

# Walsh on record-breaking mission

BY RW MATHIAS

**AFTER 110 matches and 423 wickets, West Indies ace fastbowler, Courtney Andrew Walsh, now sets out on a mission to become Test cricket's highest wicket-taker when the first of two-match series between the touring West Indies and New Zealand starts on December 16 at Hamilton.**

Walsh needs a mere 12 wickets to overtake retired Indian fast-medium all-rounder Kapil Dev's record tally of 434 Test wickets from 131 matches.

Interestingly, when Walsh played his last Test against New Zealand in the second of two-matches at Wellington Basin Reserve in February, 1995, he claimed his best Test innings figures of seven for 37 and then pocketed six for 18 to end with career best match figures of 13 for 55.

While "Cuddy" as he is familiarly called, keeps rolling along like "old man river", after celebrating his 37th birthday last October 30, he remains the oldest fast bowler in Test cricket at present and also the longest serving at the highest level.

There has been no more faithful servant to West Indies cricket than Walsh, who was the fifth player and first fastbowler from the West Indies to reach the 100 Test landmark, following distinguished batsmen, Vivian Richards (121), Desmond Haynes (116), Clive Lloyd (110) and Gordon Greenidge (108).

The road has never been easy for Walsh, who came on the international scene when the West Indies enjoyed fast bowling riches.

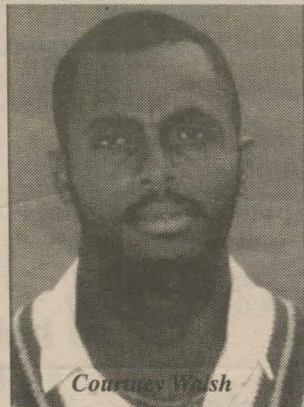
At age 22, Walsh was a member of West Indies squad for the tour of England in 1984, but was overlooked and did not make his Test debut. Another pace bowler, Winston Davis, on county cricket assignment in England, was drafted into the team for the fourth Test when both pacers, Malcolm Marshall and Milton Small, were declared unfit.

Selected on the tour of Australia for the 1984-85 five-Test series, Walsh made his debut in the opening Test at Perth.

He did not bowl in Australia's first innings when Marshall, Garner and Holding bundled them out for a paltry 76.

Walsh was given the ball in the second innings and claimed two for 43 when the Windies won by an innings and 112 runs.

Walsh came out with distinction at the end of 1988-89 five Test series "Down Under". In the



Courtney Walsh

first Test at Brisbane, he joined fellow West Indies bowlers, Wes Hall and Lance Gibbs, to achieve a rare hat-trick, while being the first in Test history to complete the feat over two innings.

During the fourth Test at Sydney, the determined and at times luckless Walsh became the 12th West Indies bowler to claim 100 Test wickets. He reached the landmark in his 29th Test when wicketkeeper, Jeffrey Dujon, accepted a catch to dismiss centurion, David Boon.

When India came to the Caribbean for a four Test series

in 1989, Walsh, on home territory at Sabina Park, achieved his first 10-wicket haul in Tests with six for 62 and four for 39.

Walsh's omission from the West Indies team for the fourth Test against England at Kensington Oval in 1990 must have been a frustrating experience.

The 32-year-old Barbadian pacer, Ezra Moseley, who made his debut in the third Test, was retained to complete a four-prong attack with Marshall, Ambrose and Bishop.

In 1983 Moseley had defied the West Indies Cricket Board by journeying to the forbidden land of South Africa and was now pardoned. However, Walsh was back in the fold for the fifth Test at the Antigua Recreation Ground, which the West Indies won to take the series 2-1.

When Pakistan toured the Caribbean in 1993, Walsh reached another milestone when he trapped Basit Ali lbw in Pakistan's second innings of the second Test at Kensington Oval to claim his 200th Test wicket after nearly 10 years and 58 Tests.

While Walsh's name was seldom mentioned among the greats of West Indies fast bowling, he became the 10th bowler and third West Indian after Lance Gibbs and Malcolm Marshall to achieve 300 Test wickets. It was a long wait.

In his 80th Test, the sixth and final Test between the West Indies and England at the Oval in the summer of 1995, Walsh needed just one more wicket to reach the landmark.

When England won the toss and elected to bat, Walsh went wicketless on the opening day. It was not until the third session on the second day that Walsh claimed the important wicket. He got relief when number eight batsman, Mike Watkinson, edged a delivery to wicketkeeper, Courtney Browne, and the celebration began with elated teammates.

Usually performing the role of "workhorse" while bowling his heart out for the West Indies, Walsh was rewarded for his relentless drive for perfection when he erased Malcolm Marshall's tally of 376 as the highest West Indian Test wicket-taker.

During the West Indies disastrous 1998-99 tour of South Africa, Walsh equalled the record with the fourth ball of his second over when the home side batted in the opening Test at Johannesburg on the second day.

After a two-hour wait, Walsh removed Jacques Kallis (53) to re-write the record books.

He ended the day's play in South Africa 217-6 replying to Windies 261 with figures of four for 48, taking his tally to 379 Test wickets.

Back in the Caribbean for the opening day of the first Test against Australia at Queen's Park Oval on March 5, 1999, Walsh covered himself in glory by claiming his 400th Test wicket.

After reaching the 300 mark in his 80th Test, it took Walsh 27 Tests to claim the next 100 victims.

The great moment came when Walsh, in his 107th Test, sent back Australian wicket-keeper, Ian Healy, by the lbw route to become only the third man to achieve the landmark, joining the illustrious company of India's record holder, Dev (434), and New Zealand's Sir Richard Hadlee (431).

Happy hunting to "Cuddy" as he approaches Test cricket's summit.