



LASTING SMILE: West Indies captain Brian Lara is greeted by supporters while he does a lap of the stadium following the game against England in the World Cup Super Eights at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Lara goes unsatisfied

AFP, Bridgetown



West Indies batting genius Brian Lara may have smashed records but his dream remains unfulfilled.

The stylish left-hander always wanted to make the West Indies a dominant force in international cricket, but was disappointed with the team's performances in the past decade.

"The last 10-12 years I spent as a player have been very tough. It was a tough ride, a tough career," said Lara, who quit international cricket after his team's World Cup Super Eights one-wicket defeat to England.

"The West Indies people need a strong team and we have not been able to produce that for a long time. The West Indies were dominant in cricket when I was growing up."

Lara made his international debut in 1990, and went on to score 11,953 runs in 131 Tests with 34 centuries and 10,405 runs in 299 one-day internationals with 19 hundreds.

"My dream over the past 17 years was keeping the West Indies on top. When I arrived, we were on top of world cricket," said Lara, who was accompanied by his daughter Sydney, named in honour of the venue where he hit his first Test century, at a crowded press conference here.

"There was a decline and unfortunately we haven't been able to

stop that. That has been the most disappointing (thing). If there's one thing that I have great hope for it is to see this West Indies team get back to the top.

"There are many things I am sorry for. You try your best, but sometimes your best is not enough."

The 37-year-old Lara felt changes were necessary to make West Indies cricket stronger, saying it was the right time for him to bow out.

"Results were not up to expectations and change was necessary. I saw no reason for me to carry on at this point of time. It was the right time to call it a day and I think I made a right decision," said Lara.

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FACTFILE

AFP, Bridgetown

Brian Lara factfile after the West Indies captain played his last match here on Saturday:

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 and Tobago, Warwickshire

Batting style: Left-hand bat
ONE-DAY CAREER (debut v Pakistan, Karachi, Nov 9, 1990)

Matches: 299

Innings: 289

Not out: 32

Runs: 10,405

Highest score: 169

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Ricky Ponting

(Australia cricket captain)
"I've always thought he and Sachin (Tendulkar) have been the two greatest batsmen I've ever played against, probably for different reasons."

On Brian Lara.



B.League
Farashganj v Ctg Mohammedi (4:00 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Beauty, Shamsuddin win against odds

Athletics

SPORTS REPORTER

Clattering woods, bare feet, under performance and hand timing dominated the Bangabandhu National Stadium's first athletics competition in 24 years as the 32nd National Athletics Championships ended yesterday in sheer negligence.

The Bangladesh Amateur Athletics Federation, which hastily organised the meet at the newly laid tracks, could not even use their starting gun, which was out of order due to lack of use for long. Instead, the runners had to respond to the sound of two pieces of woods hitting each other.

There was, as usual, no electronic timing as manual time keeping gave false security to the athletes, who will be competing for regional glory a year later when the SA Games comes to the country, not knowing where they really stand.

Moreover, the athletes mostly from the districts outside Dhaka, ran without shoes to risk injuries.

Last but not the least, just one new national record was set in the three-day meet -- on the final day -- to speak of the overall standard of

the game.

It was BKSP's Sajib Hossain who bettered the old high-jump national record of 1.97m with a leap of 1.98m.

Courage and spirit also helped the athletes fight against all odds as Shamsuddin regained the fastest man title after four years while Nazmunnahar Beauty remained the fastest woman of the country.

The Noakhali pair won the 100m sprint gold medals on the concluding day having prepared in contrasting styles.

Bangladesh Air Force sprinter Shamsuddin, who won his first 100m title in 2003, took 10.70s to dethrone Masudul Karim, the veteran Bangladesh Army sprinter who settled for silver in 10.80s. Hafizur Rahman of BAF took bronze.

"I was confused before the race because I started preparing just two days ago," informed Shamsuddin, who had a 14-day lay-off due to an injury on the back of his left knee.

"My physio told me to get started and I began training on Friday. I ran the 200m only to set my rhythm," said the 22-year-old, who won three gold medals (men's 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay) in the recently concluded Indo-Bangla Games in Kolkata.

Shamsuddin, who was inspired by former Bangladesh champion and SAF Games gold medalist Mahbub Alam to become a short-distance runner, said his dream is to be the top sprinter in the region.

"If I get proper training, I am confident of winning the next SA Games gold in 100m. But lack of facilities is one of the main barriers. Also, there is no future for athletes in Bangladesh," he repented.

Shamsuddin's mentor Rafiqul Islam Milon, who is famous for grooming talents in hometown Noakhali, said that he took the sprinter under his wings in 1998 and he became national junior champion in the next year.

"His muscle used to get stiff. They need to be flexible. To get rid of this problem, Shamsuddin needs specialist guidance and facilities," said the local coach adding that facilities in Noakhali are good but not adequate for higher level.

While Shamsuddin ran to glory without proper preparation, Milon's other student, BJMC sprinter Beauty, trained on her own for a month despite getting no salary from her employers for five months.

Beauty, who works for Hafiz Jute Mills in Chittagong, finished in

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Rokibul fashions Academy win

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Academy strongly bounced back in the tri-nation tournament with a five-wicket victory over Sri Lanka Academy at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Number four batsman Rokibul Hasan scored an unbeaten 69 off 73 balls with the help of four boundaries and two sixes as the home side, who lost their first game against Pakistan Academy by six wickets, overhauled a revised target in 42.5 overs in reply to the visitors' 218-8.

The local side, who reached 202-5, were set a 201-run target in 44 overs after rain stopped the match during the second innings.

With the scoreboard reading 78-3, captain Mehrab Hossain joined Rokibul to share 98 runs for the fourth wicket. The left-hander hit a 59-ball 47 that contained three fours and a six while one down Nazimuddin added 33.

Mehrab also shone with his left-arm spin as he took two wickets for 46 runs including the scalp of opener Ian Daniel, who top-scored with 64 off 73 deliveries with ten hits to the fence.

It was however number seven batsman A Mathew who enabled his side to cross the two-hundred mark by hitting an unbeaten 42

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A rare genius: Vaughan

AFP, Bridgetown



Michael Vaughan paid tribute to Brian Lara after the West Indies batting legend bowled out of cricket, describing the man who regularly tormented England with his record-breaking exploits as a "genius".

"In some ways, it's great to see the back of him because he's scored a lot of runs against us and it will be nice to play against the West Indies without him because we'll probably get them out for a few runs less," smiled the England skipper after his team's one-wicket World Cup win over the hosts on Saturday.

Lara, who scored a world record of 375 and then bettered it to 400 not out -- both against England -- retired from international cricket on Saturday after a glittering 17-year career.

The 37-year-old master batsman couldn't deliver a final, commanding performance as he fell, run out for just 18 before his team lost their last Super Eights match to finish sixth in the World Cup. England finished fifth.

"Lara is a genius. There are not many geniuses in the game and we

are losing one today (Saturday) (Saturday). The England team and all our supporters wish him well in retirement. He has had a great career," said Vaughan whose side chased down a victory target of 301 at the Kensington Oval.

"He's done wonders for the game of cricket worldwide, not only in the Caribbean. In the circumstances, if he had got going today (Saturday) we could have been chasing 350."

The match also marked the end of Duncan Fletcher's reign as England coach. Fletcher stepped down from his post to make way for Peter Moores.

"We wanted to perform well today (Saturday) because a couple of our staff were leaving -- Fletcher and physio Dean Conway -- they were part of our set-up for a number of years so we wanted to win for them."

Vaughan said England's failing to qualify for the World Cup semifinals was a huge disappointment.

"We won the last game but we

haven't done what we thought we should have done in this World Cup. We have to be realistic and say we didn't do what we came here to do," said Vaughan.

Defending champions Australia, Sri Lanka, New Zealand and South Africa qualified for the semifinals.

"We didn't play to our potential. It's disappointing that we didn't go through to the semifinals but I guess that this was the best game in the tournament," added Vaughan.

"There was a big crowd and a great atmosphere, we were proud to be involved in it."

Vaughan believes England can start afresh with a new coach.

"Now Peter comes in and I am sure he has his own ideas, and that will be a fresh start. What is important is that we are to play the West Indies in a few weeks' time. We are going to be a very similar side, and we wanted to get one up on them going into the Test series."

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PHOTOS: STAR

A combination of photos shows (left) Shamsuddin of Bangladesh Air Force sprints ahead of the pack on way to clinching gold in the men's 100m and (right) BJMC's Nazmunnahar Beauty gives the final thrust to win the women's 100m on the concluding day of the three-day 32nd National Athletics Championships at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.