

Memories of Clive Lloyd's Captaincy

Unlike Sir Frank Worrell, Clive Lloyd has not yet received the credit he deserves for his extraordinary achievement of building a world champion West Indies cricket team that dominated world cricket for fifteen consecutive years. In the beginning, Clive, like Sir Frank, was not universally accepted by the Caribbean people as the right man for the job. But he silenced most of his critics by putting together a diverse collection of talented individuals who lacked focus and discipline and then transforming them into a highly professional and all-conquering unit that became one of the most successful teams in the history of sport.

Clive was not a show-off. He was a quiet achiever. Perhaps his best asset was his knowledge and understanding of his players. He knew how to motivate them and what buttons to press to get the best out of them, particularly in tough situations. Ian Chappell the great Australian captain once told me that any captain can learn how to set a field, when to change the bowling or how to write out the batting order, but in his opinion the most important job in captaincy is motivation of the players. And Vince Lombardi the great American football coach once said, "Coaches (captains) who can outline plays on a blackboard are dime a dozen. The ones who win get inside their players and motivate."

Clive had a lot of ability and skill in his side but he knew that talent alone would not be enough to transform his side into a champion team. He would need other things in his change package: a clear vision, strategic thinking, good preparation, first-class leadership, great teamwork, good motivation, strong self-discipline, good mental control and high standards of execution on the field.

Good leaders usually build their leadership on two strong pillars. They create an agenda for change in which they articulate their vision for the team, and design an intelligent strategy to achieve that vision. Then, they put together a unified and highly motivated network of people to implement that agenda. Clive followed that blueprint.

He talked to me about his agenda for change over a few drinks in a Melbourne pub in 1976 soon after our disappointing Test series against Australia. He showed me his vision of what he wanted his team to achieve and become – the best team in the world for the next ten years - and he explained his strategic plan for realizing that vision. He then told me that he would search the Caribbean for players with the right stuff and would turn them into a highly motivated and disciplined group, committed to implementing that agenda.

To reach his standards of excellence he wanted his side to become the fittest team, physically and mentally, the best fielding team, the best bowling team, and the best batting team. And he hoped to become the most successful West Indies captain. He said he would look for players who were hardworking, enthusiastic, and professional and stressed that his top priorities would be self-discipline, self-motivation and mental toughness. Once those things were established he would execute his plan in a firm

manner, using a quartet of aggressive fast bowlers to “hunt in a pack” against opposing batsmen.

In addition to creating a good team-image, he would do everything possible to eradicate insularity, the curse of West Indies teams and West Indies cricket. He would get rid of selfishness and petty jealousies, and help players to trust and respect each other. To improve teamwork he would build good relationships among the players to create feelings of belonging, importance, and comradeship. He would then ensure that every team member knows his role and understands the importance of good preparation, high standards and good execution. And most importantly, he would convince team members that they were all leaders on the field.

It is fair to say that Clive achieved those aims and objectives that became the building blocks of his team’s amazing success.

As far as I can remember as manager of the team during the Kerry Packer series in Australia, the pursuit of excellence, the goal of being the best team in the world, and the challenge to improve on the achievements of the Worrell and Sobers world champion team were primary motivating forces. But, the most powerful driving forces came from within the players – survival, hunger for success, a positive self-image, strong self- belief, pride in performance, a healthy level of self-confidence, joy and passion for the game and last but by no means least, the immense pride of being West Indians.

The recipe for West Indies success in cricket is not that different from the recipes of other champion teams around the world. Recent stories have suggested otherwise.

Bill Russell the great American basketball player who played for the most successful basketball team in the history of the NBA once said, “The main difference between great teams and good teams is not physical skill but mental toughness. That is how well a team can keep its collective wits under pressure. Teams that can do this under the greatest pressure will win most of the time. Heart in champions has to do with the depth of their motivation and persistence, how well their minds and bodies react to pressure. It is concentration – that is being able to do the best under the maximum stress, fatigue and pain.”

When I was studying medicine at Edinburgh University in Scotland one of the professors warned us not to percuss our own ideas into the patient’s chest. If we did so we would run the risk of making the wrong diagnosis and prescribing the wrong treatment. He encouraged us to go to the patient with a clear mind, take a good history and do a thorough examination to get the facts about the case and then make a diagnosis. The same principle applies to cricket so we must guard against people who percuss their personal and narrow ideas into the history of West Indies cricket.

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