

Walsh in Lara's corner

By **Tony Becca**
Senior Sport Editor

FAST bowler Courtney Walsh has declared his full support for new captain Brian Lara.

In a short press conference at Sabina Park yesterday in which he confirmed his availability for the first Test against England starting at Sabina Park on January 29, Walsh said his priority is West Indies cricket and he had no problems with Lara.

"I have always considered myself a part of the team, and West Indies cricket has been good to me," said Walsh who was relieved of the captaincy just over a week ago.

Opening the press conference by saying that he wanted to end the controversy over the captaincy and his availability, and also to bury it once and for all, Walsh said that he is available for selection and will support Lara all the way.

"Of course I was disappointed losing the captaincy, but that's not the end of the world," said the Jamaica captain. "I believe I still have a part to play, we have a new captain, and I want to be there with him. I want Brian and all the people in the Caribbean to know that I will be supporting him."

According to Walsh, who said that he did not start as a captain, that he did not have to end as a

captain, and that you don't have to be a captain to play the game, he finally made up his mind to make himself available on Wednesday night - and for many reasons.

"I had to answer some questions for myself. I did not know if I still had the appetite for the game so I had to find out. That is why the match against Barbados was important to me. I felt good during the match, and after the game I felt I could still compete at the highest level.

"A lot of people spoke to me, I got a lot of letters and faxes, not only from here in Jamaica but from all over the world, and I felt that a lot of people would probably feel betrayed if I did not make myself available - and they would also probably believe that I did not get along with Brian. I also feel that I will come out a better person for it.

"Another reason is that people have been speculating that Brian will be getting a rough time here, and that it would be worse if I did not play. I remembered what happened at Chedwin Park (last October during Red Stripe Bowl match). I don't want that happen again, and I am going to do everything to see that it does not happen."

One of the reasons why Walsh was undecided about his future in West Indies cricket was the reaction if he failed.

"I did not want to play, not do well, and people start saying

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SPORT

Courtney- A man of quality

THE decision by Courtney Walsh to make himself available to represent the West Indies in the coming Test series against England is hardly a surprise. Nothing less was expected from a cricketer who loves the game and who has always been a credit to the game.

Over the years, Walsh has been a true servant to the game - a player who, despite his outstanding achievements and his greatness, has always been ready to represent his country, Jamaica,

his region, the West Indies, and even on the day after returning home from a long tour, his club Melbourne.

Regardless of what some considered good reasons to have said no, to have refused the call to play would have been uncharacteristic of Walsh - not only

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because he loves the game so much, not only because West Indies cricket has always been close to his heart, but because in doing so he would have been saying no to his colleagues of so

many years and so many battles, and to those who followed him onto the field, fought with him through thick and thin, from whom he expected their best, and who were loyal to him.

In resisting the temptation to say no, by deciding to play his part in what the West Indies hope

will be the start of the drive back to the top, Courtney Walsh has once again demonstrated his quality and class.

"You don't have to be a captain to play the game," said Walsh yesterday.

That is quality, that is class, and every Jamaican should be proud of a great, unselfish Jamaican. In fact, every West Indian should be proud of a great West Indian - on and off the field.