

Six Of One, Half A Dozen Of The Other

Anyone who loves cricket feels nothing but sadness at the state of play in the West Indies - and it's getting worse. The Test team touring England are not just a shadow of their former selves, they're a shadow of the present, with half a team at the IPL. Given England's travails against spin it is a great shame that Sunil Narine, the mystery off-spinner, will not be arriving until the one-dayers. England's batsmen may be relieved, but it makes a mockery of the series. **Nick Sadleir**, who was at the Barbados Test against Australia, before heading to the IPL himself, casts an eye over the strengths and weaknesses of what is left and suggests that England will face some tough individual examinations but collectively should roll them over as Australia did.

BY: NICK SADLEIR



Left Top:

Kirk Edwards has shown patience.

Left Bottom:

But too often Chanderpaul is left alone.

Kemar Roach, keeping the flame alive with genuine fire. (All AFP/Getty)

After an embarrassing whitewash at the hands of Pakistan in the UAE and a mediocre visit to Sri Lanka, England will be delighted to be away from the spinning surfaces of Asia and back on home turf for their next Test series – a three match affair against an IPL-depleted West Indies that begins at Lord's on 17 May.

The Windies may have the better of the old history books between these sides (WI have won 53 Tests while England have won only 43, with 49 draws) but that has not been the case in recent years, when the once-mighty West Indies can count on one hand the number Test matches won against the major Test playing nations.

The Windies have won only two of their last 24 Tests against England and on their most recent visits to these shores in 2009 and 2004 they were efficiently clean-swept 2-0 and 4-0 respectively. With as many as six quality West Indian players unavailable for Test selection due to their involvement in the IPL, the side's prospects in England look bleak. Marlon Samuels was a seventh but agreed to return after being named in the 15-man squad, a reutum perhaps eased by his desperate form for Pune Warriors.

"Don't cast a clout 'til May is out" and the beautifully hand-stitched Duke cricket ball load things further towards England. The Duke is used only in England and can be prone to swinging around like a banana on moist wickets and under heavy skies early in the season which, needless to say, is unlikely to suit a West Indies batting order that has made a name for itself in its ability to self-combust in even the most benign batting conditions.

But the world number-one side would be foolish to write off these visitors as mere fodder served up to prepare them for the real battle against number-two (only by virtue of having played fewer Tests, the two sides are actually tied on 116 points in the ICC rankings) South Africa later in the summer.



Below:

He has his detractors but Darren Sammy is a muscular presence.

Right:

Chanderpaul celebrates his hundred on the second day of the first Test vs Australia, but he could not hold back the tide.

Top Right:

Marlon Samuels, the only West Indies player at the IPL to return for the Test series. But then he wasn't setting the world on fire for Pune Warriors. (All AFP/Getty)

Whilst not managing to actually win a Test and in the end succumbing two-nil in the three Test series, they have shown not just flashes but actual sustained periods of high quality cricket against an Australian outfit that, under coach Mickey Arthur, thrashed India Down Under all winter long.

Darren Sammy's place in the Windies starting XI was by no means safe – his record is no better than some very ordinary all-rounders - when he was named temporary captain in October 2010, but few can dispute his assertiveness as a leader who has instilled something of a fighting spirit in this side. Whilst he will never be a star cricketer himself, Sammy plays hard, believes in himself and his side and is the kind of aggressive captain West Indies has longed for.

In the first Test against Australia at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados,

the Windies put up a substantial 449/9 (Chanderpaul 103*) declared and then had the Aussies in a spot of bother at 133/4. With the wicket starting to take turn one begun to fancy a famous home victory but without a quality spinner (the West Indies have one in the sensational Sunil Narine, but he chose the IPL over national duty), Australia managed 406/9 before cheekily declaring themselves.

With the wind knocked out of their sails, a typically calamitous 'Calypso collapse' ensued shortly thereafter as their innings subsided before even a foundation could be laid. With all the hard work undone, they stumbled, in what has become typical fashion, to a miserable 148 and Australia chased up 192 for victory by the narrow margin of only three wickets in fading light on final evening.

At the second Test at the Queen's Park





“Chanderpaul’s runs against Australia took him back to the top of the ICC player rankings for the first time in three years.”

Oval in Port of Spain, Trinidad, a potentially riveting finish was denied by the loss of a day and a half to rain. After being set 214 for victory when a sporting Michael Clarke declared eight wickets down, the Windies were 53/2 (11 overs) when the rain came again. As is clearly his style, Sammy went for the win, promoting the quick-scoring Kieran Powell to open and then going in himself at first drop and smashing a quick-fire 30 not out from 26 balls.

So Sammy’s leadership style should result in some exciting Test cricket, if his side can get close to England. Chanderpaul

remains a world-class batsman – he followed up his unbeaten ton in the first Test with a knock of 94 on a treacherous deck in the second. His 68 and 69 in the third Test took him back to the top of the ICC player rankings (for what they are worth) for the first time in three years. Kemar Roach, now 23, has matured from just a young bright hope that bowls at over 90mph to a consistently dangerous bowler with far more up his sleeve than just pace. If there is a West Indian bowler that reminds you of the former greats who ran through England batting line-ups – although he is only six



foot tall – it is this man.

Other players worth learning more about include Darren Bravo, who has not lived up to hopes that he may be the next Brian Lara, but has rediscovered some batting form; Kirk Edwards, who averages over 50 from seven Tests and Narsingh Deonarine, who has shown that he can anchor an innings along with Chanderpaul – something the side has missed since the demise of Ramnaresh Sarwan. Far too often have we seen the sad sight of Chanderpaul fighting alone while his accomplices fall like ninepins.

In the bowling department the slinky Fidel Edwards might enjoy the English conditions if he can bowl disciplined lines, while spinner Shane Shillingford's illegal action has been remedied and he is capable of tying up an end, albeit without any terrifying threat. His 10-219 in 81.5 overs in the lost third Test, showed his ability. Ravi Rampaul lacks pace and height but makes up for it with hustle and bustle. Captain Darren Sammy is pedestrian but determined with the ball and when he walks out to bat, you're unlikely to switch off.

After the three-Test series, the West Indies will stay in England for three ODI's and a Twenty20, where they are far more likely succeed than in the Test arena. While they are a Test team on the up and will likely win some sessions, perhaps even some days, in this series England should outclass them in every department.

But though the Windies succumbed to

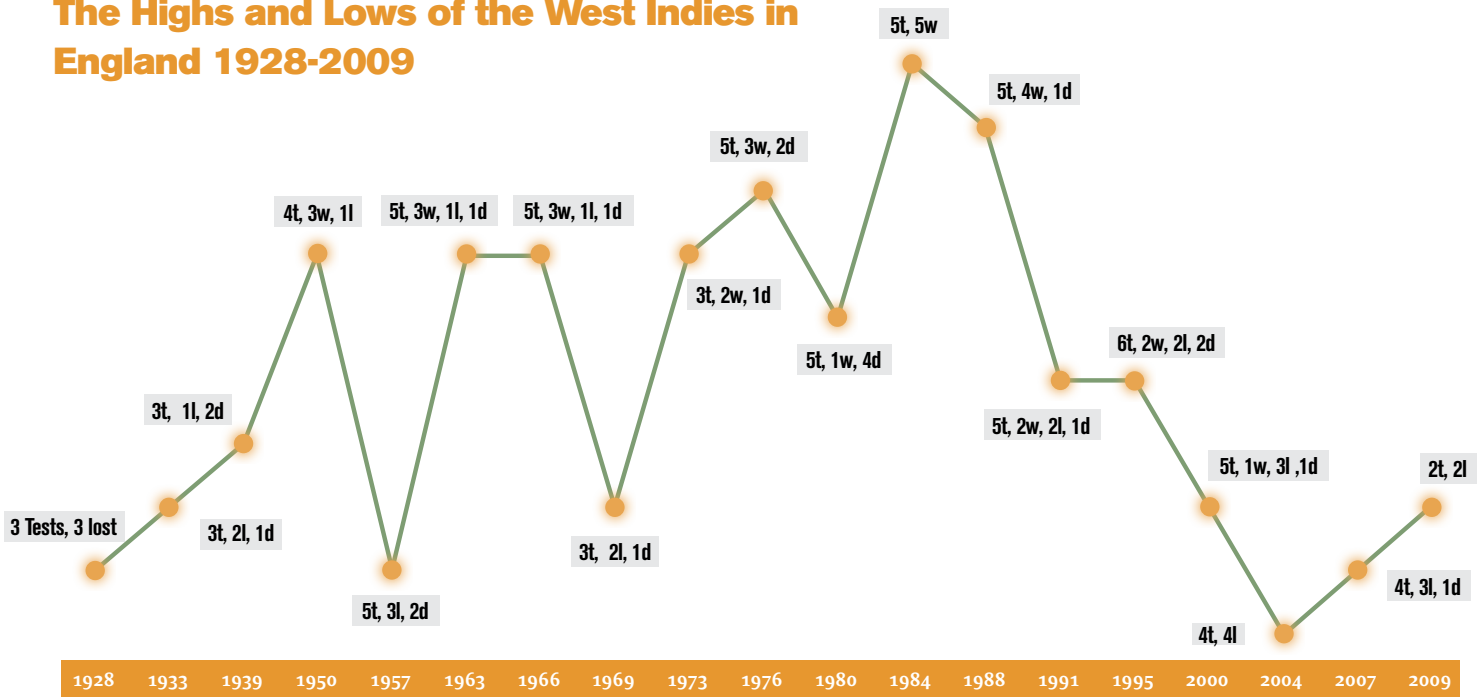
Australia in this recent Test series they drew both the five-match ODI series (including a humdinger of a tied match) and the two-match Twenty20 series. Certainly the shorter form suits them more.

Furthermore it is possible that - after serious negotiations that included intervention from the Jamaican Prime Minister – even Chris Gayle may be making a comeback present for the shorter stuff (see pages 18-21). It will be interesting to see which other IPL players will be called up along with him. A full strength West Indies would give England a more than just a good run for their money.

The Six West Indians in the IPL

- Chris Gayle
- Dwayne Bravo
- Kieron Pollard
- Sunil Narine
- Andre Russell
- Kevon Cooper

The Highs and Lows of the West Indies in England 1928-2009





Left:

Shane Shillingford, a reliable off-spinner but not as mysterious as Sunil Narine.

Right:

Chanderpaul on the attack.

Top Right:

Darren Sammy acclimatises to English conditions at Hove.

(All AFP/Getty)



Nick Sadleir finds there is still some life and real love of cricket at the Kensington Oval, Barbados

Photography: Kristin Weixelbaumer

The good crowds at the opening Test between the West Indies and Australia recently showed that, at least on this island, support for Test cricket is alive and well.

Beautifully revamped for the 2007 World Cup – the final was held here, as was the 2010 World Twenty20 final – it boasts top-notch facilities without having lost a sense of its 130-year history. It is the region's premier ground and the fact that it is on the paradise island of Barbados means it also attracts great throngs of foreign supporters. They may not have the Barmy Army but hundreds of Australians in their yellow vests and cork hats decorated the Party Stand – a Caribbean invention that is so alcohol fuelled it would be sure to give a UK Health and Safety inspector a triple bypass.

The rest of the ground is more about serious cricket viewing. Old men clutch radios to their ears to hear the local commentators' take on the state of play, while grandmothers sip quietly on tins of Banks beer. Here we found real fans with a deep-rooted passion for the game and for their team that so often lets them down.

There was no chanting of abuse at players, no fist-cuffs in the crowd, no invading the pitch, no army of yellow-vested security teams micro-policing the crowd for misdemeanours as criminal as bouncing around a beach ball or making snakes from empty plastic beer cups (surely this helps to clean up?).

It felt like if the team could string some success together the support is there.

