

Women's Cricket Puts West Indies Test Team to Shame!

Cricket in the West Indies is a male-dominated sport but it is the women players that are making waves.

A plethora of panels and reports exist to discuss the future of the game but women are not included in the decision-making committees. The women's game is relegated to a few paragraphs in officialdom. In the 'Strategic Plan 2011 to 2016' no policy statement is made about women's cricket. The Pybus Report of 2014 does not even acknowledge women's cricket. The West Indies men's Test team has forgotten how to win. The heart is no longer there but don't tell that to the women players.

They have been consistent in bringing victories to the West Indies. The team, currently ranked fifth by the ICC, is on the way up. Where are the men? They are near bottom. Given the impressive performances of the women shouldn't the WICB place more emphasis on women's cricket? The Caricom Cricket Review Panel said in October 2015 that, 'There is no organized, official programmes and policies in place by the WICB to develop women's cricket.'

Tony Cozier who has written copiously about cricket in the West Indies has devoted only one major article to women's cricket and many of the other writers seem to take women's cricket for granted. The fact is that with the current low ranking of the Test team a Deandra Dottin or Kishona Knight can show the men Test players how to stroke the bad balls.

As Clive Lloyd and his selectors ponder and wonder from where the next great team will rise they would do well to take the lessons from West Indies 2015 tour to Sri Lanka. In the Second Test at Colombo West Indies bowled out Sri Lanka for 200 in the first innings and replied with 163. In the second innings Sri Lanka made 206. Hopes were high for a West Indies victory. They needed 244 with plenty of time. But true to form West Indies collapsed and Sri Lanka won

by 72 runs to take the series 2-0. Sir Garfield Sobers presented the trophy that bears his name to Sri Lanka while the West Indies players applauded.

Cricket historians will recall the 1984 series in England in which West Indies 'blackwashed' England. The Second Test at Lords was most memorable. West Indies were required to make 342 to win on the final day. England fancied their chances. But Gordon Greenidge with a majestic 214 and a steady unbeaten 92 from Larry Gomes saw the tourists home. Those were the days when the 'impossible' was nothing! These days West Indies are going through the motions, and despite the promises, the silver lining is yet to materialize.

This, however, does not apply to women's cricket. As their illustrious male counterparts in the Test team sink the women are rising and are chalking up memorable victories. The West Indies Women's team recently emerged as victors against Pakistan. They won the ODI series 3-1 and the team is now on top of the ICC table alongside Australia. Their coach is former West Indies Test player Vasbert Drakes. He said that the victory was a result of team effort. According to Drakes, 'It was basically a collective effort from everyone. We talk about everyone making a contribution as a group and that was the main theme. Everyone actually contributed.'

Drakes singles out captain Stafanie Taylor, Kishona Knight, Shamikia Connell and Merissa

Aguilleira as some of the key players. But Drakes points out that there is still a lot of work to do. While Jason Holder has walked into a divided Test team the women's team has every reason to celebrate. It wears the West Indies colors with pride. According to the WICB's President Dave Cameron, 'it was heart-warming to see them play and the victory was a result of hard work



Stafanie Taylor shows how it should be done! Women's cricket is on the rise and putting the men to shame!

and determination.' If only he could say the same about the men!

After the ODI series it was time for the T20's. Pakistan wanted to regroup and to give a better account of themselves. But the West Indies women had other ideas. Their captain Stafanie Taylor led from the front and the other players contributed handsomely. West Indies women went on to beat Pakistan in the T20 series 3-0. Taylor was named player of the final match. The expressions of joy and exuberance that accompanied the victories were priceless. The bloggers had a field day as they called on the men to take a page from the women's book!

Women's cricket has had a fascinating history. A report in 1745 recorded one of the earliest games that took place in Surrey,

England. On a warm July day, 'the girls bowled, batted, ran and catches as well as most men could do in that game.' The scores were significant too as the Bramley maids with blue ribbons had 119 notches while the Hambledon maids with red ribbons got 127 notches. Incidentally, that game attracted one of the biggest crowds at the time. The ladies had done cricket proud and cricket legend suggests that over the arm bowling began with the ladies.

The first Women's Test Match was played in 1934 between England and Australia at Brisbane and Betty Watson remains one of the greatest players of all time. She was the first player to take 10 wickets and score a century in a Test which was a record for both men's and wom-

marginalize the women's game. It is now the females who are struggling for recognition within a male-centered world that sees them as competition.'

In 2007 the 'Committee on Governance of West Indies Cricket' made wide-ranging recommendations as to how the game should be structured. The Committee was headed by Mr. P.J. Patterson, Sir Alistair McIntyre and Dr. Ian McDonald. The Report stated that the WICB should take action to integrate men and women's cricket at the highest level. It was disappointed that no concrete policies were implemented to advance women's cricket in the West Indies.

The Patterson Report also spoke about the 'deterioration of the standard and quality of play' and of the rapid decline in West Indies cricket. It recommended sweeping changes in the structure of the game, including transparency and accountability on the part of the Board. If cricket is to change so must the management structure. But the recommendations of the Patterson Report were largely ignored. What is remarkable is that during the Patterson meetings it was discovered that another Report was buried 'in an obscure location.'

This was the Griffith Report of 1992 and that too was ignored by the Board. Is it any wonder that West Indies cricket is in the dumps?

It is interesting to note that the Caricom Panel in 2015 has suggested that the WICB should be 'immediately dissolved.' It was recommended that there should be an interim management committee to look into all aspects of the game. This is another Report that could soon be gathering dust. What is needed is a cricket impresario or administrator that would have the power to make sweeping changes regardless of whose feathers he or she may ruffle. A good choice would be Sir Hilary Beckles who has the mettle to organize and implement the changes.

As we ponder on the



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

way forward let us take a lesson from the women. They have not allowed politics or money to prevent them from giving their best. They have shown professionalism and consistency and are on the verge of winning world titles for the West Indies. Tony Cozier commented on the rise of women's cricket after a game in October 2013 at the Kensington Oval. That game attracted more than 3,000 fans and was won by the West Indies women. This prompted Cozier to write that women's cricket, 'is breaking out of the confines of masculine domination and forging an identity of its own.' One might argue that this is taking place without much help from the WICB.

What about the future of women's cricket? The answer has to do with the overall state of the game in the West Indies. There is no question that the men's version is hobbling on one leg as can be seen from the recent dismal performance of the West Indies team in Sri Lanka. By 2035 West Indies men will no longer be playing Test Matches; the rivalry will be in T20 and the new T40 format. The T20 version will take off in the US and women's cricket will be very popular there. West Indies women, by then the world champions, will bring glory to the region and fixtures at Lords, Kensington Oval, Citifield, Yankee Stadium, Los Angeles, Melbourne and Eden Gardens will be commonplace.

Women's cricket will help to make cricket a truly global sport. So when you visit a men's Test Match and find there is no rock to the rescue think of women's cricket!

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