

## WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND

## A quiet champion

Text &amp; photos by Tawfiq Aziz Khan back from Wimbledon

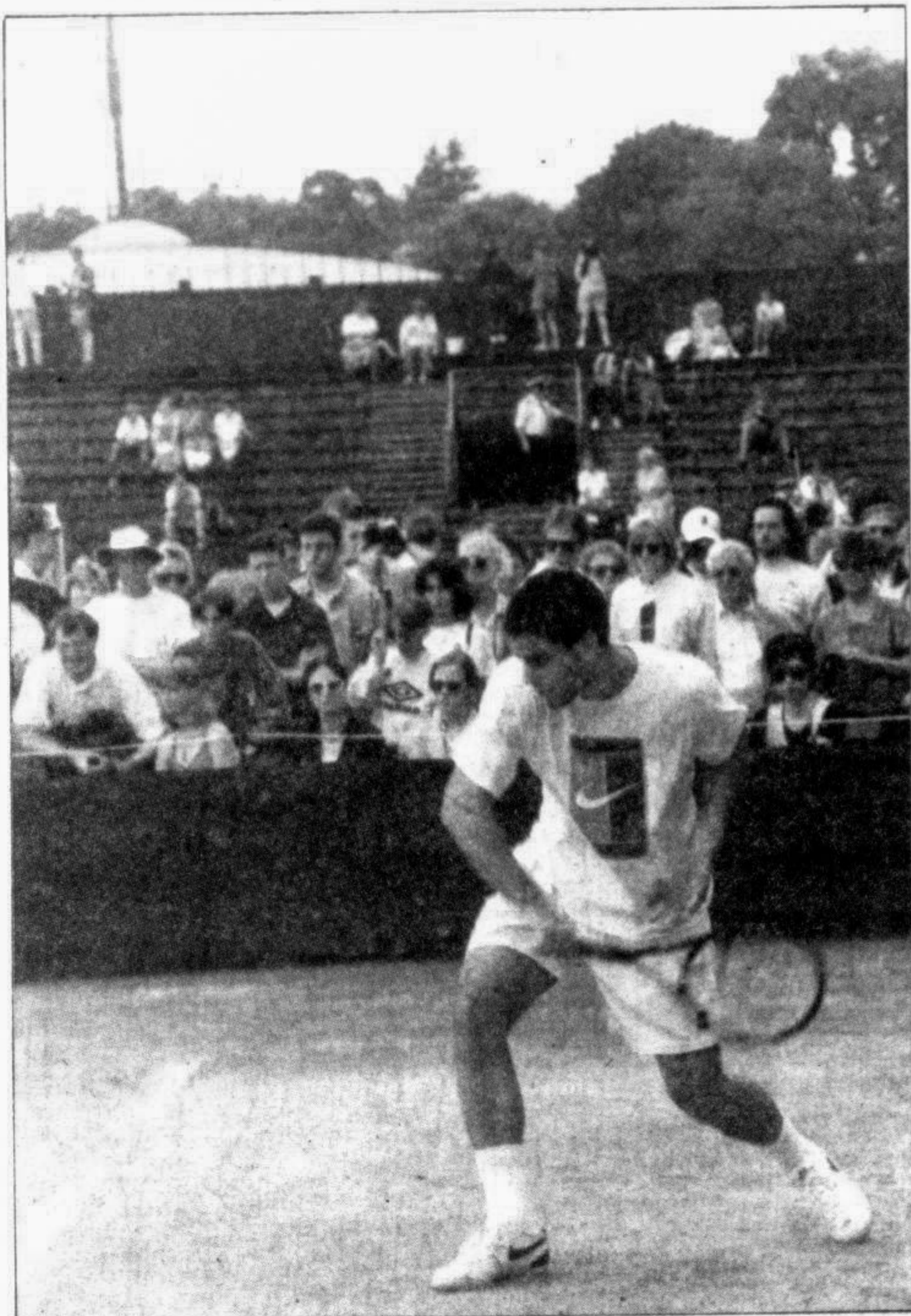
PETE Sampras was pulled down from his number one position early this year by compatriot Andre Agassi. Sampras was on top of world men's ranking for about 88 weeks — may not be a record, but indeed a long period of time. In January this year he lost to Agassi in the final of Ford Australian Open. Sampras was mentally depressed because of the sudden illness of his coach Tim Gullikson. Tim has been with Sampras since January 1992. But Sampras had more shocks in store for him before the start of the French Open '95 at Roland Garros. In his warm up at an invitational tournament he lost to an almost unknown Frenchman, Thierry Guardiola ranked 158 in 1994, on clay. Was it a pointer for Sampras who hasn't yet won the French Open? Well Pete himself thought otherwise. He emphasised, "I was not too disappointed with the result. It's more important for me to go for my shots and I'm very happy to be 100 per cent physically fit after my injury." In fact he suffered an ankle injury playing in Monte Carlo.

His pious thought of 100 per cent fitness and his being able to play shots were all blown up by an Austrian named Gilbert Schaller in the first round at Roland Garros in a thrilling 5-setter. The 26-year-old Austrian ranked 44 in 1994, won 7-6, 4-6, 6-7, 6-2, 6-4. It was a real upset in the French Open but Sampras got a few extra days to tune himself up for the greatest grass-court event at the Wimbledon. It was true that he could do with a French crown, the only Grand Slam event he has not won so far, but his sights were trained more intensely on Wimbledon where he was a defending champion and could write history. God willing!

But luck can not be the only factor for winning any Grand Slam title. One has to be absolutely fit, physically and mentally, to produce the very best of his talents against all opponents under the most trying conditions. In such big time tennis where billions of dollars are at stake, where the prestige soars sky-high, where fan-following at times can be extremely irritating, where survival of the fittest is the bottom line, one who is master of all his sensibility is the likely champion.

Though clay was not exactly his strong point, Sampras was shaken by his first round set-back. He needed something to restore his confidence and he did get the chance before Wimbledon at Queen's Club grass courts defeating Frenchman Guy Forget 7-6, 7-6 in the final. This victory restored his prestige to some extent but gave a tremendous boost to his self-confidence. His reversals at Australian and French Open tournaments had definitely made dents in his confidence and it was further aggravated by the seeding committees decision to put him behind Agassi as number 2, though he was the player trying for his third consecutive title at Wimbledon.

His passage to the final was confident but not without its moments of doubts. He dropped the second set against Karsten Braasch of Germany in the Opener, lost a set to Jared Palmer of USA in the second round. He then gave a torrid time to his supporters as he dropped the first set to an outsider from Japan, Shuzo Matsuoka in the quarter-finals. But in all these matches he held his head and came out successful with



Pete Sampras in a practice session 24 hours before the final of Wimbledon.



The Netherlands had a good number of entries at Wimbledon this year. A large number of people from Holland came to see the matches. Photo shows a couple basking in the sun on the final day.

small scratches. To me the best match of the championships he played was against Goran Ivanisevic in the semi-finals. It was a battle of wits between two of the most powerful servers in the game. He won the first set on tie break, lost the second and the fourth but finally sailed smoothly through the fifth aided by some debatable line calls. At no stage of the match did Sampras look nervous or overstretched. He does not show temper, does not question the umpire or the line judges, never jumps or pumps whenever makes a good shot or talks to himself to boost his morale. He is the coolest and naturally the

cleverest of all the top players in the game today. Against Boris Becker he dropped the first set. But he was cool as a cucumber. He even wooed the spectators, most of whom were supporting the German Lion, without any success. He fought his battle alone and won his third in a row at Wimbledon.

Pete Sampras, who first won the US Open title in 1990 upset players like Ivan Lendl, John McEnroe and Andre Agassi on his way. He was only 19 years and 28 days and became the youngest ever US Open champion. It was only his second year as a pro. Born in Washington DC on August 12,

1971, Sampras has won six Grand Slam titles so far which include three Wimbledon (1993, '94 and '95), two US Open (1990 & '93) and one Australian Open (1994).

After the presentation ceremony at the Wimbledon, on popular demand, Boris Becker had a lap of honour with his runner-up trophy which was not a normal practice. When asked about his reaction to spectator demands, "Pete Champras", as he was fondly mentioned by The Daily Mail, bluntly replied he would rather forego his popularity than losing the trophy.

## Venus Williams: A starry-eyed kid

LOS ANGELES, Aug 3: She's barely 15 and has competed in only one professional tennis tournament, yet Venus Williams already appears to have the poise of a seasoned, successful veteran of the game, reports AP.

She certainly has the sponsor-swollen back account of a superstar, despite her limited experience. Williams seems destined for stardom and has no self-doubts.

She'll become the No 1 player in the world at 18, Williams' father, Richard, said Tuesday while the 1.87-metre (6-foot-1 1/2), 70-kilogram (155-pound) youngster conducted a tennis clinic for underprivileged

youths. Venus agrees with her dad.

"I feel it's very true," she said when asked about a No 1 ranking in the next few years.

Others are equally confident. Reebok announced a couple months ago it had signed Williams — then 14 — to a multimillion-dollar multi-year endorsement contract and that she will have a clothing line by next spring.

This despite the fact that she played in just one tournament in 1994 and will play in only three this year.

"That's OK," Williams said of her light schedule. "I would rather be at the beach than playing 14 tournaments

a year. I'm only 15. That can wait. I'm going to be playing tennis for quite a long time. There's no need to rush into it."

Her family is seeing to that.

"I'm very concerned what happened to Jennifer (Capriati) could happen to Venus," Richard Williams said. "I'm afraid we could fall in that same doggone trap."

Capriati turned pro at 14 but she was out at 17, burned out. She still hasn't returned full-time.

Williams' only professional tournament so far was the Bank of the West Classic in Oakland, California, last fall. After winning her first-round

match, she faced Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, one of the world's top players, in the second round.

The youngster dominated the veteran early on, winning the first set 6-2 and taking a 3-1 lead in the second set. But Sanchez Vicario turned things around, winning 11 straight games to complete the match.

"I had a good time, it was a lot of fun," Williams said despite the loss.

This year Williams will enter the Acura Classic in Manhattan Beach near Los Angeles starting August 7, the Canadian Open the following week and the Bank of the West Classic in Oakland, California in October.

At only 13, Kutraleeshwaran ("Kutral") is already a sporting legend.

He has made it into the Guinness Book of Records by swimming six sea channels in eight months — breaking a record held by another Indian, Mihir Sen.

He is the youngest person to have swum the 32 kilometre Palk Strait between India and Sri Lanka: It took him 16 hours.

Pint-sized Kutral is the lightest person to have swum the 37 kilometre Channel crossing between England and France. That took a mere 11 hours 36 minutes.

His other "youngest ever" records include the 29 kilometre crossing between the Isle of Zannone and San Felice Circeo in Italy in 8 hours 53 minutes; both ways across the nine kilometre Strait of Messina (between Italy and Sicily) in 2 hours 20 minutes; and the 20 kilometre Rottnest Channel in Australia in 5 hours 49 minutes.

"He has a tiger's eye," says Kutral's father, senior lawyer K. G. Ramesh. "Tell him a target and he will get it."

When he went to swim the English Channel, officials were rather apprehensive when they saw the boy on the French coast. Kutral's father had to convince them that he could do it. Once in water there was no doubt about his swimming abilities.

"I knew I could do it and I did it," said Kutral on his return to India after the triumphant event.

He looks like any other Tamil boy with woodpaste and vermilion smears on his forehead. He smiles and lets his father answer all questions as his two elder brothers look on.

When his son was seven, Ramesh took him to Woodlands, a seaside swimming school for a short course.

Coach Sankaran watched him and predicted that the boy would reach new heights in the sport.

His prediction quickly came true when Kutral was selected for national competitions in Calcutta and Trivandram, and bagged a First in state diving championships.

But discovery of an unusual muscular configuration — part of the secret of his success — by a physiotherapist caused him to shift from short to long-distance swimming.

The physiotherapist be-

## Olympic painting unveiled

SAVANNAH, USA, Aug 3: A specially commissioned painting by modern French impressionist Andre Bourrie will be sold as a poster on the mass market in conjunction with the 1996 Olympics, local organisers said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The work, entitled "Passage into Savannah", commemorates the elegant coastal city's role as the host of yachting competition during the Summer Games.

It was unveiled late on Monday at a park along the Savannah River, where the opening and closing ceremonies for yachting will take place next summer.

The oil-on-canvas painting depicts a shoreline scene of yachts in full sail on the Savannah River.

Bourrie's paintings routinely command upwards of 15,000 dollars. Four-hundred and seventy signed and numbered lithographic prints of "Passage into Savannah" will be sold for 750 dollars apiece at art galleries across the United States.

Bourrie was commissioned to create the work by Fine Art Ltd, the St Louis-based art publisher which has an exclusive Olympic licensing agreement for art prints and posters.

## Challenge on Clayton's claim

LONDON, Aug 3: The World Sailing Speed Record Council has challenged Briton Lisa Clayton to prove her solo round-the-world claim to a place in yachting records, reports AP.

It said Wednesday it wants more detailed information from Ms Clayton before it will confirm her claim to be the first woman to sail solo and unaided around the world from the northern hemisphere without stopping in any port.

Clayton, 36, maintained her claim to the record.

She arrived at the south-west English port of Dartmouth on June 29 aboard her 39-foot (11 metre) yacht Spirit of Birmingham to cheering crowds and champagne, saying she had made the 30,000-mile (48,000 km) trip in 286 days.

## Pint-sized Kutral just can't stop making waves

By A J Singh from Madras, India

Athletes seem to be breaking records and reaching stardom at ever-younger ages. Now an extraordinarily talented 13-year-old Indian boy wants to take on the world in a major international long-distance swimming contest, reports Gemini News Service, and finds he is too young to compete.



Kutraleeshwaran: 'A tiger's eye'

believed the boy had the sort of long, twisted muscle fibres which facilitate endurance swimming. The theory of twisted fibres is controversial, but sports physiotherapists agree that certain peo-

ple are born with so-called "slow twitch" muscle fibres, which are slow to fatigue, giving such athletes an edge in competition.

To test the theory, Kutral was assigned to swim five

kilometres in the Bay of Bengal. He did it easily.

His will-power and endurance — two key factors — were tested in another swim, in Avdi, Tamil Nadu state, where he swam 15 kilometres in five hours.

Participation in long-distance swimming contests followed, and his name and fame spread.

When Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jayaraman heard about his achievements, she asked the state's Sports Authority to adopt him for three years. It provided a monthly grant of Rs 1,000, free travel facilities and Rs 1,500 a year for clothes, providing relief to his father who had been finding it difficult to meet his son's increasing expenses.

"A few times, I even had to pledge my wife's jewellery," confides Ramesh.

Shortage of money means he cannot have a permanent coach, who would accompany him on all his expeditions. So Kutral's father engages local coaches in the countries in which his son swims. This has the advantage of securing local knowledge of seas and conditions.

Ramesh is the brains behind his son's success. He has encouraged the boy to become what he is today. But it would be wrong to say that he is pushing Kutral against his will, especially when his body is still growing, in the hope of making him a world champion.

Despite last year's exertions, "Kutral's urge to participate in all the major international open swims remains unsatisfied," says Madras sports writer K. Arumugam. But Kutral has to wait two years before he can enter the biennial major international Open series: 15 is the minimum age. — Gemini News.

About the author: A J Singh is a freelance Indian journalist.

## Brian Lara A Lord in His Own Right

by Sasheen Mehnaz Ekramullah



Sasheen Mehnaz Ekramullah, a student of Class VII of Sunbeams School, won the second prize, Group C, in the Royal Commonwealth Society's Essay Competition, held in 1994-95. Out of a total entry of 6000 from 54 countries, this was a fine achievement and a great credit to Sasheen and the school.

BRIAN Charles Lara — the sound of this very name arouses a feeling of awe and inspiration within me. A small man, compared to the rest of the giant West India Cricketers, he seems most unlikely to trouble the opposition bowlers. He is arguably the best batsman in the world today and perhaps the greatest the world may have ever seen. The ultimate batsman of a lifetime.

Determination they say is the key to success, and this proved true in the case of Brian Lara. A man of humble background, Lara grew up in a youth culture polluted by drugs and crime and there was every possibility that he could have gone wrong if he lacked the determination to succeed. But the young man overcame various obstacles and landed his West Indies test cap. He then silenced the critics with an array of fabulous scores.

April 19th marked the day Lara stepped into the record books. The moment he flicked a short-pitched Chris Lewis delivery to the boundary, taking his personal score to 369, eclipsing fellow West Indian, Sir Garfield Sobers' world record of 365 not out, he became the most celebrated batsman in the world. He had bid for a place in the record books.

Lara's record-breaking spree did not stop just there. During his summer with English County Warwickshire, Lara set a few more world records. He scored a century on debut

and later century after century flowed from his bat. He stepped into the record books for the second time in less than two months with his epic knock of 501 not out against Durham.

What makes Brian Lara so special to his fans, is a mystery. Perhaps it is his charisma. The charismatic left-hander plays his shots with the power of a gorilla and with the grace and elegance that would do a ballerina proud. The balls tremble from the force of his hook shots, but hold out long enough for him to get his world records.

The admirable qualities in Lara are his determination, patience and his will to succeed. These qualities make him the unique cricketer he is. He is a practical man who has not let success go to his head. He believes that every innings, begins at zero and it is not every day that he will break world records. He aims to build his game and if he breaks a few records while doing so, it will only be an added bonus. He believes that one or two world records do not mean anything. He does not consider himself to be the great cricketer everyone considers him to be. He says that the keys to his success are his parents, who were very strict and made sure he "went straight." He recalls, that if were not for his parents, he may have followed the lead of some of his friends, who became involved with drug trafficking and may have wasted away his life. Such humility is rare in a man of his calibre.

The reason I admire Brian Lara so much, is because he overcame all odds to achieve the title of the "best batsman in the world." He overcame and environment polluted by drugs and worked hard to earn his test cap. No one realized his potential and he had to prove his talent with a few hard-earned scores. He gained fame almost overnight but dealt with it in a mature way and did not let it go into his head. He had the "best batsman in the world" billing to live up to. But despite such drawbacks, Brian Lara "The Lord of Cricket" succeeds and still continues to succeed.

Another Sir Donald Bradman, Sir Garfield Sobers or Vivian Richards, one of the best, if not the best batsman the world may have ever seen may be amongst us. Only time will tell.

## Aging with agility &amp; ambition

LONDON, Aug 3: Merlene Ottey, self-styled grandmother of the track, shows no sign of slowing 15 years after winning a 200 metres bronze in the Moscow Olympics, reports Reuter.

Although most of her opponents in this week's Gothenburg World Championships were children when the 35-year-old Jamaican was running in Moscow, Ottey remains the woman-to-beat.

"I am the grandmother of the track but they should watch out," she says. "They are still afraid of me and can't wait for me to retire."

Although sprinters, both male and female, are prolonging their careers well into their 30s thanks to better diets, better equipment and training, and the lure of substantial pay days, Ottey is a phenomenon.

She was ranked in the world's top 10 sprinters every season between 1980 and 1993 and went unbeaten in 88 races from May 1989 to March 1991. So far this year she is the current world leader over the 100 and second over the 200.

Two years ago, at the World Championships in Stuttgart, she won the first major outdoor gold medal of her career in the 200 metres after losing out on the 100 gold by just 0.01 of a second to American Gail Devers.

Before that she had won four Olympic and five World bronze medals and a 1983 World silver.

Her first international honour came in 1979 when she won what would prove to be the first of many bronzes, on the 100 at the Pan American Games.

In all that time, one special prize has eluded her, and that is an Olympic gold. She may well retain her World 200 crown in Gothenburg and even win the 100, but an Olympic title is the one ambition she would love to fulfill before retiring.

"When I won the Olympic bronze in 1980, it did nothing for me," she says. "And bronze medals in the 100 and 200 in Los Angeles didn't do anything for me either. In fact my sponsor dropped me afterwards."