



YesPlay Pro20 Cup brings 16 teams together for new domestic T20 season.

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By **Kevin Rademeyer**, *Sports Journalist*.

South Africa’s domestic T20 landscape is set for a new chapter this weekend when the YesPlay Pro20 Cup brings together 16 teams from across the country in an eight- week battle for the title.

The revamped competition combines Division 1 and Division 2 teams, creating a 71- match tournament designed to give emerging players greater exposure while providing established sides with another opportunity to compete for silverware.

There is also R2 million in prize money available to fans across the tournament, with ticket holders at every match, including fixtures that are not televised, eligible for a share of the prize pool. Terms and conditions apply.

The defending champions, Dafabet Warriors, begin their campaign on Friday knowing that expectations will be higher after last season’s memorable run, which ended with victory over Dafabet Boland in the final in Paarl.

Warriors captain Matthew de Villiers believes the expanded competition will test his team in a different way.

“We’ve had a couple of conversations around it. We’ve spoken about different levels of the game, guys going from Division 1,” de Villiers said.

“We’ve also asked for more cricket as well, so I think the guys are very excited to travel to different parts of the country.”

“I think it’s good that it sets an attitude in the team and a mindset that we have to rock up and win, no matter where we go. It’s going to be a very good tournament and we’re all looking forward to it for sure.”

For the YesPlay Western Province Cobras, the competition represents an opportunity to revive their fortunes in the shortest format.

The Cobras have not won the domestic T20 title for more than a decade, but captain George Linde believes a young squad can change that record. “If I look back, the last three, four years we haven’t done as well as we want in the T20 format,” Linde said during the captains’ YesPlay Pro20 Hour.

“So I think that’s probably a format that we’d love to win. We’ve got a very young squad and it’s actually exciting, so yeah, it’s going to be cool to see the younger kids go out, and talented cricketers as well. So yeah, we’re definitely going to try and win this T20 Cup.”

The inclusion of Division 2 sides adds another layer to the competition, with the possibility of upsets likely to be one of the tournament’s attractions.

Mpumalanga Rhinos all rounder Muhammed Mayet compared the concept to football’s FA Cup, where teams from different levels compete against one another. “I think there are quite a few similarities between the FA Cup and this tournament,” Mayet said.

“It will be nice for the Division 2 teams to get a bit of exposure. T20 is a game where it’s your day and there’s always room to upset someone. Having both divisions mixed will be quite interesting to see what happens.”

The new tournament also marks the start of a multi year partnership between Cricket South Africa and YesPlay, which becomes the competition’s title sponsor.

CSA chief executive Pholetsi Moseki said the partnership would help create new experiences around domestic cricket while showcasing talent throughout the country’s provincial system.

“The launch of the YesPlay Pro20 Cup is an important step in the evolution of our domestic game, and having a partner such as YesPlay come on board for the journey adds another exciting dimension to the competition,” Moseki said.

“This partnership is about creating experiences around the game, connecting with our fans and finding new ways to celebrate the talent and excitement that exists within our pathway.”

YesPlay chief executive Tebogo Makamo said the competition would provide an important platform for players while bringing supporters closer to domestic cricket.

“The competition provides an important platform to showcase the depth of cricketing talent across our provinces, while giving fans the opportunity to experience high quality T20 cricket in stadiums across the country,” Makamo said.

The action begins on Friday at SuperSport Park, where defending champions Warriors face North West Dragons before the Titans take on the Cobras later in the day. Saturday’s only fixture sees Northern Cape Heat meet Eastern Cape linyathi at Kimberley Oval.

Three matches are scheduled for Sunday. Hollywoodbets Dolphins host DP World Lions at Hollywoodbets Kingsmead, the Cobras face Flexbrands Knights at YesPlay Newlands, while the Titans travel to White River Country Club to take on the Mpumalanga Rhinos.

For the players, the tournament offers eight weeks of competitive T20 cricket and another chance to force their way into the spotlight.

For supporters, it brings 71 matches, teams from both divisions and the prospect of seeing the next generation of South African talent emerge.

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