

Educating the West Indies Cricketer

Dr. Brader Adaleine Brathwaite (Faculty of Medical Sciences)

The education of players for a cricketing career at the international level must not be considered a simple matter. Firstly, this education must be distinguished from the coaching required by the player. Coaching necessitates repeated practice of the rudiments of the game, within its rules and regulations, with skills, techniques, and savvy, passed on to talented players. Sports psychologists contribute by pointing to factors in peak performance and management of critical moments in the game; team members must attain what is critical to a winning performance. A physiotherapist adds by carrying the players through rehearsals that would maintain fitness and minimise injury. The extent to which cricket enthusiasts appraise the education requirements of the cricketer-ambassador, beyond awareness of the main elements of wicket-keeping, fielding, batting, and bowling, should be questioned.

Would our Under-19 cricketers be sensitive to the social context and climate; the change in time zones, if any; and the need to adjust their body clock when preparing for a foreign tournament? Appropriate topics would address their nutrition and travel health needs, the possible health hazards, and medications for their First-Aid kits. In general, players must protect themselves from the extremes of ultraviolet radiation from extensive periods in the sunlight; bowlers, in particular must give essential care to their hands and feet. Neat grooming and cautious non-verbal behaviour must be exhibited by the players, who have to withstand the glaring eyes of the TV camera for days.

Some science on ballistics and vectors would accentuate aptitude for handling the game. A cricketer, sometimes without education on the fear factor, must confront missiles as balls are hurled at 90 kph or over. At a workshop sometime ago, some youthful cricketers were awestruck in the sheer presence of martial arts Master, Professor Don Jacob, as he presented a motivational session on facing the opponent. Self-awareness, confidence building, resilience, and concentration become indispensable components of the education of the cricketer.

Alcohol slowly metabolises in the human body; under its influence, motor coordination and thinking are impaired. The cricketer must never use alcohol for celebrating during cricket tournaments, for homesickness, or for coping with stress.

Frequently presented as a game of glorious uncertainties, the cricket match itself begins with uncertainty, when team members never know whether they would be the side to bat, or bowl and field, for this is determined by the flipping of a coin. Uncertainty pervades since the game relies on weather conditions that may change the response of the ball, pitch, and field. Team members can never forecast when they would be the next at the crease, because that depends on the time spent by the current player.

Usually unmentioned is the players' concern for maintaining their intimate relationships back home when they are abroad for extended periods; for young persons, insecurity

could loom as the interim appears as an eternity. Is it known whether moral supporters and spouses are usually subsidised for overseas games?

The *authorities* also need to be educated on the task of assessment for selection. Their tools would be profiles of the players, explicitly describing their team spiritedness, health and fitness, and their performance on various occasions, under various conditions, and against certain rivals. Finally, players who have not been selected would receive narrative feedback on aspects for improvement.

Years ago, great players learned by intuition and innovation, without value-added technology and psychology. Today, to foster that competitive advantage, the education of the player warrants more attention than greets the eye.

Incidentally, non-sexist language has been used throughout this article, to acknowledge that female cricketers also require these benefits.

School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine