence booster of having beaten them in the Champions Trophy. I *also* think we know what to expect with the crowds and the pitches, and even the balance of their team because they named it a couple of weeks ago, so we're very well prepared. I think if we play to the best of our ability we stand a great chance.

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Getting Kevin Pietersen back for this series will be a big boost...

It will, he's a world class player, our best batsman, and it will be exciting to have him back. He had a fantastic one-day tour of South Africa when he last went over, although he did suffer a bit of abuse, and he'll be revved up to do very well. That can only be good for the team.

Tell us about your book that's coming out this week

It's a celebration of the Ashes really, my thoughts and my feelings for what was quite an emotional rollercoaster. I hope it's a bit of an insight into the changing world that happened during that six weeks. I'm very proud of it, I thoroughly enjoyed doing it because it gave me a chance to reflect every night on what had actually happened and I hope people enjoy reading it.

Did it help to get your thoughts in order at the end of each day, then?

Yes, it did. I think you have to have moments as a player when you unwind and reflect and I think that's important. Writing it all down every night helped me with that, and let me get my mind right for the next day's action.

There's never much time, is there. It seems to be non-stop cricket these days.

Who's complaining? We actually had nearly three weeks off after the Champions Trophy and that was a good little break to get refreshed.

Are you a good tourist, after all your job takes you round the world?

It's not as glamorous as it sounds, cricket tours tend to be so hectic that you don't get much time, but I do like to see as much as I can when we're away. To be honest, though, we usually end up playing golf on a day off. I'm lucky that at my age I haven't got the family restrictions that can make being away quite stressful. I just go and enjoy myself.

Where's the best place you played so far?

Oh, it would have to be the West Indies. As bowlers we have to do a lot of recovery work, ice baths and stuff, and it's very nice being able to swim in the sea mornings and evenings, pretty much on your doorstep. I think it's the one place where the ice bath is a luxury rather than a

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necessary hell!

Your sister Gemma has become the England team's analyst. How does that work out? With most people's sisters they'd be arguing all day!

She's really professional, actually, she doesn't treat me any different to any of the other boys. She's very good at her job, it just so happens we've ended up on the same path. She did a performance analysis degree and her dissertation was actually in rugby league, but then it just so happened a job came up at the ECB and she went for it. I'm really pleased it's worked out so well for her, and she actually comes up with some really valuable stuff for all the boys. Don't tell her I said so, but I'm quite proud of what she does!

Thanks for your time and we've a free £100 bet for a favourite charity as a thank-you for helping us with this E-Book.

I'm a big supporter of the motor neurone disease association, and I'll back my mate Tom Croft to score a try when England play Argentina at Twickenham this week.

*BOWLED OVER An Ashes Celebration by Stuart Broad is published by Hodder & Stoughton on 12 November

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Guide to Newlands in Cape Town

by Ryan ten Doeschate

Set against the backdrop of Table Mountain and regarded as one of the world's most picturesque test grounds, Newlands has become the fortress of South African cricket in recent years. The Proteas have won seven of their last 10 Tests at Newlands, with two draws and only one loss.

Cape Town always plays host to the New Year's Test and the atmosphere at the ground is synonymous with the festive season. The hot sun, coupled with the aromas from the adjacent brewery give a lazy feel to a day's cricket. The tempo is never electric but manages to flow along at a pace that maintains interest and usually throws up a result. This is not too far away from the description of a perfect Test and Newlands is sure to be the highlight for travelling spectators venturing to South Africa.

The pitch, although slower than in years gone by, plays true and captains have consistently looked to bat first here. In Test matches it is considered a 'result' wicket and apart from South Africa's 651 against Australia earlier this year, a good score is closer to the 320 mark. After some early assistance for the seam bowlers, the pitch rewards discipline and persistence and, while slightly favouring batting, it is a good cricket wicket. Spin bowlers are used more as back up to the quicks and although the pitch rarely offers prodigious turn, spinners have played an important supporting role over the years.

One Day Cricket

ODI cricket has followed a similar pattern to Test cricket with South Africa being dominant at Newlands. The toss is very important, particularly in D/N matches where night dew makes batting tricky. The win ratio for teams batting first is staggering. It has never been a big scoring ground and anything in excess of 250 is normally a match winning score. The groundstaff have had problems with the outfield in recent times so scoring rates may be reduced by a slow surface. England have had a particularly tough time at Newlands, losing three times to South Africa and once to Zimbabwe.

Day Off

Set between a mountain and the sea, Cape Town has many places of natural beauty and is a paradise for tourists. A trip up Table Mountain gives visitors the chance to enjoy some spectacular 360* views.

The beaches are definitely worth visiting and while the more popular ones, like Clifton, are packed over New Year, smaller beaches like Llandudno and Hout Bay, offer excellent alternatives. The meeting of the Indian and Atlantic oceans at Cape Point - Africa's southern most point - is also a fantastic trip for a morning or afternoon. Look out for a large variety of

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birds, zebra, eland, and many species of reptiles and small mammals.

The Cape Winelands, set in the valleys near Cape Town, are world-renowned and the chance to sample some of the world's finest wines in some of South Africa's most beautiful settings is definitely a memorable experience. Franschoek and Stellenbosch are regular favourites but there are other wine routes to explore, all within a short drive from Cape Town.

Kalk Bay's Main Road is packed with antique stores, coffee shops, galleries, second-hand bookstores and restaurants. Essentially a fishing village, Kalk Bay is still an active harbour and one of the best places to enjoy seafood in Cape Town. Enjoy the views of the False Bay coastline as you make your way along Boyes Drive.

The V&A Waterfront is a very popular tourist spot with its many shops, restaurants, and bars. Live entertainment and a variety of leisure activities including boat and helicopter trips are always on offer. The strip along Camps Bay is excellent for top quality dining and a vibrant night life.

Cape Town really does have something for everybody. Don't be surprised if you get the urge to return after your visit.

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Guide to Centurion in Pretoria

by Ryan ten Doeschate

Pretoria will host the opening match of this summer's Test series. Whereas modern day Test arenas are encircled with big stands, Centurion has managed to maintain an 80s feel to it with grass banks on either side square of the wicket. The two pavillions however, are world class and the mixture of old and new gives Centurion a unique atmosphere and feel.

Centurion is only 50 km away from the Wanderers, but the contrast in pitches is far greater than the distance that separates the two grounds. The Pretoria pitches are known for being flat and low and South Africa have thrived under these conditions, winning their last five Test matches here. It is a small ground so scoring tends to be at a steady rate, despite a low pitch.

England last played here in 2005, the match ending in a tame draw after high scores in the second and third innings.

Captains have regularly chosen to bat first at Centurion, possibly putting too much emphasis on the wicket playing slower and lower. Teams have been skittled out in the first innings so bowling first presents the best chance of winning. Despite South Africa's recent string of wins here, a draw is the most likely outcome.

One Day Cricket

Centurion gave a fantastic account of itself in the recent ICC Champions Trophy. It is a good wicket for One Day cricket, again supplemented by its position at altitude and a relatively small playing area. Teams prefer to set a total here and have looked to get close to 300 for a defendable score.

England showed the best and worst they have to offer here in October. A textbook innings against South Africa, with Owais Shah, Paul Collingwood, and Eoin Morgan firing, was followed by a very disappointing display against Australia. But they have one over the hosts here and should be familiar with the ground and the pitch.

This venue is set up for the big hitters. South Africa are far better suited to succeed at Centurion and will be desperate to avenge the loss which will still be fresh in their minds. The controversy over Graeme Smith being denied a runner should add fuel to the fire. This is a bowler's graveyard so expect a high scoring affair.

Day Off

Pretoria is the capital city of the country and has a wealth of historic buildings. The Union Buildings (where the local government is based) and its surrounding gardens are picturesque and worthy of a visit. The Transvaal Museum covers a wide range of interests including the Anglo Boer War and may be of interest to English tourists.

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The Cradle of Humankind is a World Heritage Site, where the oldest human fossils were found. But, even if you're not particularly interested in this historical significance it is a great place to visit. There are enough small game farms, caves, restaurants, craft shops and guesthouses to keep you occupied for a couple of days. The Sterkfontein Caves are the highlight of this area. You could even go for a hot air balloon ride. The Kruger Park and Sun City are as accessible from Pretoria.

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Guide to Kingsmead in Durban

by Ryan ten Doeschate

Kingsmead is a stone's throw away from the Durban coast and the debate over the impact of the tides on bowling conditions remains unresolved. South Africa have a mixed Test record here in recent times, following up a convincing innings victory over the West Indies with a huge 175 run loss to Australia earlier this year. England have managed two consecutive draws since 2000.

Notwithstanding an opening partnership worth 184 by Australia in March this year, it is the type of pitch where wickets can tumble on the first day. Scoring runs does however get easier with the pitch playing at its best on days three and four. Kingsmead is considered the best batting wicket in the country.

Teams fair considerably better in their second chance at the crease: South Africa scored 370 after being dismissed for 138 against Australia and England compiled 570/7 after a first innings 139 in their last outing here in 2004. It is a small playing area, particularly straight down the ground, and batsmen enjoy the value for strokes on this lightning outfield.

There's no pattern as regards how captains act when winning the toss but if there is any assistance for the bowlers, it will be on day one. Despite recent results, a draw is the most likely outcome here.

One Day Cricket

The last match in the upcoming ODI series will be a Day/Night contest in Durban. The pitch has played well in recent times and coupled with the relatively small boundaries, scores have been upwards of 250. It is a "bat first wicket" with chasing becoming even more difficult at night. The team batting first will feel happy posting around 270 but on occasions a bit of moisture requires caution, meaning 230 can be considered competitive.

Day Off

Durban's main attractions are its stunning beaches and coastline. Visitors flock to the holiday resort villages of Umhlanga and Ballito, just north of the city. The golden beaches stretch northwards for 200km. Umhlanga offers upmarket accommodation, a wealth of entertainment, shops, restaurants and nature trails. There's also surfing, deep-sea fishing, dolphin watching and scuba diving for adventure seekers.

The promenade along Durban's main beach has market stalls and is perfect for a lazy stroll. Rickshaws pulled by local Zulu men decorated in traditional clothing will give visitors a taste of the local culture. The uShaka Marine World contains everything from an underground aquarium and dolphin shows, to exciting water slides and pools.

The Drakensberg mountains are a place of exceptional beauty with peaks reaching well over

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3000m. It's the perfect rest place away from the busy cities with many walking trails and resorts designed for relaxation. The Tugela Falls is the second highest waterfall in the world and is the most spectacular natural feature of this area. The rock art paintings of the San (Bushman) people are also fascinating.

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Guide to Port Elizabeth

by Ryan ten Doeschate

If Newlands is the fortress of SA cricket, then Port Elizabeth is its bogey ground with The Proteas' last Test win coming in 2000 against New Zealand. England had an emphatic seven wicket here in 2004 when Andrew Strauss scored heavily in both innings. The tour organisers have opted not to award Port Elizabeth with a Test and England will have a solitary ODI to exploit South Africa's poor record here.

One Day Cricket

There's always a great atmosphere at St George's Park, driven along by the brass band that has become part of the furniture in the last five years or so.

The wicket was once infamous for its lack of pace but has had a revival of late and recent scores have been upwards of 270, in line with modern One-Day cricket requirements. Scoring does appear to be tougher as matches progress and most teams have looked to bat first. Despite this, the win ratio for teams batting first is only just over 50 per cent.

South Africa have lost more matches than they've won here since 2000. That said, the last outing in April saw them walk away convincing winners against Australia. England's last match against the Proteas here was a thrilling affair, South Africa winning in the final over thanks to a Graeme Smith hundred and a late cameo from Mark Boucher.

If the spinners can have an impact on a One-Day match in this series, St George's is the most likely venue. This is Johan Botha's home ground and the battle between him and Graeme Swann could be a defining one.

Day Off

Port Elizabeth itself is not the best place for a tourist compared to the likes of Cape Town but there are still a handful of interesting things to see. Hoby Beach is nice for some sunbathing and a swim and the nearby Boardwalk Casino is also worth a visit, with some restaurants and bars set around a lake.

Shamwari Game Reserve is fast becoming a favourite for overseas visitors. A chance to see a wide variety of wild animals, including the Big Five.

Knysna and Plettenberg Bay are roughly 300km down the South Coast and are definitely worth the journey. These two coastal towns are popular spots for local tourism with busy beaches, a lagoon for watersports, a handful of spectacular golf courses and a variety of places for all eating and drinking requirements. The cliffs of Knysna are best viewed from the ocean and a boat trip is highly recommended.

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A trip to Bloukraans is a must for any adrenaline junkie. It is the highest commercial bungee jump in the world, measuring 216 metres. The view down the gorge from the bridge is spectacular and even being a spectator to the bungee activities can be thrilling. Bloukraans is 40km from the aforementioned Plettenberg Bay.

The Addo Elephant National Park is within driving distance of the city and makes for a good day trip. This finely tuned ecosystem is sanctuary to over 450 elephants, Cape buffalo, black rhino, a variety of antelope species, as well as the unique flightless dung beetle, found almost exclusively in Addo.

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Guide to The Wanderers in Johannesburg

by Ryan ten Doeschate

The Wanderers has undergone a spectacular facelift and has staged some thrilling limited-overs cricket of late.

It has also seen some fantastic Tests, with all of the nine previous matches at the ground ending in a result. It will be the venue for the final Test of this series and history suggests it will be the perfect setting for a spectacular finale.

South Africa have had mixed fortunes here, with four wins, five losses and a solitary draw. More importantly, England have prospered here with Matthew Hoggard's seven wickets the stand out performance in the series clinching win in 2005.

This is the quickest pitch in the country and it usually offers good bounce for seamers. It also plays very true and captains have generally looked to bat first. If the batting team makes the most of a good track on the first day, they have a good chance of setting up a win. Spin has been used in a supporting role but the quick bowlers should do most of the damage.

One Day Cricket

Also known as the 'Bull Ring', this is the mecca of South African ODI cricket. Spectators are close to the action at this intimate ground and players get a special buzz from the atmosphere. Nothing seems impossible here and this was best illustrated in 2006 when South Africa chased down Australia's 434/4 in one of the most memorable matches in cricket history.

The recent ICC Champions Trophy cast a different light on this ground, but sub-standard wickets were more a result of under-preparation due to harsh weather conditions than a change in the pitches' character. Teams will normally look at 300 as a good score here which gives you an indication of how good a wicket it generally is.

The Wanderers will host both the first T20 and ODI matches of this series. Johannesburg is situated 2000 m above sea level, meaning the thinner air at altitude causes the ball to travel faster and further. Expect big hits and high scores to be a feature of the matches here so remember to look at the big hitters rather than the accumulators as good batsmen to side with when betting on top innings run scorer markets. Also remember that just because a team posts 300 batting first, doesn't mean it can't be chased!

Day Off

Johannesburg is the engine room of the South African economy. Sandton is the new Central Business District and has developed into a vibrant entertainment hub. Here you will find a fantastic shopping centre, hotels, restaurants, cafes, and nightlife to cater for all.

Soweto is the biggest and most vibrant township in South Africa, and is increasingly becoming

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one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country. It was pivotal to the struggle for freedom, and is now full of sites of significant historical importance.

Today, Soweto is a cultural melting pot, and an absolute must-see for any visiting tourist.

The Sun City holiday resort has glamorous casinos, gourmet restaurants, extensive sports facilities and star-studded spectacles. The full variety of entertainment on offer ranges from slots to safaris; theatre extravaganza to a games arcade for children; the Valley of the Waves to The Lost City. Year-round good weather ensures that tennis, swimming, golf, mountain biking and horse riding are all on offer whether it's January or June.

The Kruger National Park is ideal for viewing the Big Five. It is situated 400km away from Johannesburg and is best taken in over a few days. The safari and game lodges range from elegant to super luxurious. The expert game rangers whisk you off on game drives and walking safaris, tracking the wildlife in their natural habitat.

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