

Sport

Highs & lows of the Caribbeans



UNDATED (Internet report): The 5-0 series defeat in South Africa completes a cycle in West Indian cricket stretching back over a generation.

Caribbean cricket was at a low point in the early 70s but West Indies became the game's dominant force as a succession of top class batsmen and pace bowlers rolled off the production line.

The flow of talent continued with the arrival of Trinidad's Brian Lara, who set Test and first-class world batting records in the space of a few months.

But the lure of other sports affected playing resources and his accession to the captaincy came at a time when fortunes had turned on the field.

South Africa's clean sweep means Lara faces perhaps his toughest challenge of guiding West Indies cricket back to the top.

Both India and Australia won series in the Caribbean, and even England achieved a draw in the early 70s.

The year 1975, however, saw the inaugural Cricket World Cup and the West Indies proved that they could adapt their game to the constraints of one-day cricket. Skipper Clive Lloyd thrashed 102 runs off the Australian attack in the final at Lord's to see his side home by 17 runs.

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Much of the 1980s was a period of Calypso Cricket as stars such as Richards, Greenidge and Desmond Haynes with the bat, and Garner, Malcolm Marshall and Holding with the ball, strode triumphantly across the Test stage.

One of the few blemishes on their record came in 1983, when they surprisingly lost their hold on the World Cup to India.

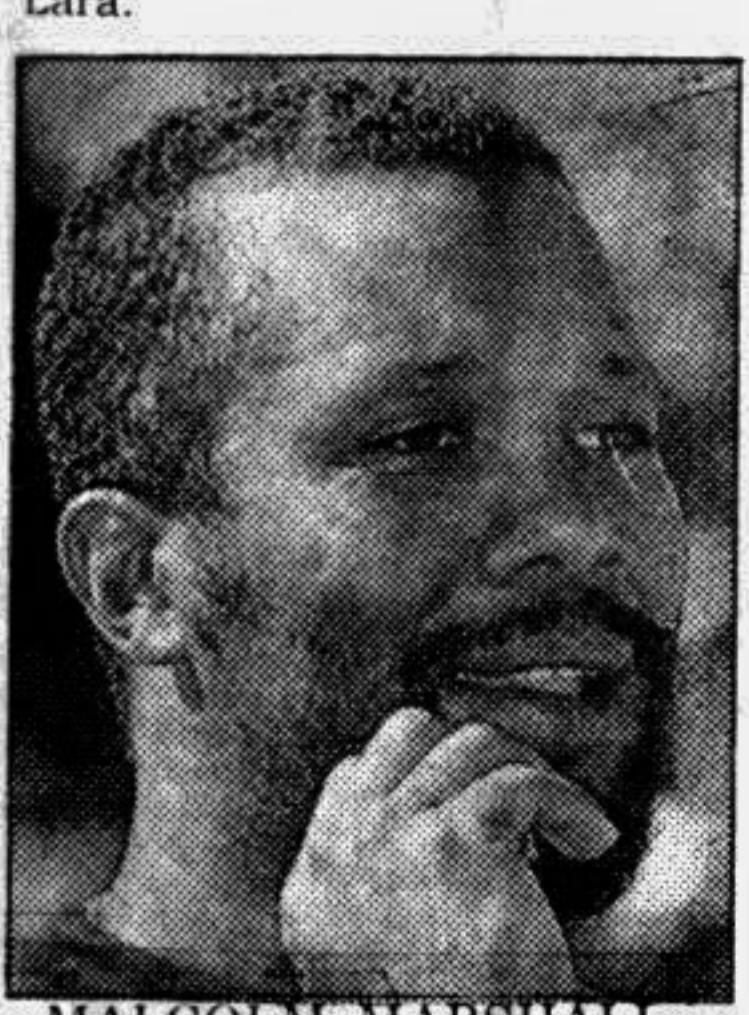
The following year, however, things were back to normal as the West Indian tourists crushed England 5-0. This clean

sweep - swiftly dubbed a "blackwash" by fans and the media - was the first England had suffered since 1920-21.

It was not to a unique fate for England, however, as their visit to the Caribbean in 1986 ended with exactly the same 5-0 scoreline.

By those standards, the West Indies slipped a little two years later when they allowed England to escape with a single draw in a 4-0 series win!

The early 1990s seemed set fair for the West Indies, especially with the emergence of Lara.



MALCOLM MARSHALL

His glory year was 1994, when he beat Sir Gary Sobers' Test record by scoring 375 against England.

He followed that up with a first class record of 501 for his English county, Warwickshire, against Durham that summer.

The downturn in West Indian fortunes, however, began just the following year when the Australians visited the Caribbean and came away with a 2-1 victory, crowned with a crushing innings win in the final Test in Jamaica.

The Waugh brothers hammed the once-feared home pace attack all round the Sabina Park ground and Lara,

once seemingly capable of winning matches on his own, had suffered since 1920-21.

Worse was to follow in the 1996 World Cup. Racked by internal dissension and criticised for lack of effort, the low point was a humiliating 73-run defeat at the hands of the part-timers from Kenya.

In their six-team group, the West Indies finished last of the four qualifiers, ahead only of Kenya and Zimbabwe.

They eventually regrouped and reached the semi-finals, but the aura of invincibility

"We failed to bowl Pakistan out twice while they dismissed us each time we went down there. They completely outplayed us."

In 1998 the Windies bounced back to claim a 3-1 series victory over a visiting England side. But with England batting badly some commentators found it rather a hollow victory.

The whitewash against South Africa is perhaps the lowest point that West Indian cricket has ever had to face.

The tour was almost a non-starter as the players encamped themselves in a London hotel in

Kenya and Zimbabwe.

A solution was found at the last minute but they were comprehensively outplayed in every game.

The West Indies have only two months to prepare for the arrival of Australia for a Test series.

As England found out to their cost the Aussies will take no prisoners and a much better performance is needed to avoid another humiliating defeat.

Findings a new pair of opening batsmen and pace bowlers to support the ageing Walsh and Curtly Ambrose are the top priority for the West Indies selectors.

"We lacked consistency. We didn't bat properly. The Pakistan batsmen showed more application than ours," he said.

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