



## CARIBBEAN CRICKET

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Cricket is like a religion in the Caribbean and for that reason the England cricket tour to the West Indies will go ahead as planned. After the build-up over the last four months, just what can the MCC expect when they arrive in the Caribbean? Will the tour proceed uninterrupted or will it be disrupted from island to island? In light of the cancellation of two-thirds of the 'B' team's tour, will the Caribbean jaunt survive?

In reality, few politicians will want to tamper with the peoples' game. With several elections in the region just around the corner, political leaders will not want to be seen as depriving the people of seeing the West Indies team trounce England.

Caribbean people are incensed at the remarks Graham Gooch is alleged to have made - that he had no regrets about playing in South Africa and that, given the same circumstances, he would do it again - and many are upset at the fact that the cricket rebels who toured South Africa with Gooch are now in the England side while the West Indies' cricketers, who committed the same offence, have been banned for life.

The Committee For the Defence of West Indies Cricket was formed in the republic of Trinidad and Tobago recently to defend West Indies' cricket against any further poaching of their players to South Africa and to boycott the West Indies games if the South African rebels were selected to play for England. Made up of political activists and the more militant trade unions, the committee was given a boost when the powerful *Trinidad Express* newspaper came out demanding that the tour be called off Bat with a 33% devaluation to contend with, few people are likely to heed the *Express*' call to forget the tour. Indeed, the *Trinidad Guardian* has not only pleaded for some restraint in the matter but has also been demanding that the tour should go ahead. In Barbados the local papers have also been urging that the tour should go ahead and in Antigua, while there was some difficulty over the Graham Gooch apology, the tour should also receive the green light.



*Clive Lloyd with Viv Richards during the 1984 Test series.*

With the present resurgence of cricketing power in Jamaica, it is hardly likely that the game will be disrupted there. Jamaica now boasts the sharpest quartet of fast bowlers in the region. Only recently, the Jamaica pacers bowled out Guyana for 41 in a premier regional competition. With the renewed interest in Jamaican cricket there is no way that the tour will be disrupted on the island, they have too much to lose.

This cricket tour is without doubt the most important in recent times for West Indies cricket, and certainly holds the key to the next decade of West Indian cricketing progress. With the retirement of Clive Lloyd, the current tour represents the most testing period of Viv Richards' captaincy. While he came through the New Zealand encounter without any scars, with England it is a much more serious matter. The last time the two sides met, the West Indies (under Clive Lloyd) made mincemeat of the Gower team, but since that series England have beaten India and humiliated the Australians. Today the England team is second only to the champions themselves.

In many ways this series is as much a challenge for West Indies cricket as it is a test of England's nerves. The Caribbean will be watching how Viv Richards' handles the pressure. There are now no fewer than five genuinely quick bowlers in the Caribbean vying to get into the West Indies next touring team. They are all eager to prove that they will be able

replacements for the likes of Holding.

The cricketing crowds in the Caribbean have been looking forward to this tour for a long time and nothing is going to cheat them out of a chance to see the side that the West Indies beat by five straight wins in England during 1984. Few people understand the importance of cricket in the lives of Caribbean people. To beat England at any time - to beat the hell out of them - is to relive the centuries of colonialism. Outsiders know little of the power of a test match in this region. To walk through the streets of Bridgetown, Kingston or Port of Spain on test match day is to see another side of Caribbean people. Ears everywhere are glued to transistors, businesses sometimes close for half a day and an entire population goes crazy over the game. South Africa to them at that time is a million miles away, especially if England has just been asked to follow on for the third time in the series. No West Indian will want to miss that feeling or the chance to see it.

Whatever the build-up to the tour, it will all only have served to create much more interest in the region and hence packed crowds can be expected. The tour itself could not have come at a better time for the regional competition is in progress and cricket interest will be extremely high. While there have been several threats to the tour, nothing will stop the series. When that 747 touches down on Caribbean soil, the cricket tour will have started in earnest.