

Oval to be fully hi-tech

by PHILIP SPOONER
in Kingston, Jamaica

KENSINGTON OVAL will be employing the latest in modern technology as the region's most historic ground prepares to host the biggest cricket match.

A lot of attention related to the redevelopment project has centred on the building of the stands, but the new plans for the pitch and field-related preparation will make the Oval a world leader.

This was revealed on Monday as officials of the 2007 International Cricket Council's World Cup (CWC) had a day of meeting on pitch and outfield.

It was part of a venue summit at the Hilton Hotel here in Jamaica, where close to 150 delegates have assembled.

A new irrigation system will run along the outskirts of the Oval field and will be a catchment area for water.

Gregori, a French ground-developing firm, has brought its leading officials to the island to work on the project.

It will see massive tanks, buried under the surface, holding the water, which could then be used for wetting the field.

This technology is used at professional football grounds across Europe.

"The Barbados system is something that is being used in football," said

Andy Atkinson, ICC's pitch and field consultant.

"It can handle huge amounts of water and will be a feature of the tournament."

As part of the project, there will also be a mini pitch, field, grass and water site set up on the north-eastern side of the Oval.

"It's going to make for a very spectacular facility," said Professor Jeff Atherton, a member of the

CWC's agronomy team.

"It will drain naturally and that will really be a major plus."

The outfield will be sand-based rather than soil and this will aid with the drainage.

"We need water to drain quickly in the event there is rain," said Atkinson.

"The last thing we want during the tournament is to have rain stop play and we have to sit by and watch the groundstaff

pulling covers and mopping.

"The field is designed so the pitch is the highest point of the field, so we will have state-of-the-art drainage."

Kensington Oval is being transformed to double its capacity to accommodate 28 000 fans.

The ground will stage Super 8 (second round) matches on April 11, 13, 15, 17, 19 and 21, and the grand final on April 28.