

# Coaching in the West Indies



Specialist batting coach **Toby Radford**, who has headed training camps for the ECB, is faced with a fascinating dilemma. Having coached England captain Andrew Strauss and West Indies leader Darren Sammy, he won't really know who to approach first when their three-match Test series begins at Lord's on May 17.

Radford recently returned to England after 16 months in Barbados where the West Indies Cricket Board assigned him to identify and develop the next crop of Caribbean international stars.

Four have already broken into the first team, and five others are queuing up in what is perceived as the West Indies second team, which is truly the best testament anyone can have for doing a first-class job.

Left-handed opening batsman Kieran Powell, aged 21, thanked Radford in an email after he had scored a brilliant 81 against India in Mumbai a few weeks ago, having already written on the Welshman's website *"Working with Toby has been an absolute pleasure and honour, as he helped me to develop my game in terms of my mental approach, physical attributes, and understanding of how to keep my emotions in check in difficult situations."*

So it comes as no surprise to learn that several West Indies batsmen have contacted Radford with a view to landing in England early for him to spend time with them before the Test matches begin.

Whether he'll be available will depend on demands from players he is currently working with across the UK, and from championship county clubs who might call on him to support their own staff.

Radford says: *"It's very exciting. I'm thrilled that the West Indian lads are doing so well. They worked hard on drills and new ideas, and are now using them to expand on their enormous flair and natural talent."*

*"With a big increase in young people playing basketball and others beamed*

*in from the United States, cricket has been challenged in a new way, and there is a desperate need to act positively to resist this challenge and maintain cricket as its principal game.*

*"Like the ECB did several years ago, the WICB is now meeting this challenge by pouring a lot of money into grassroots cricket to attract more young people. There is also a greater awareness about the need for more coach education if they are to achieve any decent level of success.*

*"Coaching standards need to be raised at all age groups, and it's commendable that the WICB is now keen to establish its own Level Three qualification.*

*"As it stands, coaches are required to travel to Australia or Dubai to take their Level Three examination, which is hardly right for a leading cricket nation.*

*"A good sign that the WICB is taking greater interest in coaching was emphasised recently when first team coach Ottis Gibson ran a fast-bowling workshop in Barbados which coaches from every territory attended."*

Before taking a microscopic look at how Radford went about his role in the Caribbean, it would be good to know

how he arrived there, and page five of Andrew Strauss' autobiography is a suitable place to start.

Strauss had been dropped from the 2007 tour of Sri Lanka, and it was clear to everyone in world cricket that repairs were rapidly needed to his technique for him recapture his England place so that he could go on and fulfil his potential.

Radford was first team coach at Middlesex at the time, so they met for one-to-one batting sessions at the club's Finchley Indoor School in North London, often as early as eight on a cold winter's morning with frost thick on the ground.

Recalling his problems, Strauss wrote in his book: *"Cricket-wise, I am in a difficult mental state. I have done some good work with Toby Radford (the Middlesex coach), getting further across, moving early, and making sure that I don't get my front foot too far across..."*

Strauss, a consummate professional, listened intently and worked hard to correct his faults, and once normal service was resumed his confidence soared, he returned to playing on auto-pilot, and went on to establish himself as the best opening batsman in the world.

Radford in the meantime pulled up stumps with Middlesex, having steered them to a dramatic Twenty20 triumph

over Kent, and was quickly head-hunted by the West Indies Cricket Board to prepare a blueprint for the future of Caribbean cricket and simultaneously take control as Director of the newly-installed Sagacor High Performance Centre in Barbados where 15 of the region's most talented players would gather for six months of intensive coaching and training under his supervision.

All were aged between 19 and 23 and had shown enough skills to assure the West Indies hierarchy, including chief executive Ernest Hilaire, that with the best tutoring, discipline, and encouragement they could develop into the next generation of Caribbean superstars and restore the fame and glory to these proud cricket islands that had been lost in recent years.

With Radford so closely available it was no surprise that many out-of-form senior West Indian batsmen also knocked on his door and asked for help in one-to-one net sessions under a scorching sun, unlike those memorable chilly mornings with Strauss.

As he proved during his time with Middlesex, a key factor with Radford was his inherent ability to identify quickly where a player was going wrong and then have the knowledge and skill to rectify the problem.

Imaginative practice drills, video-analysis, casual chats, strict time-keeping and above all else an immense passion for his work embodied Radford's approach to a job that his young West Indian players admired and admitted that they had never experienced before.

After 16 months of having optimistically put the wheels back on the wobbly Caribbean cart, Radford returned to England last May to specialise as a batting coach, working privately with professional players, and supporting county clubs that required someone with his proven experience and expertise.

Nottinghamshire's astute director of cricket Mick Newell is using Radford at the moment to work with several batsmen in support of his high quality coaching staff.

Recalling his time in the West Indies, where the players were keen to learn, and had an excellent work ethic, Radford said: *"They enjoyed working on technique and analysing it on video. Many had never seen themselves on screen before, and they loved it. They soaked it up like a sponge!*

*"Like all West Indian cricketers down the years they had great flair and innate ability, and it was crucial that my input didn't stifle that flair and everything that came naturally to them.*

*"My job was to help them understand their own game and how to control it. As their knowledge grew they even began to coach themselves, and I could become less instructive.*

*"For many of them, I became a 'sounding board' and a mentor, though for technical and tactical needs I remained a second set of eyes.*

*"It was paramount for me to create a professional environment at the HPC, particularly as players had come there from all over the Caribbean, including many from poor backgrounds who had received limited coaching, funding, and support.*

*"Now, as full-time professionals being paid by the West Indies Cricket Board, it was imperative that they conducted*



Toby steered Middlesex to Twenty20 glory in 2008

themselves in a truly professional manner. Any player who arrived late was immediately fined 20 US dollars. They hated dipping into their pockets. And they hated me for making them do it!

“But they learnt quickly and lateness lasted no longer than a fortnight. Even the most dilatory player suddenly turned up early at the nets, for one-to-one specialised coaching, and classroom sessions.

“I knew it was vital that preparation and planning should play a major part in the squad’s approach and outlook. Everything about them had to be professional! It was my key message!

“To be honest, they knuckled down brilliantly, and their massive commitment was hugely rewarded with two successful tours. The HPC beat Canada and Bermuda in a three-way tournament of one-day matches in Toronto, and followed it up by winning all six one-day matches against the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, and the West Indies FIRST TEAM in Dubai.”

With a justified smile Radford continued: “It’s been great for me to see four HPC players already break into the West Indies national side. Devon Thomas, Kieran Powell, Nkrumah Bonner and Brandon Bess all played in Test matches



recently and I’m pretty sure several others will be joining them soon.

“Kieran hit 81 in a recent Test against India, which was a great reward for his practice ethic and determination. He sent me a text to thank me for all the hard work that we had done together, which was terrific of him.

“Since returning to England, it’s been good to continue working with the WICB who asked me to write programmes for training camps for the HPC, and their

Under 19 squad, and senior men’s and women’s sides.”

During his “fantastic” 16 months in the Caribbean, multi-tasking Radford was asked to help off-spinner Shane Shillingford who had been banned from international cricket after being called for an illegal action in a Test match in Sri Lanka.

Radford added: “After two months of helping Shane to remodel his action I travelled with him to Perth for a vital

One-to-one net sessions under a scorching sun, unlike the chilly mornings with Andrew Strauss





Andrew Strauss and Devon Thomas

re-test under International Cricket Council rules, which he passed, so the ban was lifted and he returned to the Test team.



Radford helped Shane Shillingford remodel his action and return to Test cricket

"I also very much enjoyed the opportunity to work with front-line West Indies batsmen like Ramnaresh Sarwan, Adrian Barath, Kirk Edwards, who's doing exceptionally well, and Darren Sammy their captain, who's a very likeable person.

"West Indies come to England for a Test series in May and a number of batsmen have already asked me if they can travel over early so that they can continue to work with me and prepare for the big matches, which is a terrific compliment."

Radford's undoubted loyalty clash would be made even worse should his prodigy Steven Finn open England's attack against his West Indian prodigy Kieran Powell.

Finn was just 13 when Radford identified him as a bowler with immense potential and literally crossed the boundary line during a youth regional match at Oundle School to sign him for the Middlesex Academy, and then continued to monitor his progress closely as he graduated through the club's youth sides to the Second Eleven and eventually the championship side.

Radford spent a whole winter at the Academy re-modelling Finn's bowling action when he was 16 and helped him to rise smoothly through the range of Young England sides before he reached the top and achieved his dream of breaking into the Test team.

After making his England debut, Finn kindly stated: *"Having worked with Toby since I was 13 years of age, I have been able to relate to him on a*

*professional and personal basis. His astute technical understanding of the game helped me to call on him regularly throughout my early career and to build a strong base on which I can rely now."*



Radford identified Steven Finn as a bowler with immense potential at the tender age of 13

There can be no doubt that Radford learnt as much from coaching in the unique West Indian cricket environment as the talented young players learnt from him and his fresh ideas and disciplines.

He said: "Everyone in the Caribbean is deeply passionate and opinionated about its cricket, not least the immigration officers who greet you at the airport, and taxi drivers who rush you to your resort!

"They all follow cricket closely and critically and enjoy telling you who should be in, and who should be out, of the national team.

"It's a vibrant cricket culture that has no equal in the world, and I'm very lucky and grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of it, and to have worked with such talented and pleasant young players in what was an amazing experience." □