



ALMOST INVINCIBLE

West Indies in England: 1984



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Contents

About the author	8
Author's Note.	9
Foreword by Lord Ian Botham	15
Background, West Indies: The Unstoppable Juggernaut	23
Background, England: A Period of Transition and Struggle	32
Missing Rebels and Surplus Talent.	42
A Schedule from Hell	54
Results:	64
Viv's Masterclass Sets the Tone.	66
The Trent Bridge Anomaly.	74
<i>The Edgbaston Chronicles, First Test</i>	81
'England Outplayed, Out-thought by Ruthless Windies'	81
The Graveyard Series for Outgoing England Stars.	95
The Battle of the Spin Doctors.	109
<i>The Lord's Chronicles, Second Test</i>	118
Greenidge Finds His Zenith	118
Botham and the Final Frontier	131
Gatting's Woe and Fowler's Glow	139
The Declaration	143
England's Bowlers 'Threw in the Towel'.	153
The Twelfth Man Who Stole the Show (and a West Country Rookie).	159
<i>The Headingley Chronicles, Third Test</i>	173
Gomes: The Renaissance	173
Marshall – The One-Armed Genius	181

<i>The Old Trafford Chronicles, Fourth Test</i>	188
Lamb's (West) Indian Summer.	188
The Unheralded Ones	201
Terry's Sad Farewell	212
<i>The Oval Chronicles, Fifth Test</i>	219
Lloyd's Clean Sweep!	219
Gower's Misery	229
Worse than Bodyline?	235
The Irony of Broad and Robinson	250
Bradman's Invincibles of 1948 v the West Indies of 1984 v Steve Waugh's Australians of 2001	260
A Statement Extending Beyond Cricket	273
Through the Looking Glass	277
Acknowledgements	286
Bibliography	287

'The team in 1984 is the best all-round side we ever had. We had everything. We had spin, we had pace, it was the best fielding team we ever had, our batting was strong. All bases were covered.' – Sir Clive Lloyd

'By the time the West Indian squad set off for Australia and five more Test matches from November (after the 1984 England series), there was a strong feeling of near invincibility.

'We had won our last eight Tests but, unlike the period when we lost to India in the 1983 World Cup Final, we were by no means complacent. We knew we were going to have to work hard to maintain our position as the best team in the world. Gone was the era of the calypso cricketer; we were now a tough, uncompromising group of players, hardened by battle and galvanised by the occasional failure.' – Malcolm Marshall

Background, West Indies: The Unstoppable Juggernaut

'There were so many great things about the side but perhaps the key was having a captain who didn't inhibit his players' natural talent and he encouraged us to express ourselves.' – Gordon Greenidge

The West Indies cricket team's global domination should be attributed to a clutch of world-class players who made them the champions they were in one-day and Test cricket. Great individuals came together and formed a great unit. But it was due in no small part to one man, Clive Lloyd.

Lloyd was a world-class batsman in his own right, but as captain he did so much for West Indies cricket that most leaders of other national teams did not have to concern themselves with. He was a diplomat first, for he fostered a strong unity among the various populations of Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua, Trinidad, Guyana and the Windward Islands.

'Clive ran the show and was in charge of everything that was happening, though he had some good senior players around him like Viv Richards, Gordon Greenidge, Michael Holding and Joel Garner, players who he knew he could lean on,' said Courtney Walsh, who was a member

of the touring party in 1984. 'We all bought in to his philosophies and were in it together. He had the full support of all the players.'

Lloyd was the unofficial head coach at a time when they were not commonplace and would subsequently arrange practice sessions and formulate tactics for matches.

He would perform roles normally attributable to a team manager, choosing room partners with the foresight of always encouraging comradeship and mentoring; maybe a youngster would be partnered with an experienced player, or a Jamaican with a Bajan to promote inter-island mateship. He would be involved with sanctions and team discipline.

Lloyd also worked closely with Australian fitness trainer Dennis Waite to ensure his players were always in the best physical condition.

There was not much that went on around the West Indies team that Lloyd was not central to, and his players knew and appreciated that was how it was. His guidance and philosophies provided the direction and endless drive to keep improving and playing aggressive, positive and, ultimately, winning cricket.

'If the West Indies side around that time was made up differently, it would have caused you to play differently also,' Greenidge said. 'There were so many great things about the side but perhaps the key was having a captain who didn't inhibit his players' natural talent and he encouraged us to express ourselves.'

'Clive Lloyd would say, "You go out there and play the way you want to play. Be explosive, be courageous, be

forceful.” That was great as I don’t think a lot of captains would have openly suggested to their players that they go out there and play so freely.

‘He never inhibited the players in any way from the way they wanted to play, which was brilliant. That freeness was sometimes our downfall but to have that feeling of self-confidence and knowing you have the backing of the captain to go and get the job done in a way you want to do it was excellent.’

The West Indies needed all those leadership skills and inspiration from Lloyd when they lost the 1983 World Cup Final to India at Lord’s. They had gone unbeaten at the 1975 and 1979 World Cups and won both titles, but in ’83 they lost to Kapil Dev’s India twice, first in the group stage and then the final.

It is said some West Indies players were inconsolable after the match and tears were shed. But what it did do was mark a proverbial line in the sand and Lloyd used it as an opportunity to remind the players they should never again show any mercy or complacency. Not that they intended to lose the final of course, but nonetheless they should have been good enough to chase down those 184 runs required rather than lose by 43 runs.

‘There was bitter disappointment because it was a match we should have won fairly easily,’ said Winston Davis, who did not play in the final but made his name in the tournament by taking 7-51 against Australia.

‘I have thought about the reasons why West Indies faltered that day and the only thing I can come up with is that, without realising it, a bit of complacency crept

into our cricket. We bowled well, restricted India, and we should have got those runs with our batting line-up but maybe we were over-confident. Give India their dues, they stuck to the task and got over the line.'

Privately, Lloyd felt let down and accused his players of performing like amateurs. If ever there was a moment to reawaken the giant – the slayers of world cricket – this was it.

The final was supposed to be Lloyd's last game in charge of the West Indies, but the West Indies Cricket Board persuaded him to stay on. Lloyd did not need much coercing as no champion wants to go out on such a loss.

The skipper was glad of the opportunity to avenge the World Cup Final by undertaking a tour of India from October to December of 1983. West Indies won the six-match Test series 3-0 and the five-match one-day series 5-0. Point made.

'We were a better side than India and here we proved it,' Lloyd said. 'We just let ourselves down on the day at Lord's. The fact we went to India and won everything, all eight matches to their none, showed a good professional attitude. We responded in the right way.'

Aside from the cricket, one other aspect that Lloyd observed while in India and which irked him immensely was the adulation that the Indian cricketers were still receiving from various quarters for their World Cup triumph. He saw billboards lauding their efforts everywhere he travelled. Players had been gifted land or cash by the government and, in some cases, luxury apartments or lucrative endorsement contracts.

It was not that Lloyd resented the rewards that came the way of his opponents, some of whom were his friends. It reminded him that when his team won the World Cup they received almost nothing in terms of financial reward. They had to rely on six-month county contracts to top up their earnings.

Lloyd thought such a situation, commercially, had to change in that regard otherwise it would be to the long-term detriment of West Indies cricket. He would be proved right, albeit more than a decade or more later.

Their next main challenge in Test cricket was a home series against Australia, which was won 3-0 after two draws in the first two matches. It was the start of a world record winning streak that numbered 11 matches by the time they won 5-0 in England then wrapped up the five-match series in Australia at the end of the year after winning the first three Tests.

In that home series, the ever-reliable Bajan opening partnership of Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes was functioning well, which took the pressure off the middle order. In the second innings of the first Test in Guyana they registered an unbroken stand of 250, which was only prevented from being greater by the weather.

The West Indies were blessed to have many skilful players in their ranks and the partnership of Greenidge and Haynes was one such positive element to their side that they never took for granted. England, at this time, tried out five different openers on their winter tours to New Zealand and Pakistan.

‘You get to know the good points and the bad points of one another’s games, and our partnership got to the stage where, with things like running between wickets, we needed very little communication and almost a movement or a gesture was enough,’ Greenidge said.

‘There were a couple of times when that didn’t work out so well but 98 per cent of the time we got the job done.

‘Had we not batted together for so long for both Barbados and West Indies perhaps we wouldn’t have had that relationship.’

Courtney Walsh made his Test debut on the Australia tour later in the year and although he sat on the sidelines in England in 1984, he was able to further his understanding of what it meant to represent the West Indies.

‘After the World Cup the guys seemed closer than ever as team-mates,’ Walsh said. ‘They were hungrier for success and probably wanted to prove to the world that the World Cup loss wasn’t the start of something bad, but the opposite. They were more ambitious than ever.’

By the time the West Indies reached England in May ’84, they were back on a roll but still very much feeling the hurt of Lord’s almost a year earlier. They carried that defeat around, subconsciously, as a reminder of what can happen when they allowed themselves to feel that things were too easy for them.

Their ruthless, relentless pace attack and their aggressive batsmen could not be matched by any team as long they focused on and conquered their own personal challenges and remained committed to the cause.

Lloyd drove everything in that regard. Two such aspects that his fingerprints were all over, off the field, were team discipline and their attitude to training, especially fielding.

‘When we went to practice, like on the Tuesday before a Thursday start to the Test match, we would spend a whole day at the ground,’ Lloyd revealed. ‘We would bat and bowl in the morning, field in the afternoon and have a nice chat about our plans. We never went back to the hotel until later in the afternoon and would eat lunch at the ground. We were very thorough in our preparations.

‘Our fielding was very well drilled. Even all our fast bowlers were gun fielders and capable of fielding in the slips or gully. The only one who didn’t field there was Eldine Baptiste.’

Jeffrey Dujon concurred with his former captain’s view and remembered many an hour when he and his team-mates would be taking catches or practicing their fielding skills.

‘We worked very hard on the slip catching especially,’ Dujon said. ‘They were really on it, and they had to be sharp in that area with the fast bowlers that we had.

‘It created a very competitive situation in practice as the level of intensity that we had in practice itself carried over into matches because practice was conducted as if we were playing in a game. Everybody was competing against each other to be perfect at whatever it was that we were doing, and it showed in our performances. There was no lulling around when it came to our preparation. We operated at a very high level.’

Lloyd was an equally hard taskmaster on discipline. He handed down the message to the youngsters all the way up to his senior players that, if they wanted to stay on top of the world, their standards had to be better than everyone else, and that included off the field. Lloyd was in no way a party-pooper and enjoyed having a drink or attending a sponsor's cocktail party like the next man, but knew the limits of when professionalism would be threatened.

'Discipline in the team was important,' Lloyd said. 'For instance, we would give the guys ten minutes' grace when it came to getting on the bus on time in the morning for practice or a game, but anything after that the guys would shout, "Let the bus roll ..." Many a time did we see guys chasing after the bus with sandwiches in their hands! They would pay a fine into the team kitty.

'Most of the guys were good but there was always someone who tried to get one over on you. I might come back to the hotel after quarter to twelve before the curfew and someone might still be in the nightclub. But it didn't happen too often. The guys realised that if we wanted to be a professional outfit these were the rules we had to follow. But occasionally, because I would put a youngster with a senior roommate, one or two learned the ropes too well!'

It's unlikely Lloyd would have had to have been too strict with his players on the England tour, such was the high standard of their cricket. Off-spinner Roger Harper remembers how excited they were when they arrived in England. A year on from their World Cup low and things had changed significantly.

The squad was in good order, there was strength in depth throughout the line-up with quality waiting to come in should there be an injury. Richie Richardson was ready to open in place of Greenidge or Haynes; Richardson or Gus Logie would come in for any of the middle-order batsmen; the prolific Barbados keeper-batsman Thelston Payne waited patiently in the wings should Dujon become unavailable; while Walsh and Milton Small in the squad or others from outside the squad like Winston Davis or Wayne Daniel were ready to replace any of the pace bowlers. It was all looking very ominous for England.

‘The tour of England has always been very special for the West Indies,’ Harper said. ‘As soon as we arrived we could sense that everyone was keen to do well, especially the guys playing county cricket there. We were determined to ensure the West Indies won the series and won it well.’