

Legends of Yesteryear

SIR

LEARIE

NICHOLAS

“CONNIE”

CONSTANTINE

Cricket Superstar, Lawyer, Politician, Statesman, Diplomat, High Commissioner, BBC Commentator, Author, Lecturer, MBE, Baron, Lord

From the time of his birth in Diego Martin in 1901, his veins flowing with cricketing blood, his father Lebrun's and his mom's brother Victor Pascall's, the former

representing both T&T and the West Indies and the latter T&T, Learie Constantine was destined to become one of the greatest allrounders the world had ever seen. Naturally being exposed to cricket from an early age, young Learie showed a keen enthusiasm for the game backed by fine coordination and athleticism. He progressed through his early cricketing foundation on a plantation estate in St. Anns onto St. Ann's R.C. School where he captained the First XI at age 14 all the while developing his already noticeable all round prowess.

Thereafter he worked as an office boy on St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain, a place where his interest in the legal profession began. Soon he burst into Victoria's (later Shannon) First XI, captained by his father. In spite of his relatively young age his developing talents saw him playing for Shannon, captained by Wilton St. Hill (WI, 1928-1930, 3 Tests) competing against the likes of Maple/Sting, Shannon, Shamrock and Queen's Park.

That he would go on to become the West Indies and T&T's first global superstar (the first coloured professional in England) and role model and play a major part in lifting his people to a new level of respect within the British Commonwealth, was unimaginable at that time. Add to that becoming one of the biggest drawing cards in the history of the game as one of the greatest all rounders ever. His fielding antics (miracles,



Young Constantine

described by those who saw him) especially endeared him to his fans.

Thus began the saga of the rise of the cricketing and non-cricketing exploits of the late great Learie Constantine some of which are best chronicled as follows:

At the Queen's Park Oval, 1921, age 20, along with his uncle Victor Pascall, after just three first class matches he first played for T&T versus Barbados. In 1922 he played alongside his dad for T&T versus British Guiana at Bourda, an occasion long cherished naturally by both men. By the next season 1923 he was aboard the SS Intaba, selected for a West Indian team (pre-Test status) to England. There he showcased his exceptional fielding brilliance for which he was building a huge reputation along with explosive bursts of fast bowling and powerful batting. In 1924 he produced his best ever bowling performance 8-38 for T&T versus Barbados at Kensington Oval, Barbados. In 1928 he was selected to the first West Indies Test team. Playing at Lord's versus England heralded the start of many magical memorable Learie Constantine performances in England, especially on the county circuit.

There are so many cricketing and non-cricketing accounts of this legend of yesteryear but suffice it to say that the West Indies were granted Test status in 1928 largely on the basis of the brilliant performances on the 1923 tour of England, by George Challenor and Learie Constantine,

Sir Learie Nicholas “Connie” Constantine

the latter heralding the 1930's era of our cricket along with George Headley. Together they charted the early course of the characteristic calypso style of West Indies cricket. Learie was the first West Indian to take a wicket in a Test match (at Lord's in 1928) and the first also to capture 5 wickets in a Test match inning, in our first Test victory, at Bourda, British Guiana in 1930 (5-87 off 40 overs). He took one hat trick for the West Indies, in 1928 versus Northamptonshire and scored 28 first class fifties (4 in Tests), held 133 catches and took 5 or more wickets in a Test match on 6 occasions (twice taking 5 in one inning). No doubt today's one day format would have been ideally suited to him.

In 1933 when his club Nelson for which he played in 10 successful seasons (8 championships) in the Lancashire League refused to release him for the first and third Tests at Lord's and the Oval, both of which we lost, one lamenting fan composed a ditty to the strains of “O’ my darling... Constantine”, which expressed the esteem in which his fans held him. In the 2nd Test, in which he did play, the West Indies held on for a draw such was the value of the man to the Windies at that time.

There is an account that a study by mathematicians at Cambridge University, concluded that he bowled at speeds of 85 mph, faster than even Larwood, the famous speedster at the time.

Some of his memorable games at the Queen's Park Oval, his home ground:

1929, for T&T versus Barbados, scored his highest first class score of 133.

1930, his first Test match there, versus England, scored 52, took 6 wickets and 2 catches.

1935, his second and last Test there, versus England, scored 90 and 31, took 5 wickets and held 1 catch in the game. WI won by 217 runs, Learie saving his heroics to thrill the crowds with the penultimate ball to take the final wicket.

Glimpses of his legendary lightening speed and explosive batting can be imagined in the following memorable performances for the Windies against counties in 1928:

-Versus Middlesex, WI were 79-5, Constantine scored 86 to take WI to 230 then snapped up 7-57 (including 6 for 11 off 39 balls) and in the 2nd innings, again in trouble at 121-5 he hit a whirlwind 103 out of 133 to bring off a remarkable 3 wicket victory.

-Versus Northamptonshire, 7-45 and 107 in 90 minutes and in the 2nd inning, a hat trick (13 wickets in the match), to secure a Windies victory.

He had the unexpected honour of captaining the West Indies in the 4th and deciding match in the series of 1935 versus England at Sabina Park, Jamaica, leading the side to their

first ever series win in the absence of the injured Jackie Grant. He ended his career, in 1939 at the Oval in England with a characteristically stage commanding performance taking 5-75 and scoring 70 scorching runs in one hour. His first class career spanned 1921-1939. He continued to play charity matches into his fifties, at times displaying flashes of his all round talent.

Many superlatives have been penned of this great West Indian cricketer by the likes of CLR James, his good friend and confidante (an entire chapter dedicated to him in the classic *Beyond A Boundary*), Neville Cardus, John Arlott, Wisden and many others.



Lord Constantine is introduced to the House of Lords by the Duke of Norfolk.

His affinity for the legal world saw him being called to the Bar in the UK in 1954 at age 53, (and in 1955 in T&T) his stick-to-it determination and perseverance paying off eventually.

His family faced racial reactions when they moved to Nelson in 1929 but his friendly demeanor, along with his professional cricketing status, endeared him eventually to the vast majority.

In 1944 he successfully sued the Imperial Hotel in London for refusing to receive him, such was his determination to fight racism and his sense of high morals.

In 1946 he was elected captain of an all white Dominion team that beat England at Lord's in an end-of-war game.

He returned to T&T as an assistant legal advisor in 1955 (for Trinidad Leaseholds, later Texaco) joining the ruling political party and fought and won the Tunapuna seat. He served as minister in The Ministry of Community Works and Utilities following which from 1961-64 he was the first High Commissioner to London, England, a position which also allowed him to take part in Independence talks around that

time. He later had a falling out with Dr. Eric Williams which saw the end of his political career in T&T.

He was married to Norma Cox (one daughter Gloria), until his death in 1971 of lung and heart complications at Homestead, UK, 44 years later, and was post-humously awarded T&T's highest honour, the Trinity Cross. Archbishop Anthony Pantin at the Cathedral in Port of Spain, at his funeral service said of him "...a man who walked with kings without losing the common touch".

Awards & Honours:

Wisden Cricketer of the year 1940; MBE (Member of the British Order) 1945; 1954 Lawyer, LLB, called to the Bar (UK); 1955 Lawyer, called to the Bar (T&T); Knighted (Sir) 1962; Freeman of the Borough of Nelson 1962; Honorary Master of the Bench 1963; Life Peerage 1969; Baron 1969; Trinity Cross (Posthumous) 1971; Witco Hall of Fame Inductee 1984; Featured on T&T Postage Stamp 1988; Millenium Award, Ministry of Sport T&T 2000; One of Nelson's (UK) 2 men of the Millenium 2000; Learie Constantine Collection, Nalis Heritage Library, Port of Spain, T'dad 2001; Featured on popular BBC TV series "This is your life"; Learie Constantine Stand, Queen's Park Oval

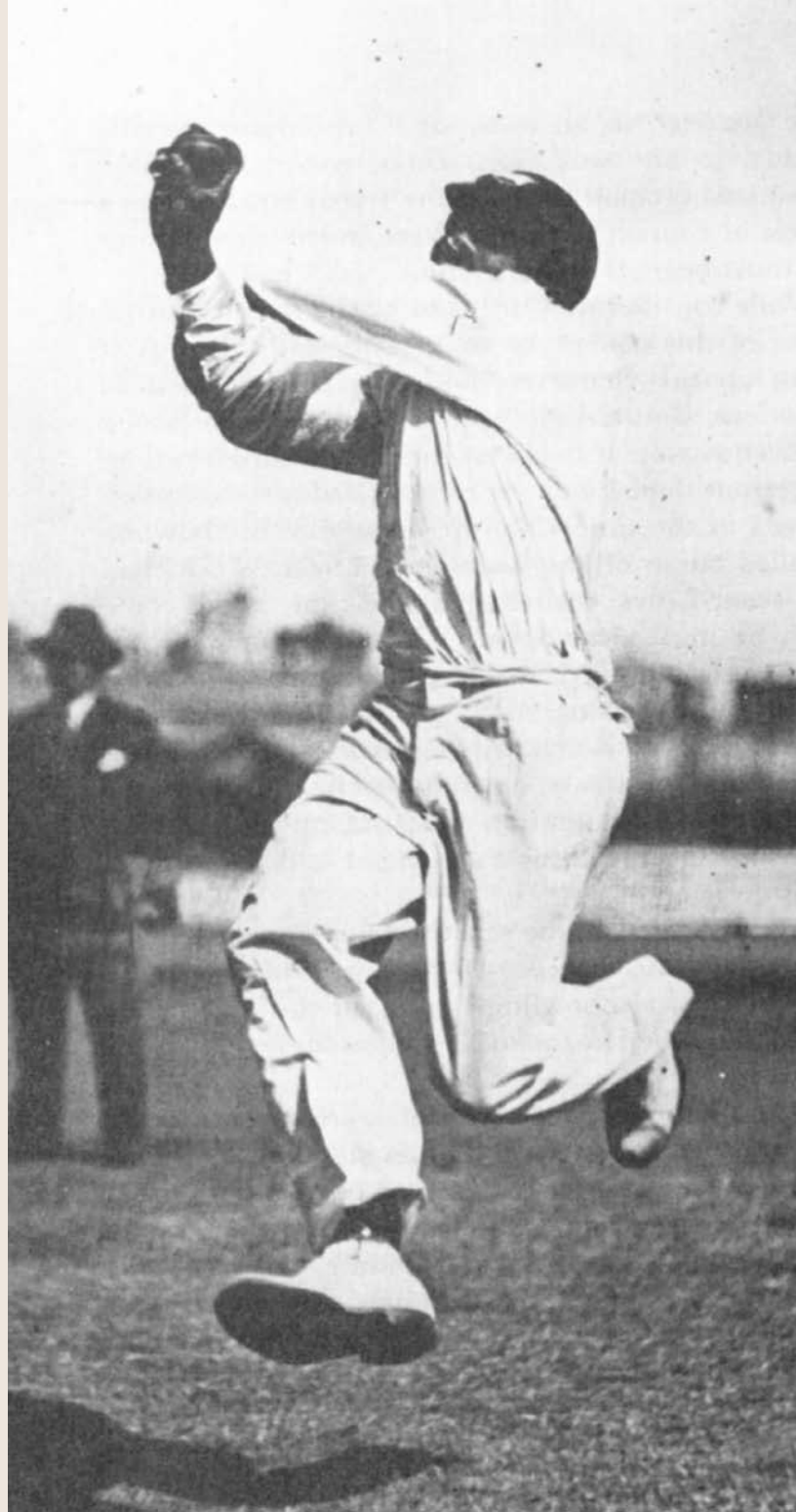
Books Written by him: Cricket And I, 1933 (with CLR James); Colour Bar, 1954 (with CLR James); The Changing Face of Cricket, 1966 (with Denzil Batchelor); Cricket in the Sun; How to Play Cricket; Cricketers' Carnival; Cricket Crackers; The Young Cricketer's Companion

Books Written about him: A Look at Learie Constantine, Undine Giuseppi, 1974; Learie N. Constantine (booklet), compiled by Eustace Ward, 1948

Recorded Calypsoes about him:

Lord Caresser 1939; Black Stalin 1962

Some Positions Held: Welfare Officer, Ministry of Labour, UK (During WWII); 1956 Elected the PNM's Chairman and Member of Parliament (Tunapuna) and Minister of Community Works and Utilities; 1961-64 T&T's first High Commissioner in London; Governor of the BBC; Member of Race Relations Board and the Sports Council (UK); BBC Broadcaster; Rector of St. Andrew's University 1967.



Learie showing perfect balance and concentration at great speed.

Batting and fielding averages									
	Mat	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	Ct
Tests	18	33	0	635	90	19.24	0	4	28
First-class	119	197	11	4475	133	24.05	5	28	133

Bowling averages						
	Mat	Balls	Runs	Wkts	BB	Ave
Tests	18	3583	1746	58	5/75	30.10
First-class	119	17393	8991	439	8/38	20.48