

Dark shadow cast on World Cup by Woolmer's death

Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller of Jamaica declared Sunday that 'a dark shadow' had been cast on the ICC Cricket World Cup, with the sudden passing of Bob Woolmer, coach of the Pakistan team.

Woolmer was declared dead at the University Hospital of the West Indies (UHWI), after he was rushed there from the team's hotel, the Jamaica Pegasus, in New Kingston. He was discovered lying in an unconscious state in his 12th floor room at the hotel shortly before noon.

Pakistan team media manager Pervez Mir explained that the housekeeping staff found Woolmer lying on the floor and a team of doctors was immediately called to the scene.

'He was unconscious,' Mir said.

'When I reached his room he was laid out on the floor with his mouth wide open and there was blood in the bathroom and there was vomit all over the wall and there were signs of diarrhoea.

'Something has happened which obviously we don't know at this time because there will be a coroner's report. After that we'll be in a position to answer what's happening,' Mir added.

The Jamaican prime minister, obviously moved by the sudden passing of the outstanding cricket coach and former test player, said 'our hearts goes out to the family of Mr. Woolmer and the Pakistan cricket team'.

She also expressed an intention to visit the team and offer her condolence.

For Mir, the death of Woolmer was particularly striking because just hours earlier the coach had been sharing his thoughts on how to continue making a contribution to Pakistani cricket, in the wake of the unexpected loss to Ireland in Saturday's World Cup match, which effectively eliminated the team from the tournament.

'Bob was very fine yesterday,' Mir told the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC).

'After the game I had a very good chat with him, he was thinking in terms of doing a number of things for Pakistan cricket. He had lots of plans. He wanted to go back and speak with the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board and give a new plan.'

At Saturday's post match news conference, Woolmer said that the extensive travelling associated with being coach had taken its toll on him.

Mir said that contrary to what was being reported in the press, Woolmer was on good terms with the team and there were no rifts or misunderstanding.

'Of course he was very disappointed with the result and he encouraged the side,' Mir said.

'He said, look that's a game which has gone down, we just have to move forward and play another game.'

Mir said all of Pakistan was disappointed when their team suffered the shock elimination after an upset loss to little-rated Ireland at Sabina Park in Kingston.

'This pressure has amounted on Bob, on the captain, on the boys, the tour management, the Pakistan Cricket Board, it's a very natural thing and the pressures are certainly there, there's no question on that.

'My last words to him were Bob it's just sad, and he said that's cricket and we just have to work on it,' Mir said.

Robert 'Bob' Woolmer was born in 1948 in Kanpur, India. He made his first class debut for Kent, in England in 1968 and his first test match against Australia at Lords on July 31, 1975.

A major highlight of his test career was the match-saving 149 he scored in his second test in that series, at The Oval.

By 1981 when he played his last test, also against Australia, at Lords, he had scored 1,059 runs, including three centuries and two half-centuries, at an average of 33.09.

Woolmer also played six one-day internationals and, ironically, missed the opportunity to participate in the inaugural Cricket World Cup in 1975 due to a broken hand.

In 1976 he was named Wisden's Cricketer of the Year.

His coaching career was perhaps even more distinguished, with successful stints at English county Warwickshire, South Africa, and Pakistan.

His stint with the South Africans in the 1990's was particularly successful, helping to restore the team to a position of great prominence in world cricket, just a few years after that country's return from international sporting isolation.

Between his two international test team assignments, he also spent several years as the International Cricket Council's high performance coaching manager for the Associate nations.

In Jamaica, several of Woolmer's West Indian contemporaries reflected with sadness on his passing.

'A very tragic day... I express deepest sympathy to his wife and family' said Clive Lloyd, the former West Indies captain, on local television.

Sir Garfield Sobers described Woolmer as 'such a good competitor', while Sir Vivian Richards said that his death was 'something that we will mourn for a long time'.

Despite the 'dark shadow' cast over the World Cup tournament by Woolmer's death, Lloyd, the current West Indies team manager, said that all the participants would have to find the strength to move on.

An autopsy will be performed on Woolmer's body in Jamaica Monday.

The Jamaican police high command issued a statement Sunday, disclosing that a team of police and medical personnel was 'conducting preliminary investigations at both the hotel and hospital'.

A highly placed police source told the CMC, however, that there was no suspicion of foul play at this time.

Earl Moxam (© IANS / India eNews)