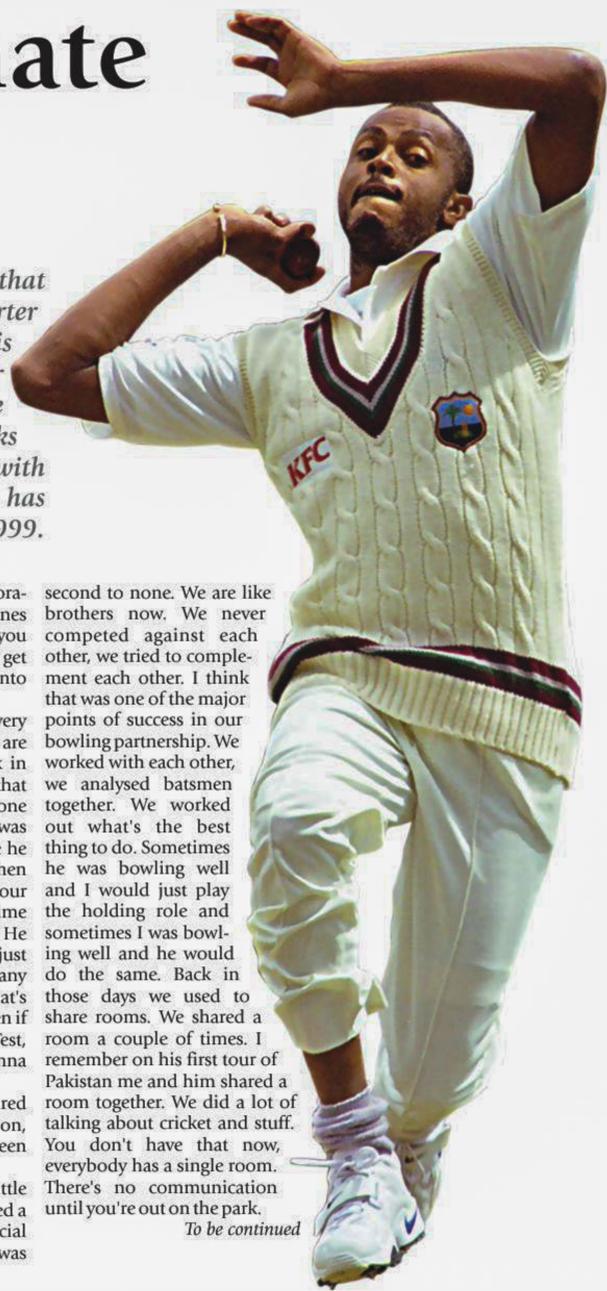


SPORT

'We thought we could dominate any batsman in those days'

'Follow me,' Courtney Walsh said in a voice as smooth as his bowling action when it was pointed out to him that the lobby of the Taj Samudra Hotel in Colombo was too noisy for an interview. He led this fortunate reporter through a restaurant and out by the pool and settled down into his seat. Being Bangladesh's fast bowling coach is not his main identity. To any cricket fan he is Walsh, the man who retired as Test cricket's highest wicket-taker and formed one of the fiercest fast bowling duos of all time with Curtly Ambrose. Before that, he was also in the West Indies side of the 1980s, possibly the greatest team of all time. Walsh looks back upon his career and talks about the art of fast bowling in the first part of this two-part interview with *The Daily Star's* Sakeb Subhan, with tomorrow's second instalment containing his thoughts on Bangladesh cricket, West Indies cricket, how the game has changed and a conversation he had with Brian Lara during the latter's epic 153 in Barbados in 1999.



The Daily Star (TDS): How did you start playing cricket?
Courtney Walsh (CW): I had a special love for the game. All my cricket as a youngster was played at Melbourne Cricket Club in Jamaica, which around that time was the same club for Michael Holding. I used to go and watch Mikey play at first when I was a kid, I was still in school. And then I played Devlin Cup, minor club and junior club. Then I played Senior Club, so it was easy for me in the sense that I was walking distance from the club. I could just walk over. On a Saturday or a Sunday I could just walk over and there was cricket and football just being played. So it was easy for me, the cricketers were always there and I had easy access, just go over and practise with the big guys.
TDS: When you were coming up in the 70s, how hard did you think it was going to be to break into that legendary quartet?
CW: I just honestly didn't think of it at the time, because I just saw myself playing club cricket and for school, I was in Excelsior. It was for fun. It was only when I

was selected to play for Jamaica Youths, I thought well, maybe something might happen. Even at that young age I wasn't thinking of playing for West Indies. I was thinking of playing for Jamaica. I was playing for the Youths, I should be able to play for the senior team. Then I got selected to play for the West Indies youth team in 1982. I think that's when my sights and my ambitions got bigger. I thought that it would be good to represent the West Indies at the senior level, seeing as I had done it at the junior level.
TDS: You came into the Test side, one of the best sides of all time, in 1984. How was the dressing room full of legends?
CW: It was a tremendous experience playing with the likes of Clive Lloyd, Sir Viv Richards, Michael Holding, Malcolm Marshall, Joel Garner, Larry Gomes, Gordon Greenidge, Desmond Haynes, Richie Richardson, Jeffrey Dujon. To be a part of that team, to be selected in the makeup of that team for me was a tremendous experience. As a youngster I was overwhelmed.

TDS: Who was the big guy in the fast bowling stable when you came in?
CW: Those days there were three big guys as far as I was concerned. Joel Garner, big in size and stature and a tremendous bowler; Michael Holding, one of the best run-ups you could think of in international cricket, very, very fast; and Malcolm Marshall who to me was a complete fast bowler. I think he had everything as a fast bowler. He was the complete package. I learnt a lot from him and he was one of the best fast bowlers of all time.
TDS: How fast were you back then? How would you compare yourself to the guys in the team?
CW: I was never one who just relied on raw pace. Jeffrey Dujon said I was just as quick as the others when I wanted to be. I never sort of wanted to bowl flat out fast all the time. I was more accustomed to bowling longer spells. There were a couple of Test matches where I sort of let myself go. Antigua against England, Sabina Park against England as well, the last Test in India, in New

Zealand when I was captain. Those were probably four of the Test matches where I really tried to bowl as quick as I could, with a bit of movement.
TDS: You had a pretty easy and smooth bowling action. Did you always have that or did you develop it?
CW: No, it was something that I always had. I tried to get it a little bit better; as I played I tried to improve on it. It was something that I think, when I was a kid, it was reasonably okay, but I worked on getting it a lot better as time progressed, you know, as smooth as I could get it. Minimal effort and I tried to get the best balance I could at the point of delivery, to maximise power, control and everything.
TDS: There is a lot of emphasis these days on reverse swing, but you didn't reverse swing it that much, did you?
CW: All of us can reverse swing the ball. It's not as hard as people make it out to be. It's just having the control. If you have good control you can reverse swing any time.

TDS: You've had some memorable battles, some one-sided ones with Michael Atherton. Did you really think that you could get him out every time you ran into bowl?
CW: You think you can get every batsman out sometime. Some are more unlucky or lucky. Back in those days the mindset was that we believed we could get anyone out on any type of surface. It was unfortunate for Mike because he played against us probably when we were at the best part of our careers, more or less in our prime so it was difficult for him. He scored runs against us, but we just felt that we could dominate any batsman in those days. That's how confident we were. So even if he got runs against us in this Test, we still believed that he's gonna get it in the next Test.
TDS: After the four quicks retired and Curtly Ambrose came on, how was the equation between the two of you?
CW: When he started I was a little bit ahead of him. We developed a bowling relationship, a special friendship and a bond that was

second to none. We are like brothers now. We never competed against each other, we tried to complement each other. I think that was one of the major points of success in our bowling partnership. We worked with each other, we analysed batsmen together. We worked out what's the best thing to do. Sometimes he was bowling well and I would just play the holding role and sometimes I was bowling well and he would do the same. Back in those days we used to share rooms. We shared a room a couple of times. I remember on his first tour of Pakistan me and him shared a room together. We did a lot of talking about cricket and stuff. You don't have that now, everybody has a single room. There's no communication until you're out on the park.
To be continued

Tigers reach Dambulla

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

From the sea shores of Colombo, where they completed the Test series with a four-wicket win in their 100th Test, the Bangladesh cricket team travelled to the mountainous interior of Sri Lanka to the town of Dambulla yesterday to gear up for the ODI leg of the tour which starts at the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium with the first game of the three-match series against Sri Lanka tomorrow. The 16-man squad started off from Colombo at around nine in the morning yesterday and reached the Aliya Resort and Spa, the team hotel, in Dambulla at around 1:30pm. It was a rest day for the team and they spent the rest of the day in the hotel. The team will start training today at the match venue from 5:30pm to get used to the floodlights as the two ODIs in Dambulla -- the second one will take place on March 28 -- will be day-night affairs, before the teams return to Colombo to play the final match on April 1.

THAKURGAON CRICKET Shammo Krira beat Star Club

QAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Shammo Krira O Shangkritik Goshthi defeated Star Club by 261 runs in the opening match of the Thakurgaon Cricket League at the Shaheed Mohammad Ali Stadium on Thursday. After winning the toss, Shammo elected to bat first and piled on a massive 320 runs before being bundled out in 48.4 overs. In reply, Star Club hobbled to 59 all out in 30 overs. Earlier, DC of Thakurgaon Abdul Awal inaugurated the event as chief guest.



Mehedi Hasan Miraz is primed to make his ODI debut against Sri Lanka in the upcoming three-match series.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Mehedi recalled as a 'genuine off-spinner'

SPORTS REPORTER



Mehedi Hasan Miraz returned home from Sri Lanka immediately after Bangladesh's historic four-wicket win in the second and final Test against Sri Lanka on March 19. However, the young off-spinner took a flight to Colombo yesterday and will join the team in Dambulla after the team management suddenly felt the need for another off-spinner considering that Sri Lanka have a number of left-handed batsmen in their ODI squad. Interestingly, Sri Lanka Cricket had announced their 15-member ODI squad on March 17, while the second Test was ongoing, so Bangladesh's team management had enough time to look into the home side. Apparently the selectors accommodated off-spinning all-rounder Shuvagata Hom in the initially declared 16-member ODI team ahead of Mehedi, who found a place in the Emerging Teams Asia Cup. There is nothing wrong with adding more players to the team at the last moment, but the question is that since Hom is still with the team, why did the team management suddenly call Mehedi back and why were they so late to realise that Sri Lanka have many left-handers in their squad? "The team management felt that it would be good to include another off-spinner in the squad considering the fact that there are a number of left-handers in the opponent's team. There is nothing wrong if management has any additional requirements. Yes Shuvagata is there, but what's wrong if the

team fields two off-spinners in a match? On the other hand, we have the ICC Champions Trophy, so we would need a genuine off-spinner," explained chief selector Minhajul Abedin yesterday. "The initial plan was that Miraz would play only Test cricket at this moment, but the team management now has changed their mind and that's why he was called back," said selector Habibul Bashar. When asked, team manager Khaled Mahmud, who is also a selector, said: "When the squad was given we had already decided to send Miraz back. Then we thought that we needed a back-up since there are so many left-handed batsmen in their side. We took the decision later, with the coach and the team management." He also said that the decision was made after the practice match. "Yes, after seeing the practice match we thought that we needed another off-spinner." Though Shuvagata has long been considered a genuine off-spinner, Mahmud said that they recalled Mehedi as they needed a genuine off-spinner. "Yes [Shuvagata is there], but we need a backup since we don't have many genuine off-spinners. We have two left-arm spinners in Shakib [Al-Hasan] and Sanjamul [Haque]. You can say that the decision was influenced by the practice match," defended Mahmud. Meanwhile, off-break bowler Naem Hasan has replaced Mehedi in the Bangladesh squad for the Emerging Teams Asia Cup.

Perera out of first two ODIs

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka's wicketkeeper-batsman Kusal Perera has been ruled out of the first two ODIs against Bangladesh after suffering a hamstring strain while representing the Sri Lanka Board President's XI during Wednesday's practice match against Bangladesh, Sri Lanka cricket manager Asanka Gurusinha confirmed to CricInfo yesterday. Gurusinha added that the strain was 'very minor' and although there was a chance for Perera to play in the second ODI in Dambulla on March 28, the selectors chose to keep Perera in Colombo. A replacement is expected to be named on Thursday or Friday, but Kusal will rejoin the squad ahead of the third ODI if he recovers as expected. The three-match ODI series between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh starts on Saturday. YOUNG TIGERS CRICKET Barisal out for 259 MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Kohli doubtful for deciding Test

PTI, Dharamsala



Skipper Virat Kohli's participation in the fourth and deciding Test against Australia here hangs in balance even as young Mumbai batsman Shreyas Iyer has been called as cover. Kohli had suffered a serious right shoulder injury during the Ranchi Test in which he played through pain. Iyer, who is flying in Friday morning, may not be able to reach here on time for the training session which starts at 9:30 am. It is learnt that Kohli's inclusion in the playing eleven will depend on his fitness test conducted in the morning session. In fact, the India captain today

skipped batting at the net session, trying to give his shoulder the much needed rest. While Iyer till now is strictly a cover, one can safely assume that Kohli will try his best to make it to the playing eleven, considering how important it is for him to play this particular game. Young right hander Iyer has been rewarded for his prolific showing in domestic cricket for Mumbai over the last two seasons. In fact, the attacking batsman hit a double hundred in the warm-up game against Australia at the CCI Stadium. Even though Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc were rested during that match, Iyer's innings was praised by one and all. Kohli was present at the ground

with his teammates. With a bandage on his right shoulder and bicep region, Kohli took part in the customary warm-up. He did some under-arm throwing during fielding practice. Perhaps it was more to do with not exerting pressure on his hurt shoulder. Known for his guts, the India skipper will not even in his dream like to miss a Test match, which is set to decide the series. Meanwhile, it was learnt that Mohammed Shami does not have a chance to be picked for the game. "Shami was with the team in Ranchi also as physio Patrick Farhart is monitoring his progress. He was not named in the squad of 15 for the final Test," a source told PTI.

Bangladesh's chance to move to 6th

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka has brought up a few interesting equations which may see them either rise or fall in the ICC ODI Rankings table. Bangladesh are currently in seventh place with 91 points, seven points behind sixth place Sri Lanka. If the Tigers manage a series whitewash, they will leapfrog Sri Lanka and take sixth place when the points are calculated beyond the decimal point. However, if Bangladesh lose all three matches then they will fall to eighth, with Pakistan taking their place. Pakistan will be playing a three-match ODI series against the West Indies from April 7, which may also impact the Tigers' ranking. Should Bangladesh lose two matches to Sri Lanka and Pakistan whitewash the West Indies, then Pakistan will gain a one-point edge and move to seventh. If Bangladesh are to remain in seventh place, then they must at least win two of their matches. If they do, then even a 3-0 win for Pakistan will not affect the rankings.

The Young Tigers Under-16 National Cricket Tournament got underway at the Tangail Stadium yesterday with Barisal and Rajshahi playing the opening match of the tournament. After winning the toss and electing to bat, Rajshahi were bundled out for 259 runs in 86 overs in the two-day match with Mehrab Hossain top-scoring with 54 while Mohammad Ashraf scored 46. Barisal's Mohammad Tahsin and Touhidul Islam scalped three wickets each. The umpires stopped play for the day with Barisal at four for no loss after two overs. Earlier, DC of Tangail Mahbub Hossain inaugurated the tournament as chief guest.