

Glory Gardens 6

Blaze of Glory

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Cricket Commentary

About the Author

Also by Bob Cattell
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About the Book

Glory Gardens C. C. are Barbados bound for the cricket tour of a lifetime. Having begged, scrimped and saved for months they've finally got the cash together to take the team to the sunny Carribean. Playing the top teams from the island, they find cricketing West Indian style rather tricky. What with rock-hard pitches and startlignly fast bowlers, if they don't seriously improve their form, it looks as if the Glory Gardens' players may have finally met their match ...

Blaze
of
GLORY

BOB CATTELL

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With thanks to Danial Khalid

Chapter One

MARTY RACED IN and bowled the first ball of the game. It was fast and short. A bouncer. The batsman leaned inside the line and hooked savagely.

We watched as the ball flew high off the top edge of the bat. It was going straight down Jacky's throat at long-leg. A wicket from the first ball, I thought; it was going to be a dream start to the tour. Jacky stood and waited just inside the boundary. The ball seemed to reach him more quickly than he expected. He tried to readjust as it hit his hands but it burst through his fingers and bounced over the rope for four. Marty groaned and sank to his knees in disappointment.

Jacky turned to pick up the ball; he bent down then he stopped and looked at his right hand. Immediately he turned and walked towards the pavilion. What was going on? We all watched him. "What's the matter, Jacky?" shouted Frankie. "It's a bit early for a drinks break."

Jacky didn't say a word. He held up his right hand towards us. The middle finger was sticking out backwards at right angles to the others. It looked disgusting.

"He's broken it," said Marty.

I couldn't believe it. After all the struggles to get Glory Gardens to Barbados: raising the money; persuading our parents; arranging the games - and now, after one ball of our first game, it looked as if Jacky's tour was already over.



*Back row: Jacky, Marty, Clive, Cal, Mack, Matthew,
Front row: Ohbert, Azzie, Erica, Hooker, Frankie, Tylan, Jo*

That's Jacky in the top left-hand corner of the picture - it was taken just before the game started. With Marty, Jacky makes up our opening bowling attack - so he's a really important member of the team. The other bowlers are Erica, me and the spinners, Cal and Tylan. I'm Hooker Knight, captain of Glory Gardens and the team's top all-rounder - although Erica and Cal are pretty useful at both batting and bowling, too.

The batting specialists are Matthew, who opens with Cal, and Glory Gardens' two class stroke-makers, Clive and Azzie. Frankie's our wicket-keeper, Mack's our star fielder and Ohbert is our specialist number 12 and all round special case. You'll see what I mean soon enough. Finally there's Jo, Frankie's sister, who is sitting on the right of the bottom row. She and Frankie don't just look different, they're complete opposites in absolutely every way. Jo's our scorer, team secretary and one of the main reasons we're here. She organises us, you see, and Glory Gardens takes an awful lot of organising.

But I'd better go right back to the very beginning.

Talk of a tour to Barbados started at the end of last season. At first we thought it was a joke and hardly anyone took it seriously because under-13s teams just don't go on tours to Barbados ... and anyway we didn't have any money. The people who were doing all the talking were Frankie and Clive.

Frankie's good at talking but, if you ask him to *do* anything, you've got to be a super-optimist to think it will happen. Clive's not exactly the most reliable person in the team, either. He's always late, especially for net practice. Clive's one of those really lucky people who are brilliant at sport without even trying but sometimes he forgets he's playing for a team instead of just for Clive da Costa. That's why he's not always very popular.

So, with Frankie and Clive in charge, none of the rest of us were getting too excited about Barbados. But, for once, they both persisted. Frankie wrote to Thompson Gale in Barbados. Thompson plays for Griffiths Hall, the top school team on the island - he's one of their demon fast bowlers. We came up against him and the Griffiths Hall team in our 'World Cup' tournament last summer. We just beat them in the final in one of the greatest games of cricket ever played.

Last season was brilliant for Glory Gardens. First we won the North and East County Under-13s League. Then we clinched the 'World Cup' against loads of 'international' teams. And, finally, right at the end of the season we went to Edgbaston and triumphed in the national Champions League competition over top opposition from all round the country.

You should have seen the local paper that week. The headline was "*Glory Gardens - National Champs*" and there was a whole page about our famous victory. It began: "*Two years ago Glory Gardens Cricket Club didn't even exist. Then a group of young cricketers decided it was time to form their own club. They named it after Glory Gardens*

recreation ground where they'd first played together. And now, two years on, they are champions of England."

It was on the television news, too. And everyone was talking about our great Edgbaston victory. Maybe we had been a bit lucky to win on the day. It was hard to believe that we were the best under-13 team in the country - no team with Ohbert in it could be that good. But we've improved fast and there's not a side anywhere keener than Glory Gardens.

I think our fame helped us to get to Barbados - because suddenly things started to happen. Frankie got a letter from Thompson Gale saying that his school would fix all the games for us with the best teams on the island. He made it sound dead easy - and he also told Frankie to prepare for the biggest thrashing of our lives.

"Thommo's got a short memory," said Frankie. "I'd better send him the score-sheet for the World Cup final to remind him how good we are."

It was about then that Clive's aunt started to take an interest in things. She was born in Barbados, and she's mad about cricket. Clive has lived with her ever since his old man left home and just disappeared. Clive hasn't seen him from that day which is partly a good thing because his father was a terrible drunk and sometimes used to beat him up. Clive's improved a lot since then - he's still arrogant but nowhere near as bad as he was.

Without saying a word to any of us Clive's aunt applied to the Lottery for funding for our trip. The first we knew of it was when Frankie rushed into school one morning with the news that we'd got the money.

"They'll pay half the cost of the tour if we can raise the other half," he said. "Clive rang to tell me. It's amazing isn't it?"

"What's amazing is your imagination," said Tylan - to be honest we all thought it was one of Frankie's wind-ups.

“Wicket-keeper’s honour,” protested Frankie. “Would I lie to you about something like this?”

“You’d lie about anything, fatman,” said Cal. “So how much money have we still got to find?”

“A lot,” said Frankie, calming down slightly. “But we can do it. We’ve got months before the tour.”

It was only when Kiddo turned up to confirm Frankie’s story that we finally believed him. Kiddo Johnstone is our coach. He opens the batting for Eastgate Priory Firsts and ages ago – before he got this knee injury – he used to play county cricket. Kiddo helped us get Glory Gardens started and the truth is that we owe him a lot. There’s only one serious thing wrong with Kiddo – he’s our French teacher. Still it’s not hard to see that he prefers teaching cricket to French any day and he was almost as excited as Frankie about the Lottery money.

“I’m beginning to think, kiddoes, that the gods are smiling on us. We might just have us a tour.” Kiddo talks like that all the time. He never uses one word when he can find six and arrange them in a weird order. “Mind you,” he went on, “it’s going to be mighty hard work raising the money. You’re all going to have to put your shoulders to the wheel and heave.”

Frankie volunteered to take charge of fund-raising but Jo wasn’t having that. “You’re having nothing to do with money while I’m secretary of Glory Gardens,” she said to her older brother.

“Sorry, Frankie,” said Cal. “You’ve done really well so far but you know she’s right.”

Frankie looked a bit dismal but he never argues with Jo. No-one does.

“That’s agreed then,” said Jo. “I’ll organise it.”

So the serious fund-raising started. Matthew who is the club treasurer kept a daily record of the money as it came in. At the end of one month he had a list like this:

Existing club funds		£77.50
Knicker rota		£88.27
Sponsored indoor cricket tournament		£218.00
Glory Gardens raffle (so far)		£43.20
Car boot sale		£69.44
Frankie's duck race		£1.40
Donations:	Ian Botham	£50.00
	Eastgate Priory C.C.	£50.00
	County Cricket Club	£100.00
	Others	£28.42
		<hr/>
Total		£726.23

I could believe we'd raised so much money. Azzie's dad ran the indoor cricket tournament and it was a brilliant success. The team he selected beat us in the semi-finals and went on to win the competition. He was really delighted about that and, I suppose, he deserved it. After all we had thrashed his team in the 'World Cup'. The car boot sale was organised at the Priory by Clive's aunt and Kiddo was in charge of the raffle.

The knicker rota is our regular money earner for the club. Each of us is supposed to take turns working on Tylan's dad's market stall every Saturday morning - but in fact Ohbert does it far more than anyone else because he really enjoys it and he earns twice as much money as the rest of us. The stall sells mostly underwear, which is why we call it the knicker rota, and our money comes from tips and the odd fiver from Ty's old man if he's had a good day and he's feeling generous. It was Ohbert who had the idea of putting up a notice saying: *Donate your spare change to Glory Gardens' tour of Barbados*. Some miserable people said why should kids like us go on holiday abroad when they themselves couldn't even afford a holiday in England, but loads of them gave us money, especially the stall owners.

The only complete fund-raising disaster was Frankie's duck race. Holding a duck race in the middle of winter didn't seem a good idea in the first place. Then Frankie

forgot to tell anyone it was taking place till the last moment so hardly anyone turned up - which, as things turned out, was probably a good thing.

It rained for two whole days before the race. We assembled along the muddy banks of the Mill Brook on a cold Saturday afternoon. I'd never seen the stream so full, the water was racing along like a mountain torrent. Frankie lined up the little plastic ducks he'd borrowed from the Priory club along the bank and we all chose a duck for a £1.

"The winner gets a bottle of whisky," said Frankie gathering up his ducks for the start of the race. The whisky had been donated by Azzie's dad. When Frankie finally let the ducks go they took off so fast downstream that we couldn't keep up with them. At least half of them were washed over the net at the end of the race and bobbed merrily off towards the sea, lost forever. Frankie panicked and tried to catch them. With one hand clutching the branch of a tree he swung precariously out over the rapids and ...

"Watch out, Frankie," yelled Marty. "That branch doesn't look ..." SPLASH. "... too safe." Cal finished the sentence and peered down at Frankie who was struggling and gurgling in the freezing waters. He was muddy, smelly and shivering when Marty, Cal and I finally pulled him out. And all he got for his efforts was a terrible cold because he had to spend most of his 'winnings' on buying a new set of plastic ducks.

But it was Frankie who got £50 out of Ian Botham. He wrote to him and asked if he'd appear in a pantomime which Frankie himself was going to write and act in. It was one of his daftest ideas but Ian Botham wrote back very politely to say that he was very sorry that he was busy but he wished us luck, said we'd have a wonderful time in Barbados and sent a cheque for £50. Frankie showed it to everyone at school before handing it over to Matthew.

Successful though our fund-raising had been, however, it was still nowhere near enough. If we didn't come up with a big idea very soon there'd be no Lottery money and no tour.

As usual Marty was the most pessimistic. "It's hopeless. We might just as well give the money back and forget all about Barbados."

"But we don't know who gave us most of it," said Matthew.

"Then we can blow it on an enormous feast," said Frankie. "We've got enough to eat for a week like the Romans did." We were all completely stumped for ideas for raising the extra cash - except, of course, Frankie. He had plenty of suggestions such as kidnapping Ohbert and holding him up for ransom or charging an entrance fee for maths lessons or busking in the high street. The Frankie Allen One-Man Band was nearly arrested outside the town hall after only one song.

In the end the breakthrough came from the most unlikely person.

Chapter Two

“WHY ARE YOU so miserable?” asked my sister one morning.

“What’s it to do with you,” I said.

“I bet I can guess what it’s about.”

“What?”

“Stupid cricket.”

As you may have guessed I don’t normally talk to Lizzie much. First because she’s so irritating. And secondly because usually all I want to do is clonk her over her head for being my sister. I’ve made a vow never to talk to her about cricket because that just gives her the chance to make fun of me and she doesn’t need more than one invitation to do that. She may be only little but she knows exactly how to get on my nerves.

Lizzie has a sort of love-hate relationship with Glory Gardens. She’s always telling me how boring cricket is, but on the other hand it was she who made our mascot for us. It’s a sort of soft, squidgy thing which looks like it’s made out of old socks. It’s supposed to be modelled on Kiddo’s dog, Gatting, but it doesn’t look a bit like him. All its stuffing is coming out now and Lizzie complains that we don’t look after it properly which is true because we usually throw it round the changing room after matches. The only reason we hang on to it is because Jo thinks it brings us luck and she likes to have it sitting on the table in front of her when she’s scoring.

It turned out that Lizzie knew everything about the Barbados tour and the trouble we were having raising money. I don’t know who told her. Not me, that’s for sure.

“It will be a pity if you don’t go,” she said. “I was looking forward to getting rid of you for a few days.”

“Then all you’ve got to do is find someone to give us the rest of the money,” I said. “How much have you got in your piggy bank?”

Lizzie thought for a moment. “What about getting a sponsor?”

“What?”

“You know, a sponsor. People who put their names on your shirts and ... your bats and caps too, I suppose.”

“I know what a sponsor is,” I said crossly. “But who would want to sponsor us? We’re not famous or on the telly.”

“But you’re quite well known round here since your silly final at Edgbaston,” she said. “Anyway I was only trying to help.” She looked rather cross that I wasn’t impressed with her great idea and to cheer her up I said maybe she was right and I’d talk to the others about it.

I didn’t give it another thought until I was buying a cricket shirt at Ollie’s Sports Shop in Baxter Street and the sponsor’s logo caught my eye. Why not ask Ollie about it, I thought. I told him about the tour and the Lottery money and he got more and more interested. Then I mentioned Lizzie’s sponsorship idea. “I think I might be able to help you there,” said Ollie.

A week later Glory Gardens’ tour of Barbados had not one but two sponsors - Ollie’s Sports Shop and Gunn & Moore, the cricket bat makers. They gave us shirts and caps with their names printed on them, some really good new cricket bats and a kit bag. Finally there was the cheque; it was a big one and it meant our fund-raising worries were nearly over.

Lizzie was unbearable when she found out about it. “See, I said it was a great idea,” she gloated.

“Yeah, thanks,” I said.

“Don’t you think you owe something, then?”

“Such as?”

“Well,” said Lizzie thinking hard. “The least you can do is promise to send me a postcard every day from Barbados.”

I moaned a bit but in the end I said I would - on my honour. And then six weeks later we were in Barbados playing our first game against Carlton School.

But already it was all going wrong. After one ball of our first game we were down to ten players. With Jacky injured there was nothing for it but to send for our twelfth man. Ohbert didn't waste any time changing; he came on to the pitch dressed as he was - in lime green shorts and a coloured tee-shirt that would have made a Premier League goalkeeper jealous.

He ambled on and I shouted and tried to direct him to long-leg but he took no notice and walked all the way to the middle of the pitch. I could just imagine what the Carlton players were thinking at the sight of this odd, skinny apparition. And when they saw him play it would be even worse.

“Oh but ... Hooker, where do you want me to field?” asked Ohbert eventually.

“Long-leg,” I said, trying to keep calm.

“That's back where you came from and turn left,” said Cal.

Ohbert set off towards long-off. “The other way, Ohbert,” shouted Frankie.

Ohbert walked past me again, “Oh, but ... Hooker. You should see Jacky's finger. It's like this.” Ohbert bent his middle finger back as far as it would go until he winced with pain. “Only worse.” He grinned stupidly and disappeared roughly in the direction of long-leg and I prayed that there wouldn't be another top-edged hook. But I knew from experience that the harder I tried to hide Ohbert in the field the more the ball would be drawn to him.