



Courtney Andrew Walsh

Chancellor: somewhere out there in the night some hapless batsman waits, unknown and unknowing, waits to make a dubious intervention into history by being the four hundred and eighty-fourth Test victim of the wily Walsh. It may be from a ball of unplayable length, drawing the hypnotised bat after it to edge a sharp catch to the slips, or finding the impossible space between bat and pad to “discombobulate” the stumps, or coming back off the seam to trap the unfortunate one leg-before-wicket. Whatever the method, the ball will have “authority” and “class” stamped all over it.

Cricket “breathed about him in his infancy.” The house of his boyhood stood just outside the southern end of Melbourne Park, home of the Melbourne Cricket Club, a model of its kind and a happy nursery for young talent. If you hit a lusty six from the northern end of the wicket, the ball was likely to end up in Courtney’s yard. He cut his cricketing teeth at Melbourne. His mother did not discourage her only child’s enthusiasm for the game, because, as she says, speaking of the boys of the neighbourhood, “It was all that they had.” Young Courtney played cricket at Melbourne before he entered Excelsior High School. Indeed, the folks at Melbourne were instrumental in getting him into Excelsior.

Courtney’s loyalty to Melbourne is of a piece with all his other loyalties, to his teams, to his fans, to his country, to the West Indies. He never returns from a trip abroad without dropping in at Melbourne, and more often than not with gifts for the small boys. He never misses an opportunity to give them a tip or two on the game. He has never been in Jamaica and not played for the club. Once, when there was a match on the day that he was to leave the island, he naturally wasn’t asked to play. He said to the President of the club, that doyen of cricket journalists, Tony Becca, “Mr Pres, I see the club get too big for me now!” Pointing out that his flight was not due to leave until 8 pm, he played, and left Sabina Park at 5 o’clock, going straight to the airport.

His dependability, his resilience, his resourcefulness, his willingness to bowl the extra over, and always to keep heart – these have been hallmarks of his cricketing career. At Gloucestershire, which he represented for many years in the English county league, they nicknamed him “Duracell,” because, to mix the similes, “like that Ole Man River, he jus’ keep rollin’ and bowlin’ along.”

The way he has been able to bounce back out of slumps in his career has been admirable. Some of his finest performances have come in those low moments. In 1992, at Kensington Oval in Barbados, in the first Test match ever played between South Africa and the West Indies, the time came when, at the end of the day’s play, South Africa were on 122 for 2, with the captain 74 not out, and them needing only 79 runs to win. The situation seemed hopeless; but next morning, Mr Walsh and his equally famous comrade-in-arms Mr Ambrose took 8 wickets for 26 runs between them. The West Indies won, and, to quote Becca on Walsh, “that kept his career going.”

It has been a remarkably long career for a fast bowler. He made his debut for Jamaica in 1982, his Test debut for the West Indies in 1984, and he was Wisden Cricketer of the Year in 1987. When the career would already have ended for most men, his seemed to get better and better. Here is Becca again, on the first Test, at Edgbaston, in this year’s series against England: “In picking up his 20th bag of five wickets in a Test innings, ... in pinning up his best figures in 32 Test matches against England, and in moving his world record tally to 454 wickets, Walsh not only cut down the cream of England’s batsmen, but in the process also struck a blow for the older generation.”

But the crowning glory of this career has been the quality of character that has distinguished it, his magnanimity, his decency, his team spirit, his respect for the fans. There is nothing that he has ever done on a cricket field of which it could be said that it was “not cricket.” No peevishness, no pique, no posturing, no self-pity, no gamesmanship. When he was made West Indies captain in 1995, he knew it was only an interim appointment, but he gave it all he had. He has captained every team for which he has played; his fellows spontaneously rally behind him. In the World Cup competition at Karachi in 1987, the West Indies were in trouble against Pakistan. The home team had lost 9 wickets but were on the brink of victory. Walsh, running in to bowl, saw that the batsman at the non-striker’s end had already backed up too far and that he could run him out; but he stopped, holding the ball over the stumps, and pointedly allowing the batsman to get back to his crease. The West Indies lost the match, but cricket won, and Courtney won the International Fair Play Award.

What this career and the quality of character that distinguishes it have meant for the people of the West Indies is seen in the spontaneous outpouring of love and praise that erupted across the region when he broke Kapil Dev’s record for the highest number of Test wickets. As Keith Smith, writing in the *Trinidad Express* said, “it couldn’t have happened to a nicer man.” Consider, Chancellor: Walsh received Trinidad and Tobago’s second highest national award, the Chaconia Gold Medal, but in the view of Citizens for a Better Trinidad and Tobago, who had presented him a year earlier with their Republic Day Award, he deserved no less than the Republic’s highest

honour, the Trinity Cross. And in Bridgetown last May, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme appointed the good Courtney a goodwill ambassador, the region's first athlete to receive this honour. According to the UNDCP, his "grace, determination and discipline" are "a wonderful example for youth."

Chancellor, I present Walsh of Melbourne, Gloucestershire, Jamaica and the West Indies. I present Mother Walsh "one-son," "Cuddy," "Duracell." I present the Honourable Courtney Andrew Walsh, Officer of the Order of Jamaica, Chaconia Gold Medallist, Commander of the Order of Distinction, Ambassador-at-large, and beg that, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate, you pronounce the words that will make him Doctor of Laws of the University of the West Indies, *honoris causa*.

Mona

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