

Ambrose could be WI trumpcard vs Pakistanis

DESPITE the bitter controversy over the standard of umpiring and the nature of the pitches towards the end of the series and a few rain-marred matches which helped some teams and handicapped others, the final verdict on the 1988 inaugural Red Stripe Cup regional tournament must be that it was if not an unqualified success, at least a vast improvement on last year's truncated Shell Shield.

That the eventual winners hailed from the territory where the sponsors have their headquarters has proved a source of pride to the jubilant Jamaicans and Prime Minister Edward Seaga who understandably has a political axe to grind — nor should anyone, least of all the disgruntled Barbadian skipper Malcolm Marshall, begrudge them their hour of glory.

After all, it has been 19 long years ago since Jamaica tasted the sweet smell of success at regional level when Easton McMorris was the Shell Shield captain way back in 1969. Until this year Jamaica languished in the cricket wilderness though they have done quite well in the limited overs series within recent years.

Healthy And Vibrant

The 1988 tournament has provided the assurance, if any was needed, that West Indian cricket remains by and large in a healthy and vibrant state — and a salient feature of the season has been some promising performances turned in by a few young batsmen and bowlers during the Red Stripe Cup series, both before and after the West Indies Test stars returned home from the tour of India.

Yet another fast bowler of distinct promise has emerged onto the stage of Caribbean cricket. He glories in the name of Elton Lindwall Curtley Ambrose — and one wonders whether with that sort of second name, his father at the time of his christening was not map-

CRICKET

By MIKE GIBBES



ping out his future career optimistically.

The lanky 6ft 7in Ambrose enjoyed a highly successful season, setting a new record for the most wickets in a West Indian season (35). He is 24 years old and bowled with fire and hostility from the opening match against Trinidad and Tobago when he was no balled for throwing by umpire Clyde Cumberbatch. Yet only occasionally is his action suspect and there is no denying his competitive spirit.

His surprise omission from the Board President's XI to play the Pakistanis in the match starting at Sabina today is really no surprise at all; it is often the practice of selectors to "hide" what they deem to be a new trumpcard from the opposing batsmen of a touring team in a minor fixture and let him loose in the upcoming Test match — so do not be shocked if Ambrose is in the WI team for the first Test at Bourda on April 2 or even in the first one-day international in Antigua on March 12.

Another young Antiguan, left-handed batsman Keith Arthurton also impressed in the tournament — winding up the season in fine style with a fine century against Guyana in the same match in which the Windies skipper Viv Richards slammed 119 as the Leewards won handsomely by an innings. Here is another player to watch for the future and Arthurton is only 23 years old.

Two Trinidad and Tobago teenagers who made their first-class debuts this year loom as stars in the making — the talented and dashing Brian Lara and leg-spinner Rajendra Dhanraj. This duo



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consistent form

were but two of a number of youth players who had outings in Cup matches before leaving for the mini-World Cup series in Australia: Jamaica's all-rounder Jimmy Adams and off-spinner Nehemiah Perry; batsmen Darwin Telemaque of the Windwards and Roland Holder of Barbados were others.

Looking briefly at the performance of the six teams, the new champions Jamaica owed their triumph to teamwork and the fact that their home matches coincided with the return of pacemen Patrick Patterson, Courtney Walsh, Mike Holding and wicketkeeper Jeff Dujon to the ranks. Though soundly beaten by the Leewards, the Jamaicans scored heavily at Sabina and Dujon, opener Wayne Lewis and Delroy Morgan all hit hundreds at the right time.

Fragile Middle Batting

Leg-spinner Robert Haynes gave good support to the pace attack while caretaker captain Marlon Tucker claimed 11 wickets in the crucial match against the Bajans which broke Marshall's spirit.

The Leewards lost by a narrow two-wicket margin to Trinidad and Tobago in their first match — and trailed the lacklustre Windwards on first innings but once their stars came home from

India, they went from strength to strength and fully deserved their second place in the Cup standings, edging out Larry Gomes's side by four points and wrapping up their programme in fine style by whipping Barbados.

Barbados, as ever a threat in the tournament, conceded first innings points to Trinidad and Tobago and then mauled the Windwards and Guyana but their act came apart in Jamaica, courtesy Tucker — and once again their fragile middle order (Thelston Payne excepted) let them down badly (shades of the past when titans like Sobers, Nurse and Lashley were in their heyday!).

Both Bat And Ball

Marshall had his days with both bat and ball but seemed more concerned with shooting his mouth off in condemnation of the pitches and the Jamaican umpiring than with winning matches and motivating his young players — and the Bajans's eventual fourth place in the table smacks of poetic justice.

Guyana had an awful season: partly because there was little support for Clyde Butts and also because injury sidelined star batsman Carl Hooper. But they had the consolation of prolific form by opener Clayton Lambert who scored more than 500 runs in belligerent fashion while Rabindranath Seeram was also very consistent.

The Windwards finished in the cellar spot; paceman Winston Davis lacked real support except from the medium-paced Desmond Collymore and only the veteran Lockhart Sebastien showed fight with the bat.

Elsewhere, I have analysed the 1988 performance of Trinidad and Tobago — but it must be stressed again that their batsmen lack the predilection for large scores, preferably centuries, the stuff of which cricket champions are made. Young Lara played a brilliant knock of 92 against Barbados but of the others only Ken Williams, especially in the final match with 77 and 43 and to a lesser

extent Philip Simmons showed the capacity to dominate the bowling. The 21-year-old paceman Ian Bishop improved immensely this year and has added a yard of pace. Along with Tony Gray, who bowled listlessly at times, this is an encouraging sign for the future. We now have a pair of genuine quickies to spearhead the attack.

Off-spinner Ranjie Nanan enjoyed a rejuvenation this year and was back among the wickets but selection blunders (notably the inclusion of Harold Joseph) coupled with the utter failure of Clint Yorke and Aneil Rajah to get a decent score, put intolerable pressure on the bowlers — and once more Trinidad and Tobago flattered to deceive in their quest for Cup honours.

The Pakistan tour is about to start and the selectors, based on what they saw in the regional tournament, must tackle the serious task of choosing the strongest team to oppose Imran Khan's side in the three Test matches.

It would be folly to imagine that the advantage of playing at home automatically gives the West Indies a guarantee of victory. This series will be a tough one. Here is my squad of 16 possibles to do battle with Pakistan this year: Openers — Greenidge, Haynes, Simmons, Best; middle batsmen — Richards, Richardson, Logie, Dujon (keeper), Hooper, Arthurton; fast bowlers — Marshall, Walsh, Patterson, Ambrose, Gray; slow bowlers — Clyde Butts.

For all his brilliance as a fieldsman per se, Roger Harper, vice-captain or not, does not get my nod nor does Winston Benjamin at the moment.