



TRIBUTE

RT. EXCELLENT SIR GARFIELD ST AUBRUN SOBERS, NH, OCC, AO

At the age of 17, Garry Sobers was recruited to the Barbados team as a replacement for the medium pace bowler Frank King. It was as a left arm spin bowler, when Alfred Valenine was injured, that this gangling prodigy was summoned by the Test Selectors to launch his glittering career. Unforgettable for me is that scintillating drive to the northern extra cover boundary at Sabina Park which immediately revealed he was no ordinary Number 9. In the sixteen Test Matches that followed, Garry Sobers revealed the wide range of his tremendous promise and provided exciting glimpses of the flood gate to come.

Destiny determined that the avalanche would be unleashed once and for all in his 17th test appearance at Sabina Park when his maiden test century set a batting record of 365 that stood for 36 long years. The Emperor had arrived to occupy the throne and from then onwards the Titan proceeded to change the face of cricket forever.

To assert the obvious ought not to conceal the truth in full. That Garry Sobers is the greatest All Rounder the game has ever seen is apodictic but does not reveal the whole truth: Sir Garfield Sobers is the greatest Cricketer the world has ever seen. When will there come such another?

His advent sparked the dawn of a new era as a batsman who combined in one person the lithe feet of a dancer, the lyrical strokes of a poet, the ferocious punches and hooks of a boxer.

He enriched the game with his own style and panache to fashion a brand that would excite and endure. His wizardry as a lethal pace bowler who could swing the ball both ways, his magic as a slow orthodox left arm finger spinner, his guile as a left arm wrist spinner with googlies interspersed were sharply honed to baffle the finest batsmen he encountered. Such dexterity with the ball places him in a role of his own.

He was an outstanding fielder in the deep, but his courage and feline spring earned universal repute for the “impossible catches” in the cordon areas.

A foremost literary connoisseur of the noble game said it best:

“Sobers could pluck a lightening fast edge out of thin air with the grace of a man catching a falling leaf.”

- CLR James

There is bound to be a ceaseless debate – which of his abundant centuries in Test and First Class matches exhausted the store of superlatives from scribes, commentators, spectators and players of the game alike. His innings of 254 at Melbourne against the fury of Lillee and the formidable Australian arsenal was immortalised by Sir Donald Bradman himself as “the best innings ever seen on Australian soil.” That he was a recipient of the Order of Australia is fitting testimony to the records he set in the Sheffield Shield for 2 consecutive years.

When in full flight, the blade of the bat could be deployed as an axe to savage the best bowler or used as the butcher’s knife or a surgeon’s scalpel to the delight of any crowd. As he pushed the gate at Lord’s in 1973 for the last time, pulled up his collars and took his majestic strides to the crease, while the bowlers quivered in fear at 256 for 4, Tony Greig who had promised to make the West Indies “grovel” was heard to mutter “What have I done to deserve this?” Sobers answered with 150 not out when Kanhai declared at 652 for 8. That innings of Sir Garry had been repeatedly interspersed with hefty refreshings of port and brandy.

The debonair Garry with the swagger in his gait, was never of the ascetic style. As the narrative goes “Men wanted to be like him; women wanted to be with him.” Another anecdote, attributed to CLR James, is that of the Legendary Scholar berating West Indies players for drinking and sensual

indulgence before matches. They countered “you have never told Sobers so and he is no different.” CLR replied – “He is different. He is a genius and you all are mere mortals.”

Garfield Sobers is to Cricket what William Shakespeare is to drama, isolated in solitary splendour on a stage apart. It was under Sobers’ Captaincy that the West Indies defeated every competing nation in the world to assert its primacy and eventual domination.

Even as we applaud the spectacular feats and marvellous accomplishments of Garry Sobers the iconic Cricketer, his passing obliges us not to observe the man he was. Beyond the talents, he brought to the game, The Rt. Excellent Sir Garfield St Aubrun Sobers was a towering figure in the evolution of our Caribbean civilisation.

At a time of struggle to carve our own space and identity, he was a model of West Indianness. He was the embodiment of grace, humility and generosity who fully understood the unique role of cricket within the process of integration. Throughout the region, wherever he went he was readily accepted as “one of us” and felt quite at home. This creative virtuoso brought fame, pride and glory to our Caribbean. He was determined to excel and thereby establish that no pinnacle was beyond our reach.

Barbados made him its first National Hero. The Caribbean bestowed its highest award; the Order of the Caribbean Community and the University of the West Indies conferred an Honorary Doctorate of Laws in recognition of the intuitive acuity he reflected on and off the field of play.

During his earthly sojourn, Garfield Sobers earned the right, time after time, to be a "Cricket Immortal." As his mortal remains are laid to rest, there is the certitude that his name and catalogue of awesome accomplishments will never die. Garfield St Aubrun Sobers will forever be a beacon to chart our own journey to be the best we can ever be.

PJ Patterson

July 22, 2026