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GOING DOWN
MEMORY LANE

WITH R. W. MATHIAS

BITTER-SWEET
RECORD FOR
'CUDDY' WALSH
AS VI SKIPPER

Veteran journalist R.W. Mathias looks at at Jamaicans who have captained West Indies in the second of a three part series. Read the final part next week.

Top-class fast bowler Courtney Walsh, who once held the highest Test wickets record (519), was the 23rd West Indies captain and fourth Jamaican.

When England toured the Caribbean in 1994, the Windies were forced to omit through injury, their two most experienced batsmen, captain Richie Richardson and vice-captain Desmond Haynes for the fifth and final Test at the Antigua Recreation Ground (ARG).

For the first time the tough assignment of West Indies leader was thrust on Walsh. While the Test ended in a draw, the high point was Brian Lara eclipsing Sir Garfield Sobers previous highest individual Test record of 365 not out with 375.

For back-to-back tours of India in late 1994 and New Zealand early 1995, West Indies were not at full strength. They were again without regular captain Richardson and Haynes, while strike bowler Curtly Ambrose was back in the side for the New Zealand series.

Moment of need

In their moment of need the West Indies turned to Walsh, familiarly called "Cuddy" to captain a depleted side and he did not disappoint.

India, unbeaten in a home Test for six years, won the first Test by 96 runs. The second, which favoured India ended in a draw. For that crucial third and final Test, Walsh although nursing an injury, led from in front, as West Indies triumphed by 243 runs to level the series one-all. Earlier, Windies lost the one-day international 6-2.

Then in New Zealand, West Indies won the two Test series one-nil. The first was drawn. In the second the New Zealanders suffered their worst defeat ever by an innings and 322 runs, while West Indies retained their incredible record of not losing a Test series for 15 years.

Walsh ended with memorable match figures of 13 for 55 included his personal best of seven for 37 and six for 18,

which was only bettered among West Indian bowlers in Tests by countryman Michael Holding who claimed 14 for 149 with eight for 92 and six for 57 against England at Kensington Oval in 1976.

When Australia arrived in 1995, Richardson returned to the helm and West Indies at long last surrendered their proud record by 2-1 margin. The pressure on Richardson as captain finally ended when he resigned after the 1996 World Cup tournament.

Good record

Once again the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) turned to Walsh for five one-day internationals and two Test series against New Zealand at home. He kept his good record alive when he led the Windies to a 1-0 victory in the Test series.

Again burdened with the captaincy, Walsh lost his first Test series 2-3 to Australia played "Down Under" in 1996-1997.

Walsh was again the board's choice as captain when India came early in 1997. After the first and second Tests were drawn, injury forced Walsh to miss the third Test. It was the first time in his illustrious career, that he had to sit out a Test through injury. Vice-captain Brian Lara took over the reins and the Windies registered a 38-run victory.

Walsh was back for the two remaining Tests, which were both ruined by rain and ended in draws. It was a frustrating series for Walsh who claimed only four wickets.

Tough tour

The year 1997 was another busy one for Walsh as the Sri Lankans followed the Indian visit. With Walsh again in charge, West Indies won the sole one-dayer, then the opening Test by 35 runs, while the second and final Tests were drawn.

Now in the 13th year of international cricket, Walsh at age 35 was retained for a tough tour of Pakistan in the closing months of 1997.

When it ended Pakistan recorded an embarrassing 3-0 clean sweep. Then in 1998, Walsh was relieved of the captaincy after 22 Tests, winning six, losing seven, leaving nine drawn.