

George Headley—West Indies Batting Maestro By Ousman Ali

Universally-acknowledged as one of the finest batsmen of all time, George Alphonso Headley dominated the international cricket scene during the period he played for the West Indies. In 1948 he became the first black man to captain the West Indies team and, in his final appearance in January 1954, he set a record as the oldest (44 years and 236 days) cricketer, after a hiatus of four (4) years, to have played Test cricket for the West Indies.

Born in Panama on May 30, 1909, he died in Jamaica on November 30, 1983. His Panamanian birth was as a consequence of his Jamaican father's sojourn in the Central American Republic where he had migrated to work on the construction of the famous Panama Canal. He was taken to Jamaica to improve his English. He would have been lost to cricket had he received a visa in time to proceed to the United States of America where he had planned to study dentistry. In recognition of this outstanding player, the Jamaica Cricket Association named an 8,000-seat pavilion at Sabina Park cricket ground, Kingston, named after him (George Headley Stand). (*shown below*)



Headley's career batting average in Test cricket is a phenomenal 60.83, fourth only to Australian Sir Donald Bradman (99.94), Michael Hussey (64.18 and still playing) and South African Graeme Pollock (60.97) (*among players who played over 20 test matches*). He was Wisden's Cricketer of the Year in 1934. Who knows what Headley's average would have been had he not lost six (6) years of cricket because of the Second World War? Dubbed the "Black Bradman", it would not be sacrilegious to designate Sir Donald the "White Headley"—such was the virtual similarity in prowess, productivity and consistency of both players who played in the same era. Had Headley come from the United Kingdom or Australia, there is no gain saying that he would have received more international accolades analogous to those that were bestowed on Bradman.

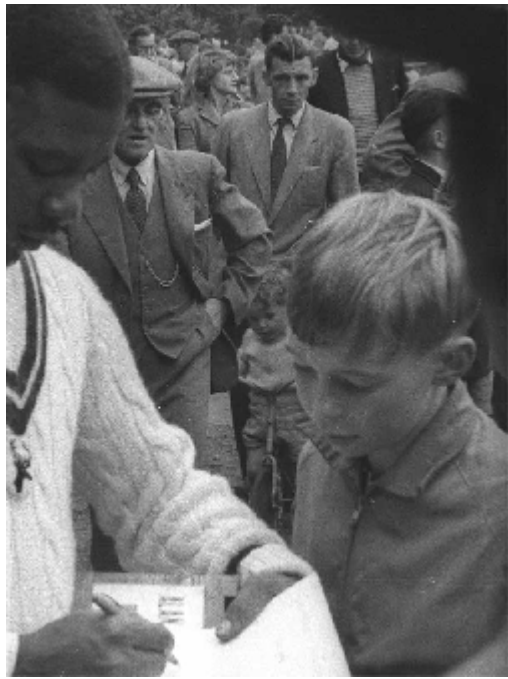
Headley was the first batsman to score 3 and then 4 Test centuries before the age of 21. His rate of scoring centuries, often seen as an accurate measure of great batsmen, of 1 in every 4 innings is bettered only by Bradman. In 22 Tests he scored 10 centuries, with 8 against England. In 1939 he became the first batsman to score a century in each innings of a Test in Lords. He scored 29 per cent of his sides' runs in his career—the highest ever percentage, even more than Bradman's 27 per cent. No wonder he was also fittingly nicknamed 'Atlas'. Like Bradman he was skilled at picking the gaps and accumulated his runs at a great rate without risk. He was also adept at playing in wet conditions (recall that until the late fifties, wickets were not covered) as much as on sunny hard surfaced pitches at home. While Bradman had the support of other outstanding batsmen like Ponsford, Woodfull, McCabe, Brown, Hassett etc, Headley was not fortunate to have in his company similarly illustrious batsmen.

Clarrie Grimmet, an outstanding Australian spinner, considered Headley the strongest on-side player against whom he had ever bowled. Sir Len Hutton, renowned England batsman and the first player to have been knighted for his batting ability, declared that he had never seen a batsman play the ball later.

His son, Ron, appeared in two Test matches for the West Indies in 1973. His grandson, Dean, played fifteen (15) Test matches and thirty (30) One-Day Internationals for England. It was the first of only two instances of a grandfather, father and son playing Test cricket; the other being Jahangir Khan, Majid Khan and Bazid Khan of Pakistan.

CLR James in his masterpiece "Beyond the Boundary" expressed much admiration for Headley and was effusive in his praise of this West Indies batting icon, He would invariably describe Headley as a "natural cricketer", "master strategist and technician", "maestro" and "great master of batting". According to CLR, Headley "narrowly escapes being the greatest batsman I have ever seen....He is not far behind Bradman....If he had lived his cricketing life in Australia or England, he would not have been behind anyone"

CLR underscored three qualities which, in his view, are characteristics of a superb batsman, all of which, he said, Headley possessed. Firstly, he sees the ball early. Secondly, he is quick on his feet. Thirdly, he is quick with his bat.



Quiet by nature and barely medium in height, the movements of this giant of a batsman were precise and economical, according to Michael Manley and Donna Symmonds in their book ‘A History of West Indies Cricket’. They recalled England’s tour of the West Indies in 1929-30 when Headley stamped his class as an international player of repute. In the first Test in Barbados, being the first to be played in the West Indies, Headley scored a superb 176 in the second innings, becoming the youngest player to score a century in his maiden appearance. His centuries of 114 run out and 112 in the first and second innings respectively in the third Test in Guyana made him the youngest player to score a century in each inning of a Test and b) three (3) centuries in Test cricket. To add further luster to his magnificent accomplishments in this series in the Caribbean, he scored a brilliant 223 in the second innings in the fourth Test in Jamaica.

Manley and Symmonds went on to view Headley’s performance and contribution from a sociological standpoint in terms of the mainly black population in the West Indies in its team’s encounter with that from its then ‘colonial masters’. They saw Headley “during those marvelous three months at the beginning of 1930” as demonstrating “black capacity”. According to them, Headley “became the focus for the longing of an entire people for proof—proof of their own self-worth and their own capacity. He was black excellence personified in a white world and in a white sport”.

Headley is unique in Caribbean history.

George Headley

West Indies

Full name George Alphonso Headley

Born May 30, 1909, Colon, Panama

Died November 30, 1983, Meadowbridge, Kingston, Jamaica (aged 74 years 184 days)

Major teams West Indies, Jamaica

Batting style Right-hand bat

Bowling style Legbreak

Relations Son - [Ron Headley](#), Grandson - [DEAN Headley](#)



Batting and fielding averages

	Mat	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	6s	Ct	St
Tests	22	40	4	2190	270*	60.83	10	5	1	14	0
First-class	103	164	22	9921	344*	69.86	33	44		76	0

Bowling averages

	Mat	Inns	Balls	Runs	Wickets	BBi	BBM	Ave	Econ	SR	4w	5w	10
Tests	22	14	398	230	0	-	-	-	3.46	-	0	0	0
First-class	103		3845	1842	51	5/33		36.11	2.87	75.3	1	0	

Career statistics

Test debut West Indies v England at Bridgetown, Jan 11-16, 1930

George Headley Career Batting Performance

