

# Of a mortal immortal

## Cricket

BY QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

And so it ends.

Fitting, though, that perhaps the greatest and most glorious of all cricketers careers will bid its final hurrah at the scene of its greatest achievement.

But then again, perfect timing is just what you would expect from Brian Charles Lara.

When the West Indies captain comes out to bat for one last time against England in the final match of the Super Eight phase of the World Cup tonight, the packed turnstiles will hope for a display of genius reminiscent of the poetic 153 not out that he eked out against Australia at the same Bridgetown, Barbados ground some eight years ago.

Widely and justifiably regarded as the greatest chasing innings Test cricket has known, Lara's hundred and fifty against all odds draws whispers of approval from even his most scathing detractors. As Wisden later put it, 'he had guided his team to victory as though leading the infirm through the maze.'

Which was exactly what he is capable of.

As far as cricket is concerned, for wholesome mastery there is Sachin Tendulkar, for wizardry there is Shane Warne, for technical virtuosity there is Rahul Dravid, to bat for your life there is Jacques Kallis.

So where does Brian Lara fit in all this? What the Trinidadian does is epitomise all of the above characteristics and more. He lifts the soul, brings light and song and to a further extent bliss and glory into the game.

His parting words sum that up to the dot. "I just want to be remembered as someone who came out there and tried to entertain," said Lara. "You have to remember that people pay to come through the turnstiles and watch you. It's important if they say that they have enjoyed watching Brian Lara play."

And entertained he has. From his divine 277 in Sydney to his world-record breaking 375 in Antigua, his three consecutive centuries under exceptional circumstances at home against Australia in 1999, his mastery over Puttiah Muralidaran in the slow pitches of Sri Lanka and the reclamation of his world record with a 400 against England in Antigua, Lara has reigned us to no ends.

Over a career spanning some 17 years, Lara has had many taxing relationships -- with the WICB, with the media, the selectors and even the players. He has walked out, impressed, flustered and tested the most immaculate of relationships.

However, one bond that remained unshakable was the one that Lara forged with his spellbound audience. You fell for him once and God help you -- you were hooked for life.

Lara's story is amongst the most

exotic in world cricket. Born into the small village of Santa Cruz his infant steps towards world domination were forged in the backyard of his house he shared with his parents and ten other siblings.

Within four years of his debut in 1990, Lara was the darling of the cricket world with the records for highest individual Test and first-class scores snugly fit in his back pocket.

Lara was a young man at the peak of his powers, a hero to many with a world already conquered.

But as Irish-American novelist Francis Scott Fitzgerald once said, 'show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy.'

Lara's tragedy was yet to begin. For while his batting at that time was impeccable, his ability to deal with superstardom was fatally flawed.

Lara's fall for grace was spectacular.

His rise to the zenith of the cricketing world and the adulation of the public is well-documented, almost as well as his fall from that elevated pedestal. If he owned the world in 1994 he scraped the bottom of the barrel in the four years following that.

And when in 1996 he was branded mentally fragile and put off as a destructive influence many critics wrote him off as a flawed genius, without county or country.

But it is his ability to rebound, the ability to shine in the face of adversity and in the most trying of circum-

stances that sets Lara apart as a great. Its not about how many times you fall down, its about how many times you can pick yourself out -- Lara has proved that acronym to the book.

He has failed almost as often as he has succeeded, frustrating us to no ends but he has almost always come roaring back.

And the people who wrote Lara off all overlooked one thing. Fellows with the ability to score 501, 400 or 375 in an innings do not have an ordinary mind. Above anything else there is a desire and power of concentration beyond the reach of most. It was this above all that helped Lara pull through his slump in mind-boggling fashion.

So it was that in his second coming, that began with that unforgettable knock alongside the likes of Curtly Ambrose and Courtney Walsh in the dust bowl of Bridgetown, that Lara showed himself as what he really was -- a mere mortal like the rest of us but a cricketer immortal. It is easy to sum Lara up in statistics and it is a trap many will fall into. There is no fault in it. After all there has never been any other player in cricket who has scored not just hundreds and double hundreds, but triple tons, quadruple tons and even spanked half a thousand for good measure. Add to that being the quickest man to

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## FACTFILE

AFP, Bridgetown

Brian Lara factfile after the West Indies captain confirmed his international retirement on Thursday:

**Full name:** Brian Charles Lara  
**Born:** May 2, 1969, Cantaro, Santa Cruz, Trinidad

**Age:** 37  
**Major teams:** West Indies, ICC World XI, Northern Transvaal, Trinidad Tobago, Warwickshire

**Batting style:** Left-hand bat  
**TEST MATCH CAREER** (debut v Pakistan, Lahore, Dec 6-11, 1990)

**Matches:** 131  
**Innings:** 232  
**Not outs:** 6  
**Runs:** 11,953  
**Highest score:** 400 not out  
**Average:** 52.88  
**100s:** 34  
**50s:** 48  
**Fours:** 1559  
**Sixes:** 88  
**Catches:** 164

**ONE-DAY CAREER** (debut v Pakistan, Karachi, Nov 9, 1990)  
**Matches:** 298  
**Innings:** 288  
**Not out:** 32  
**Runs:** 10,387  
**Highest score:** 169  
**Average:** 40.57  
**100s:** 19  
**50s:** 63  
**Fours:** 1,032  
**Sixes:** 133  
**Catches:** 120

## Cricket

AFP, Bridgetown

Former greats on Friday paid glowing tributes to retiring batting genius Brian Lara, saying he leaves behind a great legacy.

But the praise was tinged with regret over his failures as captain of a declining team.

The record-setting left-hander announced he would retire from international cricket after his team's last World Cup match against England here on Saturday, bringing to an end a 17-year stay on the frontline which has had its fair share of ups and downs.

"I am bidding farewell to international cricket," said Lara on Thursday, ending speculation he was about to be replaced as captain for next month's tour of England, a trip for which he may not have even been selected as a player.

Former bowling great Wes Hall was surprised over Lara's sudden decision despite the 37-year-old having already announced he would retire from one-day cricket after the World Cup but would continue to play Tests.

"I am lost for words, it's unex-

pected," said Hall.

"He was a great servant to West Indies cricket. His legacy is fantastic, a great batsman, 400 in a Test, 501 in first-class cricket, I mean it's a big legacy," added Hall, also an ex-president of the West Indies Cricket Board.

Trinidadian Lara holds the world records for Test and first class scores.

He smashed an unbeaten 400 against England in the Antigua Test in 2004 and an unbeaten 501 for Warwickshire against Durham in the English county championship in 1994.

He is the highest scorer in Tests with 11,953 runs in 131 matches with 34 centuries and the fifth-highest in one-dayers with 10,387 in 298 games.

Hall's new-ball partner Charlie Griffith agreed Lara was a genius.

"He leaves behind a strong legacy and a lot of players will have to work really hard to fill his shoes," said Griffith.

Ramnaresh Sarwan, tipped to take over as new West Indies captain, praised Lara's mental strength.

"Lara is a very strong man. He has come under a lot of scrutiny but his mental strength stands out," said Sarwan, who has been Lara's

deputy since 2003.

But despite acclaiming his stature, some of his most vociferous critics accused Lara of prolonging his career.

"Lara stayed on for longer than he should have, and now it's time to thank him and look forward," said former fast bowler Michael Holding. "He had a great career, but of course, a lot of times his captaincy was questioned."

Holding's teammate Joel Garner agreed Lara's leadership left a lot to be desired.

Lara's only meaningful piece of silverware as national skipper came with the 2004 ICC Champions Trophy.

"It is his decision (to retire) and I can't say it's wrong. A captain can only be judged by his success record and that's not good in his case. Now we have to take drastic steps to carry West Indies cricket forward," said Garner.

Former opener and a teammate of Lara, Philo Wallace said Lara's retirement was a great loss.

"It is a big loss to world cricket and one that will be hard to overcome," said Wallace.



BRIAN LARA

## Akram to train Pak pacers

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan bowling legend and former captain Wasim Akram is to help train fast bowlers for the national team, the Pakistan Cricket Board said Friday.

Wasim, Pakistan's leading wicket-taker who retired in 2003, will supervise a special two-week camp in the eastern city of Lahore from mid-May, board spokesman Ahsan Malik told AFP.

Wasim's decision comes after new Pakistan captain Shoaib Malik said he wanted to emulate him and it will boost Pakistan's efforts to recover after their dismal World Cup.

PCB chairman Nasim Ashraf contacted Wasim in Singapore where he is currently working with sports channel ESPN as a commentator, Ahsan Malik said.

"The chairman contacted Wasim today and invited him over to help Pakistan cricket and we are very happy that he has volunteered to help," he said.

"Wasim has offered all-out support to the Pakistan team to

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## Moore to replace Fletcher

### Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

England have named Peter Moores as the permanent successor to departing head coach Duncan Fletcher.

Moore, currently the National Cricket Academy director, will start on 1 May.

The appointment comes less than a day after Fletcher decided to step down after eight years in the role following England's exit from the World Cup.

"Peter has been identified for some time as a leading candidate as a future England head coach," said ECB chief executive David Collier. The 44-year-old coached Sussex to their first County Championship title in 2003 and took charge of the National Academy in 2005.

He has coached England A and worked with most of the current England team but has neither played nor managed a team at the highest level.

It was thought his main rivals for

the job were Sri Lanka's Tom Moody, Bangladesh's Dav Whatmore and New Zealand's John Bracewell -- who all have experience at the top level.

But Moores said: "It is an honour



PETER MOORES

to have been appointed as head coach and to succeed Duncan, who has been an outstanding coach of the England team.

"The challenge of this new role excites me and I look forward to meeting up with the players on their

## PCB clears team of match-fixing

AFP, Islamabad

An inquiry into Pakistan's shock exit from the cricket World Cup has found no evidence that any players were involved in match-fixing, the head of the probe said Friday.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) ordered the inquiry after the 1992 champions were dumped out of the competition, losing to minnows Ireland in the first round, sparking allegations that games could have been thrown.

"The inquiry has been completed and there is no evidence of match-fixing against any player," inquiry committee chief Ijaz Butt told AFP.

He said details of the committee's report would be submitted to PCB chief Nasim Ashraf next week.

The committee interviewed nearly 40 players, officials and retired PCB functionaries during its two-week hearing.

Butt also rejected a claim by former PCB chairman Shaharyar Khan, who said in March that parts of international cricket matches are fixed and the practice known as "spot-fixing" happens on a regular basis.

"There is no evidence of any targeted match-fixing and Shaharyar's statement was found to be incorrect," Butt said.

The fixing allegations intensified in the wake of the murder of Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer hours after the defeat to Ireland.

Pakistan lost their opening match to the West Indies by 54 runs before a humiliating three-wicket defeat at the hands of debutants Ireland sent them crashing out of the World Cup on March 17.

Butt also criticised Pakistan media manager Perviz Mir for accusing the team of focusing on their devotion to Islam, instead of concentrating on the game.

"It was a stupid statement from P.J. Mir," Butt told reporters after the hearing in Islamabad.



PHOTO: STAR

Mohammedan's Nigerian midfielder Divine (No. 21) fights for ball with Chittagong Abahani booters during their B. League match at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

## Mohammedan tame Ctg Abahani



SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan's second trip to Chittagong was fruitful when the Dhaka giants recorded a 3-1 victory against local Abahani in yesterday's B. League clash at the MA Aziz Stadium.

Nigerians Peter Odafe and Mwach Ukwu Paul and Rezaul Karim Biplab struck one goal apiece in the black and whites' second consecutive win and overall third that pushed them to fourth place with 11 points from seven games.

Liberian recruit Abraham reduced the arrears for the home side, who stuck to second from bottom with three points after seven defeats in eight rounds.

Mohammedan, who shared a goalless draw with their Chittagong namesake in their first visit to the port city, went ahead after 26 minutes through a controversial goal.

Centre-back Odafe fired the ball from a goalmouth melee after a corner and the ball apparently crossed the line after hitting the crossbar. The referee did not notice

it as the game continued but the official awarded a goal after his assistant's signal drew his attention about half a minute later.

With the local boys protesting the decision, the match was stopped for about three minutes.

Another corner put the visitors 2-0 ahead in the 64th minute when central defender Rezaul slotted the ball inside from the box.

Chittagong Abahani showed some resistance and briefly came back in the game ten minutes later when Abraham took a pass from Towhid to reduce the arrears with a powerful volley.

Skipper Paul, fresh from a record breaking double hat-trick against Rahmatganj in the previous round at home, relieve his teammates nine minutes from time with a dazzling solo. The robust Nigerian striker, current top scorer, ran through the rival defence and finished the move inside from the box for his seventh league goal.

Both teams play their next round matches in the capital with Mohammedan hosting city rivals Farashganj while Chittagong Abahani will be pitted against bottom-table Rahmatganj, who have a rest in the ongoing eight round fixtures.

## Sarwan proves a point

AFP, Bridgetown



Ramnaresh Sarwan made the perfect case to be the next West Indies captain on Thursday when he smashed a

majestic 91 to lead his team to a convincing World Cup win over Bangladesh.

Sarwan, widely-tipped to become Brian Lara's successor, was named man of the match for his innings which came when his side were struggling at 55-3 in the Super Eights match at the Kensington Oval.

His unbeaten knock, which featured six fours and two sixes, helped West Indies make 230-5 before Bangladesh were bowled out for 131 to give the hosts their first victory in the second round stage.

"It was a difficult pitch to bat on at first but it got more comfortable. The main thing was to play well for my team and the most important thing was to win the match," said vice-captain Sarwan who knows that a good run of form will help his leadership bid.

"I just want to continue to keep playing the way I have been playing."

Lara, who will retire from one-day internationals after Saturday's final Super Eights match against

England here, wants to win that game to boost his side's chances of finishing fifth in the table.

A win will also give the West Indies an important psychological boost ahead of their tour to England which gets underway in May.

"With that tour coming up, a win would give us a huge advantage," said Lara who was also fulsome in his praise of Sarwan.

"His innings was magnificent and he was very positive. We have a lot of pride to play for. The guys showed a lot of character and they dug in to get us a good total."

"It's also good to see the crowds coming out to support us."

## PCB denies Jamaica call

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan Cricket Board officials have denied getting any request from investigating authorities in Jamaica to send any Pakistani player there in connection with investigations into the death of coach Bob Woolmer.

Indian television channels reported on Thursday that former captain, Inzamamul Haq, assistant coach, Mushtaq Ahmed and some other players had been summoned

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