

Gavaskar given hero's welcome in Hartford

Indian cricket idol, Sunil Gavaskar, was given a hero's welcome from the moment he set foot in Hartford, Friday, October 4. Although he retired from the game in 1987, the "Little Master", still manages to command a great deal of popularity wherever he goes. The prolific run-getter was met by a host of fans at almost every stop.

A fine player, if not the best player of fast bowling during his hey day, Gavaskar who is now a commentator for ESPN Asia, began his visit to Hartford, Friday, October 4, with a tour of the ESPN complex in Bristol that gave him a first-hand view of how the network is able to get their programs out to the entire world. At the end of the tour, he was presented with a framed sketch of himself and a video tape of one episode of a series, "The Legends of Cricket," which is scheduled to be shown on ESPN Asia in the near future. Making the presentation was Bernard Stewart, Vice President and General Manager, ESPN Asia Pacific, who hosted the tour along with Cathy Savino, Manager, International Programming and Affiliate Services at ESPN. Gavaskar was also asked to sign autographs on pictures, a bat and cricket balls, for a ESPN staffers, some who recognized him as their idol, before departing.

His next stop was at Hartford's City Hall where he met Mayor Eddie Perez, who presented him with a book on Hartford and wished him success in his future endeavors.

A visit to Star Hardware on Main Street, followed, where he was received by proprietor, Max Atar, a native of India, who introduced him to a number of his staffers and admirers who posed for pictures and solicited autographs. From there he visited the Cricket Hall of Fame headquarters just across the street, where he was given the opportunity to view the mementos and exhibits which included framed copies of the induction of other greats.

The evening concluded with dinner at the Ambassador of India restaurant, in Glastonbury, where host Shekar Naik, gave Gavaskar and his party a sampling of the dishes that are served at the restaurant. His presence there brought out a number of his countrymen, many with cameras, who were getting the opportunity to see the Indian legend for the first time.

On the morning of the function he was honored at a reception held at Hartford's Public Library, Main Street, in which more than a hundred fans showed up to pay their tribute. At the reception another Indian dance troupe performed in his honor.

In a brief interview held prior to the start of the induction program on Saturday, Gavaskar said that he was moved by the reception that he received at ESPN. "The television networks are very much interested in carrying the game because of its commercial aspect, but for it to take off the American team that participates in the International Cricket Conference (ICC) tournaments, will have to start winning," he said. The game has good potential of getting big in the U.S. but that will not happen until the game is being played on a more regular basis rather than just during the weekend, Gavaskar stated.