

# THE ARRIVAL OF SOBERS

By HORACE HARRAGIN

WEST INDIES' oldest adversaries, England, due to visit in 1953-54, had by now learned well about what the quality of their teams for tours to the Caribbean should be.

They paid dearly for sending a less than efficient side in 1947-48 and had a rude awakening when the new generation of West Indian players got going on the true pitches of the region.

With the "Ashes" back in their possession, England's confidence and optimism about their chances in the series could not have been at a higher peak.

They had beaten Australia in England the previous summer in what was considered the "Coronation Series" after a long drought of 19 years against their arch rivals.

## The Decline

Success was achieved of a combination of things, none more visible than the decline of some of Australia's leading players like Bill Johnston and Doug Ring.

The main reason for England's good fortune, however, was the emergence of some remarkably talented players, particularly two young fast bowlers and a superb middle-order batsman.

In Fred Trueman and Brian Statham, England had at last discovered two fast bowlers to rank with the very greatest the country had ever produced in any era.

In Peter May, they had unearthed a very special batsman to be classed with the best in cricket's history.

## Opposite Number

But all this could not have brought the results they had wished unless they also possessed a top class leader. And in Len Hutton, the first professional to captain the country, they had, indeed, found just the man.

A hard nosed competitor from Yorkshire, Hutton had squeezed every ounce of blood from the Aussies the previous summer and his opposite number, Lindsay Hassett never found the answer to Hutton's success.

It was Hutton who was named to lead England to the West Indies, and the team under his charge was probably the strongest touring side ever to come to the Caribbean.

As it turned out, however, England not only travelled with top class players in every sense, they also toured with a few hardened "games masters" who made life very uncomfortable for some umpires and the opposing players.

Rared in the wilds of county cricket, some of the players created moments of uneasiness on the field and the West Indian crowds came to realise their players were up against uncompromising Test stalwarts.

But good these Englishmen were, indeed. They had allround strength to spare and had it not been a top class West Indian side,

England would have walked away with the series.

It didn't start all that good for the tourists, however. In the first Test in Jamaica, the West Indian batsmen came off smartly, reaching 417 in their first innings, hometown player, J.K. Holt getting 90.

Of significance was the recall of George Headley at the age of 45, a useless selection and certainly one that kept out a young player deserving of a chance. Headley hardly looked the part scoring 16.

Statham announced his presence to the series with four for 90 and whatever easiness England may have read into the pitch seemed to dissipate when they fell for 170, Ramadhin and Valentine spinning them silly and Gerry Gomez taking three for 16 in nine excellent overs.

Weekes played a belligerent knock of 90 not out when Jeff Stollmeyer refused to force the follow on, a not too popular decision with the crowd.

West Indies reached 209 for six declared and the most unlikely of bowlers, Esmond Kentish did the rest.

## Fast Bowler

Kentish, at the age of 38 and playing his second Test match, took five for 49 as England totalled 316. Willie Watson with 116, Peter May and Hutton batted well but could not save the 140-run defeat.

Fast bowler Kentish, when 32, played his first Test in the 1947-48 series.

The teams arrived in Barbados for the second Test with varying considerations, but Hutton was not concerned about this team. He had class players and they would come good in due course.

When he lost the toss again, however, he must have had certain misgivings about having to bat last on what was regarded as the

best "spinner's pitch" in the Caribbean.

A great innings of 220 by Clyde Walcott highlighted the early proceedings of the game. For six and a half hours he plundered the English bowling as West Indies reached 383.

Bruce Pairaudeau scored an attractive 71 and Denis Atkinson got 53, while off-spinner Jim Laker claimed four for 81 and Statham took three for 90.

## Follow-On

Ramadhin again got at the batsmen from early in their innings and despite a stubborn 72 from Hutton, they were routed for 181 with Ram taking four for 50.

Valentine supported well with three for 61.

But Stollmeyer again discarded his follow on option. With

success behind him this time, there was less objection from the Barbadians. Holt's 166 and Worrell's 76 not out set West Indies up on 292 for two declared, leaving England 495 to win.

They stumbled halfway and lost by 181 runs. Compton (93), Hutton (77), Graveney (64) and May (62) sent them off well and at one time they were 258 for three. But Ramadhin again stepped in and broke the back in the innings.

England arrived in British Guiana two Tests down and a far distance from what one believed would be the result of the series at that stage. Even the most optimistic West Indian supporter had not bargained for so much success so soon.

But England batted

first at Bourda Oval and got the one big innings that had hoped for. It came from Hutton himself, who hit 169, the platform for a total of 435. Ramadhin again bowled beautifully, taking six for 116 from 67 overs.

Then came Statham with seam bowling of the highest order. He sent back Worrell, Stollmeyer and Walcott for 16 runs from which West Indies never recovered. Weekes made a great 94 but Statham got support from spinners, Laker and Lock later on and West Indies were dismissed for 251.

Hutton, unlike Stollmeyer, enforced the follow on. A bottle-throwing incident followed the dismissal of the B.G. wicket-keeper/batsman, Cliff McWatt.

Holt, who batted at number nine in the first innings when Worrell opened, played a fine knock of 64 in the second. He put on 79 for the first wicket with Stollmeyer and the recovery seemed secured. But the England all-round bowling strength was to show in full force and West Indies could only reach 256. England hit off the required 75 for victory for the loss of May's wicket.

The series was now poised in a most intriguing manner when the teams arrived at Port-of-Spain. But the matting wicket was again to prove the only winner of the game.

It was one of the greatest batting exhibitions ever witnessed in any Test in history and given the players on stage, it was the perfect classroom ex-

perience for any young spectator fortunate to the present.

## Answer Back

West Indies batted first and scored 681 for eight declared. Weekes made a breathtaking 206, Worrell scored the most elegant 167 and Walcott punished the bowlers for a staggering 124. Trueman, Statham, Bailey and Lock all scored bowlers' centuries.

But England replied with equal emphasis. May played one of the finest knocks ever seen at Queen's Park Oval, getting 135, Compton showed his remarkable flexibility in making 133 and Graveney's 92 was a charming exhibition of strokeplay. England scored 537.

There was nothing left in the game with West Indies reaching 212 for four declared and England batting last totalling 98 for three. So the tourists would have to find the

answer back in Jamaica if they were to save the series.

In what has been described as a great exhibition of "fast leg break bowling," Trevor Bailey picked up seven for 34 in 36 overs when the last Test began to virtually put England level in the series. West Indies were routed for 139 despite a brave 50 from Walcott.

When Hutton took over with a magnificent 205, pacing England to 414, all doubts disappeared. A young left arm spinner making his debut for West Indies, claimed four wickets for 75 runs. His name was Gary Sobers.

## Winning Run

The great up hill battle for West Indies, facing a deficit of 275 runs, did not start well. Holt and Weekes were back in the pavilion with the score on 38 and even the splendid efforts of Walcott (116) and Stollmeyer (64) could not alter the inevitable.

West Indies were dismissed for 346 and when May hit the winning run with the score on 72 for one, England had staged a remarkable recovery to draw a series that seemed to have been lost half way in the rubber.

But England had come with a powerful team and would go on to possess the world's best Test side in the next three years while West Indies kept on rebuilding, seeking the key players of tomorrow.

One such player had already arrived in Sobers and as time would reveal, his place in the halls of cricket would be an honoured one, a place reserved for the very best the game has ever produced.