

Sir Garfield Sobers visits Cricket Hall of Fame

West Indian cricket legend Sir Garfield Sobers recently paid a visit to the Cricket Hall of Fame facilities, where he met and signed autographs for a few adoring fans. Sir Garfield, a former inductee of the Hall of Fame, was in Hartford with a Barbados Sports Tourism team, that is touring the U.S. to promote the Sir Garfield Sobers' Youth International Cricket Tournament, and to drum up support and assistance from Caribbean nationals throughout north America for the 2007 World Cup tournament, which is scheduled to be held in the West Indies.

The West Indian cricket administrators are working hard and hopes to make the 2007 World Cup tournament, the most successful ever held, he said. It calls for each venue to have accommodation for 30,000 spectators, so every Caribbean person regardless of where they reside will have to give a helping hand. "We need the help of every West Indian regardless of where you are, in order to make this a success," he stated.

The U.S. is building a cricket stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and is bidding to host some of the matches, Sir Garfield revealed. If the stadium is completed in time, with the number of people from cricketing countries living in the area, it is quite likely that they may be successful in their bid to host a few matches, he said.

Sir Garfield's visit came on the back of another former West Indian cricket legend, Lance Gibbs. While addressing an enthusiastic gathering at the nearby Sportmen's Athletic Club, he said that West Indies' cricket is back, and predicted that by the next two years it will be back where it belongs, at the level that it enjoyed as champions of the world.

They have had some success recently because they are now adopting a format that I advocated years ago, Sir Garfield said. They are now bringing more younger players into the team and not resorting to the old format of recycling the older players. Captain Brian Lara has come of age and is playing like a responsible person. If he continues in this mode, then there will be nothing to stop us from becoming world champions once again, he said.

Sir Garfield reminisced on some of his past cricketing experiences, and paid tribute to his friend "to whom I owe a great deal," the late Collie Smith. "Mighty Mouse" as Smith was called by adoring fans, died in a tragic accident in which Sir Garfield was the driver of the vehicle. He also reminded former team-mate and friend, Rudolph Cohen, who was in the audience, of some of the good times that they had when they were on a tour of England.

The International Youth Tournament, now held annually in Barbados, but which began in England, has become a very popular tournament in the cricketing world, he said. So far only about three countries have not already sent a team to participate. The U.S. should try to see if they can get an Under-19 team to participate in the tournament which is held in July of each year. It could turn out to be a great stepping stone for cricket in the U.S., he said.

Recognizing the exodus of prospective West Indian Test players who have moved to the U.S., Sir Garfield said that the U.S. cricket administrators need to form an international body here and get a committee to run it. They should continue to pursue the possibility of playing in tournaments in the Caribbean as it should help to develop the game in the U.S. They need to recognize the importance of cricket in the Caribbean and help to foster a closer relationship with the cricketing bodies in the region. It would be nice to see a U.S. team participating in the World Cup, he said. Regardless of how many from the Caribbean may feel about the game in the U.S., it is here to stay, it is our strength, it is our legacy, a whole experience, so we must do everything possible to get the youngsters involved, he added.

Contrary to what many may think, Cricket is not dying in the Caribbean, he said, in response to a question raised that the youngsters are now concentrating heavily on soccer and turning to the popular American sport of basketball. "It may seem that way at the grass-roots level, but the game is structured throughout the Caribbean and is in fact flourishing," Sir Garfield said, pointing to the number of tournaments that are now being played at the various age levels there. More cricket is now being played in the West Indies than when I was a youngster," he said.