



Aaron Finch hits out for Surrey
Picture: Getty Images

A MASTER BLASTER

Berlin break for Finch after T20 Surrey heroics

SURREY CCC

BY MARCUS HOOK

Aaron Finch took a well-earned break in Berlin this week after igniting Surrey's Blast campaign with a record-breaking 131 not out against Sussex.

The 31-year-old Australian master blaster, the world's number one ranked T20 international batsman, struck seven sixes and 10 fours in the win at Hove.

That came 24 hours after his 58 on returning to the Oval had contributed to an impressive victory over Essex.

"It was nice to put in a match-winning performance and help us to another good win," said Finch.

"Our bowlers did an outstanding job and it was a really good polished performance by us.

"From a distance, the pitch looked an absolute road, but it turned out to be quite low and slow. The first 50 runs

were quite tough, but I was pleased with how I got through that and cashed in.

"Credit to Ollie Pope at the end too, he played some great shots, we ran hard and I got a bit of the strike!"

Finch's fifth T20 ton was the highest score made by a Surrey batsman in short form cricket, but he was still grateful for the chance to give his body a rest after a gruelling schedule in recent months that has included ODI and T20 series against England and a tri-series in Harare, against Zimbabwe and Pakistan.

"This week's break has come at a really good time for me and some other of our players," said Finch. "My body's certainly feeling it and with all the travelling around the world we've done since Amy and I got married in April.

"With all the cricket she's had to watch, the least my wife deserves is a short break in Berlin. It's a place we've never been to before.

"I ducked off to the IPL literally the day after we got married and the schedule since has been pretty hectic. It is good to recharge the batteries a little, both mentally and physically, and then we'll be able as a team to launch ourselves into the second half of the Blast.

"The one thing the IPL does teach you, though, is how to make sure you can get yourself up mentally for every game.

"There are times when you get home from a game at 1.30 in the morning, you're up at 8am to travel to the next match and then you play the following day.

"That happens quite a lot, so it's a case of making sure you are as fresh as you can be going into each game.

"For me, when I am playing a lot like that, it generally means not too much training and keeping yourself mentally and physically fresh.

"Yes, momentum is nice when you're

playing well but you still need those breaks."

Finch returned to the club after hitting a near world-record 172 in a T20 tri-series game against Zimbabwe.

There was also an explosive short-form innings of 84 against Eoin Morgan's England white-ball team last month and, in an overall T20 career of 228 matches so far, Finch's strike rate is a remarkable 142 per 100 balls.

He has certainly wasted no time in reminding Surrey's supporters of how important he is at the top of their T20 batting order, with all-rounder Rikki Clarke saying: "It gives us such confidence having Finchy going in first, especially given all he has already done for us in the last two years in T20 cricket."

First, though, against Kent at Canterbury tonight, Surrey play their fifth Blast fixture - hoping that Finch is suitably refreshed and continues where he left off at Hove.

County Championship title win can move step closer



HOOK SHOT

Surrey reporter Marcus Hook gives his county view

The domestic Twenty20 continues to go from strength to strength, and the arrival of Aaron Finch means that Surrey find themselves right back in the reckoning for a quarter-final place.

Thanks to Finch, who was waylaid by a hastily-arranged T20 series out in Zimbabwe, the defeats at the hands

of Middlesex and Kent, to open Surrey's campaign, already seem like a distant memory.

The 31-year-old Australian is at the peak of his powers. Fresh from breaking his own world record for the highest individual score in T20 internationals, he has been the catalyst for both of the Oval outfits' successes since he rode back into Kennington for a third T20 stint as Surrey's overseas player.

The Blast continues to be played in front of packed houses. The headline in one of the Sunday papers asked: 'Cricket never had it so good - so why is ECB putting it all at risk?'

Will Brown, the CEO of Gloucestershire, was quoted as

saying: "Our attendances have gone up 61 per cent in four years."

The dilemma, of course, is that in two years time the nearest venue Gloucester fans can travel to see The Hundred will be Cardiff - some 45 miles away. Surrey's head coach Michael Di Venuto also made this point on social media: "4 x #T20Blast games for Surrey CCC so far, 3 different venues, 4 sold out crowds! Not sure where all the 'new' supporters are going to sit for the proposed 100-ball competition!"

Football may not have come home, but if Surrey impose themselves against second-placed Notts when their County Championship campaign resumes, albeit briefly,

this weekend, the faithful will start believing the most coveted prize in county cricket is returning to its spiritual home.

Surrey won five of the first six official titles (between 1890 and 1892 as well as in 1894 and 1895). Homage is now paid to all of the club's championship-winning sides behind Block 1 at the Oval - including those that were awarded it prior to 1890.

Believe it or not, between 1864 and 1889, the champions were decided by the sporting press.

While one ponders that there was a time when cricket writers had such influence, it's good to see Surrey have left plenty of room for the display to be extended.

KENT v SURREY probable line-ups



Surrey:
Burns, Finch, Maddinson, Foakes (wk), Pope, S Curran, Clarke, Borthwick, Pillans, Batty and Dernbach (capt).

Kent:
Denly, Bell-Drummond, Kuhn, Billings (capt, wk), Blake, Brathwaite, Dickson, Haggett, Podmore, Claydon and Qayyum.

KEY PLAYERS

Rikki Clarke (Surrey) - The veteran all-rounder is averaging 54.50 with the bat in the Vitality Blast. In the corresponding fixture a fortnight ago, he and Mat Pillans were also the pick of Surrey's attack.

Joe Denly (Kent) - Became the first player in history to hit a hundred and take a hat-trick in the same limited-overs contest, when these two sides met at the Oval a couple of weeks back. Denly, *below*, has hit four T20 tons. Surrey have been on the receiving end of two.



FORM GUIDE

After four games, Kent top the South Division on net run rate with three wins out of four (including a six-run victory over Surrey), while the South Londoners are now back in contention after turning around a losing start to level their record - two wins and two losses.

STAT

Aaron Finch faced 79 balls in his unbeaten 131 against Sussex, making it the longest T20 innings of all time in terms of balls faced; beating the record held by Zubair Ahmed - who faced 77 deliveries in making 111 not out for Quetta Bears against Larkana Bulls at Karachi in 2014.

STAR MAN

Aaron Finch - Surrey's T20 campaign was in reverse gear until Australia's white-ball skipper came to the rescue, opening his Blast account with knocks of 58 and 131 not out.

BEST MOMENT

I'm always reluctant to highlight a player's misfortune, but it could have been a very different story against the Sharks last Friday had Jofra Archer held on rather than shelling a routine caught and bowled chance off Aaron Finch in the first over at Hove.

FIXTURES

July 20: Kent v Surrey at Canterbury (T20 Blast)
July 20-25: Nottinghamshire v Surrey at Trent Bridge (County Championship).