



Sir Isaac Vivian Alexander Richards

Chancellor, in the words of our Poet Laureate, Edward Kamau Brathwaite,

*"This isn't no time for playing
the fool nor making no sport; this is cricket".*

And the man before you today, Sir Isaac Vivian Alexander Richards, is the Caribbean incarnation of cricket - its artistry, its entertainment, its culture and its politics. Let us picture St. John's, Antigua, nearly 40 years ago, where four young boys, under a scorching hot sun, would play two against two on a full size field, in the heat of the day, all day long. Now "fast forward" to March 27th, 1981. Viv Richards, newly married, is striding to the crease in that same Antigua sun, where a test match is being played for the first time. He is playing before his countrymen, who have put his face on their stamps and dubbed him Ambassador of Antigua. He is perhaps more nervous going out to bat that day than he has ever been before.

He begins his innings in explosive mood, and his first 50 come almost entirely in boundaries. With every one, in the words of biographer Trevor McDonald, the very foundations of Antigua seem to tremble with acclamation. *Pelham Cricket Year* captured the mood perfectly: "That the man would hit a Test century on his own ground to mark its use as an international arena for the first time was one of cricket's more predictable happenings. He began in dominant mood, rested for a while, then flourished again before easing off to his hundred. It was his first week of married life, his home ground and his 14th Test hundred". His career had come full circle - all seventy seven thousand Antiguan and all cricket loving Caribbean people celebrated the victorious home coming. He ranks that day as one of the truly great days of his life.

That life began in St. John's, Antigua, on March the seventh, 1952. He was the son of

Malcolm and Gretel Richards, and he had the benefits of being raised by a deeply religious couple, who made sure he was churched three times on Sundays, and a father of strong discipline - a prison officer, no less - and a fine fast bowler for Antigua. One of young Viv's greatest victories was winning reluctant paternal permission to play Sunday cricket. And one of his greatest lessons was learnt in a Leeward Islands' tournament at 17, when his adoring fans forced an official to overrule the umpire and reinstate him. He followed the crowd and learnt a lesson to last a lifetime: "To your own self be true". In his new book "*Sir Vivian - The Definitive Autobiography*", he says "It opened my eyes, and I was a good learner". He sums up his upbringing with the words: "We could always rely on the strength of our faith in God".

Chancellor, the career of a man with a century of centuries cannot be summarised in a few centuries of words. His records fill reams. They began in 1974 when he joined Somerset and scored more than 1,000 runs in his first season and in every season until 1986. His selection for the West Indies came with the tour of India in 1974 - 75, when he amassed a match-winning 192 not out in Delhi. And in 11 glorious tests and 8 incredible months in 1976, beginning with 101 at Adelaide and ending with 291 at the Oval against England, he amassed 1,710 runs. Alec Bedser wrote: "There are academic distinctions centred on the fine point of whether Richards is a bludgeoning murderer or a clinical assassin when he is in his pillaging mood. It matters little. Either description could fit..." The doyen of cricket writers, John Arlott, wrote: "...he had scored more runs in a calendar year of Test cricket than anyone else before him - and had done it bravely, brilliantly and so entertainingly as to captivate crowds and his opponents as well. Not since Bradman has a batsman consistently treated established Test bowlers in a fashion at once so lordly and so prolific." And our own great sage and cricket guru, C.L.R. James, wrote: "there is one super batsman - that is Richards - who can be ranked with great batsmen of any time."

In 1985 he became the first Leeward Islands player to lead the West Indies. Chancellor, I believe there can be few challenges to the statement that the Captancy of the West Indies cricket team is the most difficult job in the Caribbean. Not since Sir Grantley Adams' heroic attempts to lead a disunited Federation has any one job required one man to fulfill so many agendas and reconcile so many conflicting views. Viv Richards achieved the impossible, against all odds. He led from the front, with the courage of the gladiator, to become a legend in his own time. He terrorised the bowlers - he could destroy the length of the greatest fast bowlers, and do it all without the indignity of a helmet. In his words "To my way of thinking, I was going into battle for my country. It was a war, and if I was going to die for the cause, so be it. The fear of failure and losing was much stronger than the fear of being hurt". His *Definitive Autobiography* reveals all of this and more - his love of life, of Guinness, of God - even his love of four letter words - especially those two famous four letter words "Hard work"! For hard work, spotting the ball early, supreme self confidence and the killer instinct are perhaps his main secrets of success.

This Lord of Lords, as John Arlott called him, this Gentleman soldier as Hilary Beckles called him last Sunday in the Sun, is the symbol of West Indian dominance at cricket. He fought the good fight against racism and petty Caribbean jealousies. "For a while", he says, "I was an angry young man, but I have mellowed a lot and I can see there is racism on both sides. I would like to see us deal with it collectively rather than itemizing things.....no one would tolerate, for example, an association for white sportsmen, so why should there be a black sportsmen's association? All this does is to achieve the opposite of what's intended and it encourages division." On Caribbean relationships he says "when we are separate, we are nothing".

On September seventh, 1999, he was knighted by the Queen, and then appointed Ambassador-at-Large for Antigua. He was voted the best international cricketer of the past 25 years by his peers. Politically and socially conscious, he has placed his enormous experience and skill at the service of his country and his region. Chancellor, in recognition of his extraordinary talent, remarkable achievements and international fame as Gentleman Soldier and Cricket Consul of the Caribbean, I invite you, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of the University of the West Indies, to confer upon Sir Vivian Richards the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

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