

Is This Really Cricket?

Cricket, lovely cricket? Hardly. When the wickets are tumbling you can't find anyone to hold up the side! If you happen to be a West Indian fan then heaven help you.

There is more confusion in West Indies cricket than ever before and most of it is beyond the pavilion. Test Cricket these days is being played in empty stadiums while the crowds turn up for the T20 variety. Gone are the days when this most genteel of games would cause the imagination to soar to unattainable peaks. Money, politics and big business have injected angst and personal venom in cricket. The game of gentleman and women has been lost in various forms of baiting, racial bashing and dressing room bullying. One only has to read Kevin Pieter-son's autobiography to understand the level of cynicism that pervades world cricket.

In the gloomy maze in which cricket finds itself one factor is common. The faithful and loyal cricket fans are being taken for a ride. The desire to win at all costs and to make money seem to override the pure and unbridled joy of appreciating the finer points of the game.

The situation has deteriorated to the point where the immortals of the game want drastic action to be taken. Sir Ian Botham has called for the elimination of the Indian

Premier League (IPL) and Clive Lloyd has asked for fewer T20's as this format arguably undermine skills at the Test Match level. There is a bucketful of money to be made in the shortest format but Test cricket remains stagnant.

The recent Bangladesh tour to the Caribbean

informed the media that the team has had enough and that they will leave India without fulfilling their contracts.

Since then many fans have been struggling to understand why the series of events occurred. Who is wrong, who is right and where do we go from here? In order to understand the chain of occurrences we need to point out that there are two main organizations in the West Indies cricket structure. They are the West Indies Cricket Board

competing body the latter is sometimes viewed as a bastion of old colonialism, and an extension of the plantocracy. The WICB did not take kindly to the fact that players belonged to a union.

According to WIPA, 'there were veiled threats to players contemplating joining the body (WIPA) in that they were indirectly told that they would be jeopardizing their position as players, with the possible consequence of being dropped from the side.' We are told further that

WIPA. The WICB described the agreement as a 'watershed moment for West Indies cricket' while Hinds said that the agreement promoted meritocracy. Apparently, someone forgot to tell the players about the agreement. The West Indies team flew to India claiming that it did not know about the details of the deal.

A letter was sent to the WICB by the players asking for clarification, claiming that the terms would lead to reduced wages by as much as 65 per cent.

The WICB replied that it was only going to talk to WIPA and not to the players directly. The WICB wanted the players to complete the series and then to meet to address the grievances afterwards. A letter was sent by WIPA to the players but this was described as 'confusing' by the players. West Indies

went on to win the first ODI against India handsomely but lost the next two games. The fourth game appeared to be in doubt and then Bravo faced the media and said that 'enough was enough.' The West Indies players were going home.

The Indian Board (BCCI) has every right to feel aggrieved as it will lose money. There is the view that for the tour to go on the BCCI could have subsidized the West Indies. In other words the BCCI could have paid the West Indian players to compete against its own team. This makes no economic or cost-benefit sense. In any event this is a West Indies and not an Indian problem. Those that have harsh criticisms for the WICB include former West Indies fast bowler Michael Holding. He attributes the crisis to money and a lack of good faith.

According to Holding the players agreed to a reduction in salaries and left for India without a contract but had hoped for a fair deal. However, when they saw that the reductions in their salaries were between 60 and 70 per cent they got in touch with WIPA who got in touch with the WICB who



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

refused to make a compromise. Holding says further that, 'the problem with West Indies is that the WICB always pushes things to the brink and waits till the last moment. That is why so many tours begin with players not having yet signed tour contracts. Hinds signed the Memorandum of Understanding and if were playing he would be the most upset man in the team.'

Holding concludes that he has no idea where this is going to leave West Indies cricket 'because it all depends on BCCI.' Where does West Indies cricket go from here? It is unlikely that BCCI will carry through with their boycott to West Indies on future tours.

The asking sum of \$60million may also be waived. World cricket needs a strong West Indies team. The BCCI said that it was the WICB and not the players that cancelled the tour so the latter would be under scrutiny to be accountable and not just to the West Indian public.

The WICB issued a statement saying that it is embarrassed by the unfortunate end to the tour. The Board stated further that it believes 'a way can be found to repair the damage and to ensure similar events do not recur...' Why wasn't this 'way' found earlier and why did it have to lead to the cancellation of the tour before the WICB could see the light?

There are cracks in the player's camp as Marlon Samuels has openly criticized Dwayne Bravo's handling of the matter. He wants Bravo to explain himself to the public while Lara wants sweeping changes in the WICB. In the meantime there is a tour to South Africa, the World Cup is looming and West Indies are unprepared for both. Who will hold up the side?

The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of the THE WEST INDIAN.



Dwayne Bravo



Wavell Hinds



Dave Cameron

saw some of the sparsest crowds attending while Australia and Pakistan are playing exciting Test cricket to almost empty stadiums in Dubai. Why Pakistan cannot play Test cricket in its own country is another matter. As if there are not enough problems in cricket we have had to witness the most deplorable series of events involving the West Indies. Which team abandons a tour mid-way and head for home? This happened a few weeks ago when West Indies one-day captain, Dwayne Bravo,

(WICB) and the West Indies Players Association (WIPA). There are also the fans that few seem to care about.

The Players Association was formed in 1973, the aim of which was to represent the players. Its first President was Rohan Kanhai and the Secretary was Deryck Murray. The other Presidents were Courtney Walsh, Dinanath Ramnarine and currently Wavell Hinds. The organization was only incorporated in 2003. While WIPA is seen by the WICB as a

WIPA is 'the exclusive representative and bargaining agent of players selected for their national and West Indies teams.' If that is the case why have the players abandoned the tour in India and blamed the WIPA and the West Indies Cricket Board?

The answer to this question has its roots in the previous WIPA administration. In 2011 the then President Dinanath Ramnarine called on the WICB to be more responsible to the players and not to have a hidden agenda.

He wanted more accountability and advocated that cricketers that do not make the Test level should still be looked after financially. Ramnarine spent 10 years as President of WIPA and he was effective and outspoken. In was under Ramnarine's presidency that pay raises were enjoyed by players and a new collective bargaining agreement was reached. His successor Wavell Hinds is seen as a Board supporter, of trying to please two masters and this may be one of the reasons for the present impasse.

In September 2014 there were reports that an agreement was signed between the WICB and

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