



NEW INDUCTEES from left Lesly Lowe, Lloyd Dixon, Farokh Engineer, Austin Hutchinson and Joslyn Chance Sr.

Engineer praises Cricket Hall of Fame visionaries

By STAN WALKER

In one of its most successful and entertaining ceremonies, the Cricket Hall of Fame inducted five new members into the prestigious institution at the Marriott Hotel, downtown Hartford, Saturday, October 3. Topping the class was former Indian and Rest of World XI wicketkeeper/batsman Farokh Engineer. He was joined by four locals Lesly Lowe, Austin Hutchinson and Lloyd Dixon all of New York and Joslyn Chance Sr. of Bloomfield, Connecticut.

Three other individuals Hartford's Mayor Eddie Perez, Patricia Kelly of Ebony Horsewomen and the Rev. Hugh Hamilton were presented with Presidential Awards for their contributions to the community.

Director Michael Chambers opened the program declaring that tonight we will be honoring visionaries. And although most of them including those who were receiving presidential awards may have fit the description, without a doubt the star of the night was Engineer, who came in from England where he now resides to accept the honor.

The former flamboyant batsman and agile wicketkeeper, Engineer who has become a popular, sought-after dinner speaker, kept the audience in stitches as he mixed his acceptance speech with a variety of jokes, some colorful, using cricket terms some which could befuddle the mind if you were not one who is familiar with the sport.

On a more serious note, Engineer whose chiseled features and rugged looks during his playing days allowed him to become the first Indian cricketer to be offered advertising and modeling contracts, most notable for the Brylcreem hair product, had high praises for the "visionaries" who started the Hall of Fame. "I was very impressed with what they are doing," he said. "I am yet to come across any collection like this. I do not think that there is anything like this in any part of the world. The nearest I can recall is at Lord's, the premier cricket ground in England."

Responding to a comment made by Chambers, who said that famous Jamaica and West Indies batsman, George Headley, was one of the first persons to break down the color barrier in sports, he said that Chambers had forgotten to mention the name of Leary Constantine of Trinidad, who also played a part. Engineer also added that famous South African player Graeme Pollock, who tried to play down apartheid by telling the players that they should consider themselves all green, could also fit into that mold.

Headley, who began playing Test cricket at the age of 18 in 1929, was the first West Indian sporting hero and the first black man acknowledged as a world class performer.

Describing Engineer's robust approach to the game, Master of Ceremonies former West Indies player Rudolph Cohen, said that he (Engineer) could easily fit into any West Indian team. He had our kind of flair for the game," Cohen said.

Acknowledging that we are all gathered here to honor players, organizers and supporters, which he saw as a unique perspective, Cohen, said that we must certainly recognize talent, but at the same time we must also realize that it is the supporters and contributors who keep the game alive.

Inductee Lowe, founder of the largest cricket organization in North America, said that in comparison to when he began back in the early 70s, there are many more teams now in the country. It is now played in almost every state. "The game has grown in leaps and bounds, but if we want the game to continue to progress, we need to support each other," he said and paid tribute to the late James Gabriel, the father of cricket in the U.S., who he said was one of the best supporters of the game that could be found anywhere.

"I am proud of the role that I have played in the development of the game in America, and my vision is to one day having Australia playing against the West Indies in the U.S."

Dixon, who seemed somewhat overwhelmed by the honor, spent some time relating some of his experience while playing the game dating back to his childhood days interjecting a bit of humor as he did so. Although being a successful bowler during his playing days, he was mainly recognized for the hard work that he did behind the scenes.

Hutcheson, who was recognized for his role in establishing the Red Stripe cricket competition and the Masters League in New York, said that the award is one that he will always cherish.

New York Assemblyman Nick Perry spoke briefly before presenting some of the New York honorees with citations from the assembly.

Entertainment for the evening which was well received was provided by two members of the Renaissance Steel Orchestra out of New York. The program concluded with dancing to Afrique Disco.