

## **WINDIES WIZARDS OF THE WILLOW ???**

(May 19, 2003)

*Spectators in St. John's Antigua staged a relatively mild protest on the penultimate day and, I believe, their action helped West Indies win the fourth and final test (May 13, 2003).*

*People had seen throughout the series a number of poor umpiring decisions. Some of the faults went against Australia. Several more operated against the West Indies. Some of them occurred at moments strategic enough to alter the course of the game. When these things happen in favour of a team that is clearly better than ours, one effect is to exaggerate the strength of the opposition, and to accentuate our weakness. Of course, do not expect to win a four - match test series in which you drop 20 catches.*

*In the first couple of test matches in particular, it appeared that Asoka Da Silva had it all wrong, responding in the affirmative when he should signify negative; and vice versa.*

*Between lunch and tea on May 12, a section of the Antigua crowd called a "no - ball" bowled by Andy Bichel. The commentators on duty - just in jest, I suppose - used the available slow-motion technology. Then they had to admit that the spectators were correct in their call. Umpire Venkat did not call it.*

*The proverbial straw that broke the back of the camel came later when Jacob took a rising ball from Bret Lee on his biceps but was adjudged caught behind by umpire Shepherd. On seeing the replay and the obvious injustice some of the spectators reacted.*

*Not a single commentator at the time or subsequent spoke adversely about the crowd. They did not dare!! If I have something of public interest to say I can express myself through the media. But besides suffering quietly what is the cricket spectator to do? I am referring to the situation where she/he has a legitimate grievance; not the case scenario where, like at a couple of venues in India, spectators threw bottles onto the field even when it appeared that their own home side was doing very well.*

*The Antiguan spectator cast several bottles and glasses, - most of them plastics - unto the field. I assume that was their way of reminding the umpires and others concerned:*

*"You are our servants. We pay your fees. Throughout the series you have performed badly. We are sick and frustrated at your inefficiency."*

*That warning made the umpires more careful. From then on they did things strictly in accordance with the rules. It was not the least of the factors that determined the outcome of the fourth test match.*

*I can almost hear some smart fellow objecting to the statement that it is the spectator who pays for cricket. What about the corporate sponsors, he queries. But if he is so smart, he should also know that it is the spectator who pays the corporate sponsor, and who pays all expenses including sponsorship, advertisements, corporate profits and corporation taxes.*

*Watching the games on TV, one gets the impression that the umpires, and sometimes the Caribbean cricketers allow themselves to succumb to the intimidatory tactics practiced by the Australians. That kind of surrender is not new. In fact, I believe that if management of West Indies cricket was as astute as management of basketball in the USA (the NBA), certain literature would be compulsory reading for every West Indian cricketer.*

*Such literature would include "HITTING ACROSS THE LINE" by Viv Richards, Headline Book Publishing Co, 1992. He wrote about his rough awakening on his first test outing to Australia in 1975:*

*"Until then I had believed, however naively, that Test cricket was the ultimate sport of gentlemen. The Australians smashed that view wide open. Forewarned or not, it came as a total surprise to me to come up against a team that contained so many openly aggressive people. It was a kind of nastiness that I had never encountered previously, not just in cricket but in life in general. The force of their hostility was nothing short of frightening. ... The verbal abuse ... left our team completely stunned. West Indian people are in general, mild, good - natured folk and we had anticipated an atmosphere of friendly rivalry. But as soon as we wandered out on that field, we had to face their taunts. It did not prove easy to concentrate when someone was snarling at you and saying 'You f\*\*k off, you black bastard!'"*

*Now that this column has educated you or reminded you, are you surprised that a new generation of West Indians - the Laras and the Sawans - will not wither in face of Australian humiliation or insult? I am not surprised that these men answer back, even at the expense of getting involved in verbal controversies. Neither would current chairman of the West Indian selectors be surprised:*

*"I do not know of any West Indian cricketer who swears at the opposition in the way that those Aussies did. We came up against extreme savagery in that series, what many people would call extreme racism." (Viv Richards, page 73 of his Autobiography already mentioned).*

*One may contend that Richards was writing when the Australian team was all white: things must have changed given the inclusion in their team of people like Jason Gillespie and Andy Symonds, men of aborigine extraction.*

*But we know that Daren Leyman recently made racial slurs at a Sri Lanka player. Ironically, it was West Indian Clive Lloyd who meted out Leyman's punishment.*

*Suffice it to say for now, that the Australians do not need racism, bad behavior or even gamesmanship to win against a side that still must learn to use common sense and to believe in itself.*

*There is a veritable wealth of good sense and professional advice available to our cricketers and to whoever chooses to benefit by it. I refer to the tapes of the continuous commentaries done by Holding, Bishop, Cozier, Hooks, Thompson, Mark Waugh, etc. Because our players repeat their silly mistakes over and over and over again, they create the impression that they leave no time to listen to and learn from those tapes. I would urge the West Indies Board and Management, selectors, trainers, psychologists, and players to cease any belief that may possess them to the effect that they already know everything, and to begin learning from those commentaries. The opposition is doing so consistently.*

*To earn the title of Windies Wizard of the Willow, like Walcott, Weeks, Worrel, Sobers or Richards et al before them, our current crop must be smarter, more committed, and much more consistent than they are now. The capacity of Lara as a wizard among the willow - wielders is not in doubt. But note how he misread the situation of the game and surrendered his innings, a hat trick of times, when he was not even in trouble. I refer to the two innings during the 4th test in Antigua, and the first one-day match in Jamaica. Lara must "wise up."*

*Last week, Mr. Edison James in his capacity as an ex - manager in regional cricket, offered a well-thought-out way forward toward the use of technology for improvement in umpiring. Some may wish to complement or modify his ideas, but all of us should agree in principle. I cannot understand why the ultimate cricket authority (ICC) should be reluctant to use available technology for the best decision - making in the game.*

*And since as Caribbean people we seem to suffer abundantly from "unfortunate" decisions, why do we not push the ICC? At page 243 in his book already cited, Viv Richards made an observation about our West Indies Board:*

*"The Board seem incapable of making decisions for themselves. Every single thing they do is to please the ICC. The role we play in international cricket seems to be one of simply toeing the line, being afraid to cause a fuss, just doing whatever is right to please every one else."*

*The Board should wish to impress us, that what Richards then said in 1992 is now no longer the case.*

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