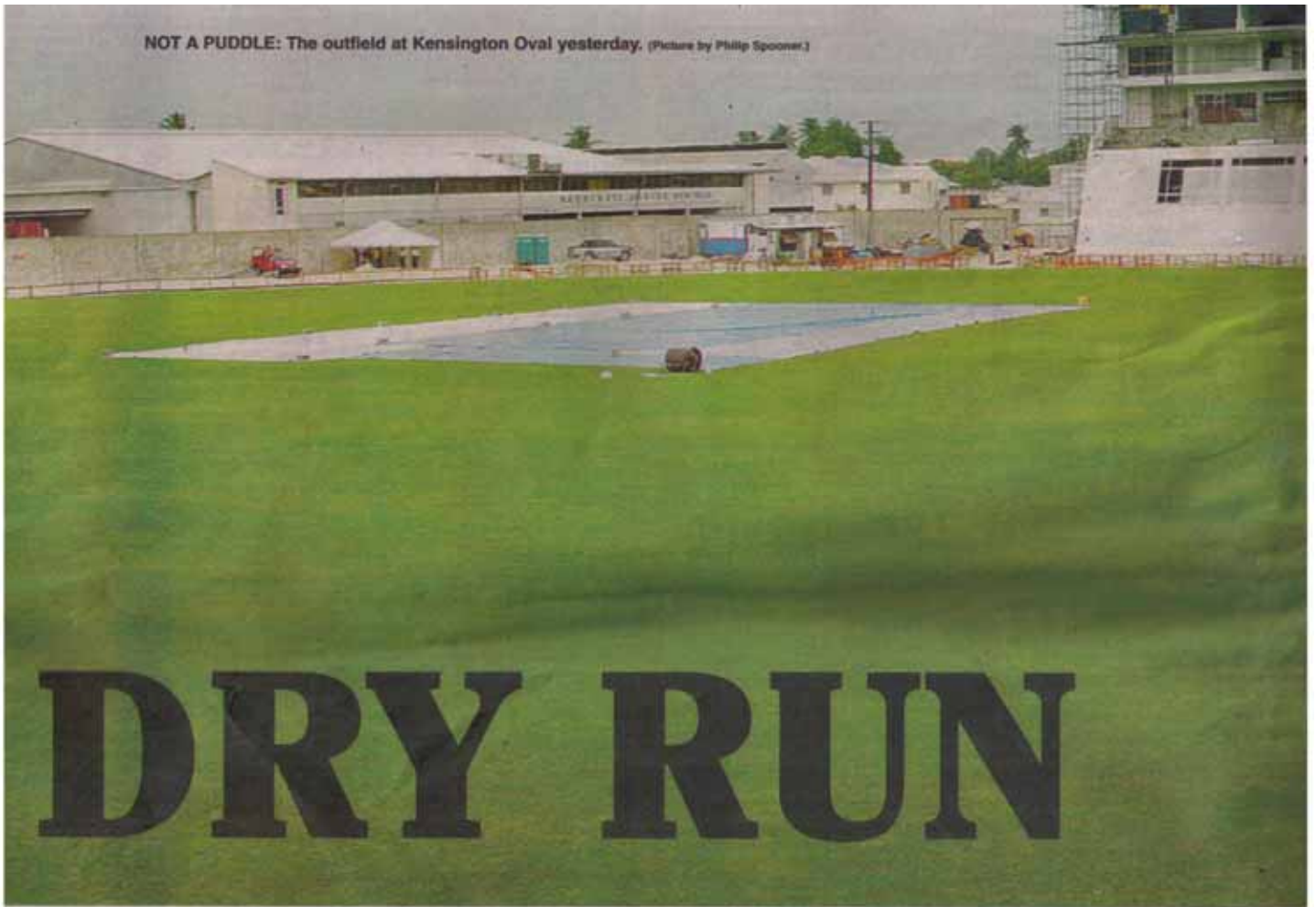


NOT A PUDDLE: The outfield at Kensington Oval yesterday. (Picture by Philip Spooner.)



DRY RUN

Not a puddle on Oval as drainage system passes test

by PHILIP SPOONER

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE – but none settling on the outfield at Kensington Oval.

Officials preparing for next year's Cricket World Cup (CWC) had reason to smile yesterday as Kensington Oval – venue for the final – passed its first test of readiness for the mega-event. The Oval will host six Super 8 (second-round matches) and the grand final on April 28.

Not a ball was bowled in the scheduled first testing match, but that did not deter the players and match officials. They were bowled over at how well the outfield was able to handle the water. There was not a single puddle on the outfield and the six pitches on the "square" were untouched.

In contrast, all over the Fontabelle area, no fewer than six inches of water

was on the ground.

Courtney Browns, cricket operations manager for the local organising committee, said it showed that the new high-tech drainage and irrigation system were of world-class quality.

"This speaks volumes for the new drainage system," he said. "Gone are the days when, once there is rain, we go home. The drainage here is so good that we didn't see a single puddle on the field."

Yesterday the City of Bridgetown was drenched and there was severe flooding in some parts. While this was happening, players from Sunrise Cricket Club and St Catherine Sports & Cultural Club were eagerly preparing to play the first match at the Oval in 16 months.

Play was eventually abandoned when it was felt this might cause slight damage to the outfield.

The new irrigation system runs along

the outskirts of the field and is the catchment area for water. It has more than 300 massive tanks, buried under the surface, holding the water, which could then be used for wetting the field during dry periods.

Gregori International, a French ground-developing firm, installed the system. This technology is used at professional football grounds across Europe, and will allow play to start less than 20 minutes after the rain stops. It is part of the \$135 million redevelopment project at the ground, the capacity of which is being doubled to house 28 000 fans.

"The umpires decided not to play, not because of the conditions of the pitch and field, but because we didn't want to risk any damage to the field. With all the rain, obviously it would be a bit damp. If we absolutely had to we could have had a match."

Minister of Sports Anthony Wood joined players and officials in the Sir Garfield Sobers Pavilion and he too expressed amazement that the ground remained in immaculate condition despite the weather.

"This is quite impressive – the field, the pavilion, the overall facility. Not so long ago play would never be possible in these conditions. Now this is a total transformation," he said.

Michael Bramble, captain of Sunrise, the Barbados Cricket League one-day champions, said the players were honoured to be part of the activities.

"We were hoping to play today, but we didn't get out there," he said. "However, these facilities are world-class and we feel good to be part of it."

The second match in the pitch testing series will be played today between Pickwick and Empire.

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