

B/N
Walsh, Courtney

A great cricketer, a fine gentleman

COURTNEY Walsh, the Jamaica and West Indies champion bowler out of Melbourne and Excelsior High, is the toast of cricket.

Based on his latest accomplishment, he will be for a long time - probably as long as the game is played.

Last year against Zimbabwe, at his beloved Sabina Park, Walsh took his 435th wicket to become the world record holder for the highest number of wickets in Test cricket.

On Tuesday when he removed Jacques Kallis leg before wicket for zero at Queen's Park Oval, he became the first bowler to take 500 wickets in Test cricket.

Without a doubt, both deeds are fantastic, and although one, the world record, can be erased, the other, the first to 500, cannot. In fact, in raising the bar so high, even if the record of most wickets is broken, it will take a long, long time - so long it will probably never be broken.

Lest it be forgotten, when, for example, Fred Trueman retired with the then world record, the number was 307, when Lance Gibbs retired it was 309, when Richard Hadlee retired, it was 351, and when Kapil Dev retired, it was 434.

Even if Walsh does not take another wicket before he retires, the lead over his predecessor is a frightening 70.

In other words, when the big Jamaican fast bowler leaves the field for the last time, the bar will be so high, that he could be forgiven if he turned to the likes of Shane Warne and Muttiah Muralitharan and say to the two master spin bowlers: "there it is, clear it if you can".

As a boy at Melbourne, Walsh probably looked at the great Michael Holding and said, I want to be like him, and later on he probably looked at the

records of other fast bowlers down the years, at those of such greats as Ray Lindwall, Trueman, Dennis Lillee and said: I want to be like them.

Walsh has not only followed in their footsteps; he has also stepped ahead. He has done what they have done and better - so much so that today, right around the world, there are sure to be young boys who are inspired by his deeds and saying they want to be like him.

The greatness of Walsh, however, goes beyond his performance with the ball, and in serenading him, in joining the toast in celebration of his latest accomplishment, we should couple with it a toast to one of cricket's finest gentlemen.

As a young man striving for a place in the sun, Walsh was polite, during his climb to greatness, he remained polite and he was humble, and in his greatness, he is still polite and humble.

As great as Walsh is, as much as there is to brag about, there is not an ounce of arrogance in him, as much as he has achieved he has never forgotten his roots, and his loyalty is beyond question.

He has never said no to the West Indies, he has never said no to Jamaica, and most importantly, he has never said no to his club - to Melbourne.

Walsh's loyalty is such that there have been times when he has come home one day and is on the field the following day representing Melbourne, and times when he has left the field for the airport.

Cricket has been good to Courtney Walsh - no question about that. Courtney Walsh, however, has also been good for cricket.



FROM THE BOUNDARY
Tony Becca