

Sunny Basdeo

It was 1947 and he could well have been Guyana's answer to Sonny Ramadhin if things were different. But Sunny Basdeo lived in an age when the opportunities were limited and when the talent was so rich that several outstanding players had to compete for a single spot. Nevertheless, Sunny managed to represent Guyana as a spin bowler and to make a name for himself in the country. His memory is sharp and he could recall with accuracy the beginnings of some of the greats in cricket including Rohan Kanhai, Lance Gibbs, Joe Solomon, Basil Butcher and others.

Sunny Basdeo was born at Plantation Leonora on the West Coast of Demerara. He is the youngest of three children. His father is Dhupan Maraj and his mom is Somaria. Sunny attended Anna Catharina Primary School that was opposite the cricket ground. He liked reading but cricket got hold of him and he went to work in the factory 'pushing wheelbarrow and throwing turn wood in the boiler.' He would throw wood in the night and this would free him up to play cricket in the day.

Sunny's cricketing career began with softball and then the team moved on to hard ball. Every weekend they would play at Leonora seawall. He would miss meals because of cricket but he didn't mind. Sunny took up welding through the sugar estate but cricket first on his mind. After a stint in club cricket Sunny found that he could spin the ball and he began taking wickets. It so happened that in 1948 a coach from Bookers visited Leonora. He was Woolford and he was looking for talent.

Woolford brought his team from Georgetown to play the local Leonora club. Sunny was picked to represent Leonora and he took six wickets in

the match. Coach Woolford was impressed and relayed to the cricket Board that he had spotted a new talent. Sunny says, 'I was called to trials in Georgetown. When we got to the nets the rules were strict. If you were a batsman and you did not do well you were out. The same applied to bowlers. You had to be on top of your game.'

In the first trial at Guyana Cricket Club

call to the ground. Robert Christiani took the call and relayed the message to Berkeley Gaskin the Sunny was on his way on the other boat.

Sunny had never met Christiani but now he would be bowling against him. The pavilion was noisy as Christiani was in prime form. The fans told Gaskin that the little boy Sunny would suffer at the hands of the great Christiani and that maybe Sunny should not bowl. But Gaskin threw the ball to Sunny. The first delivery was hit hard back to the bowler. The second ball was pitched outside of the leg stump and Christiani did not offer a stroke. The ball turned prodigiously and clipped the off stump and Christiani was bowled around his back. He was stunned.

Sunny was on song. Christiani's wicket opened the way for Sunny to bowl Bruce Pairaudeau, Glendon

impress.

Sunny was impressed with some of the spin bowlers of the day including Edwin Mohamed, Ganesh Persaud and others. The Bristol Trophy was played between Port Mourant and Leonora, two of the strongest teams. Sunny

the English team. Sunny could not sleep the night before the game and he was up early for nets at Bourda. England won the toss and elected to bat. But as Sunny looked at the fingers on right his hand something strange happened. He began to feel a pain on his spin-

was one catch: he had to marry the daughter of one of the officials. Sunny refused and he returned to Guyana with memories of cricket only! He continued to play local cricket on the West Coast of Demerara. His best bowling hap-

Cricket in the Old Days!



A PROUD MOMENT:

Sunny Basdeo meets President Obama at the White House.

ning finger and he found a boil on it. He managed to bowl two overs and had to stop.

'I showed my finger to Christiani and he advised me to see a doctor,' Sunny said. 'I went to Dr. Jardine and he treated it but I wasn't able to bowl.' Sunny had another chance when India toured West Indies under Vijay Hazare. Sunny got a wicket in his first over and then the Indians declared and there was no chance for him to bowl again. Sunny's international career had come to an end. He recalls meeting Rohan Kanhai, Basil Butcher and Joe Solomon and says that they were courteous to him.

Sunny toured the Caribbean with the Leonora team and one outing to Trinidad was most memorable. His bowling performance was so outstanding that he was offered a house and a job and a car. But there

opened when he took 7 wickets for 0 runs against Anna Catharina.

These days Sunny lives in New York with his wife Drupatty and his children Komal and Nalini and their three grandchildren. A special moment occurred when Sunny met with President Barack Obama at the White House. Sunny is still involved in cricket as he umpires softball matches. He thanks Robert Christiani, Lance Gibbs and George Camacho for their kindness. Sunny admires Gary Sobers, Viv Richards and Shivnarine Chanderpaul but he reserves a special mention for Rohan Kanhai.

Sunny says with nostalgia in his voice, 'Kanhai can bat!' We wish Sunny Basdeo and his family all the best in the future.



The Leonora team in 1947. Sunny Basdeo is seated second from left in the second row.

there were only two players that remained from the 24 that were called to trials and they were Sunny and Audrey Bishop. At the end of that trial Bishop got four wickets and Sunny got 3 wickets for 5 runs. This led Sunny to play in the second trial and this was at the East Indian Cricket Ground. Sunny missed the boat at Vreeden-hoop and had to find a phone to make a

Gibbs, George Camacho, and another wicket giving him figures of 5 for 47. The fans lifted him in the air and a new spin bowler was born.

Christiani congratulated Sunny but he had a plan. The following day Christiani kept wicket and had Sunny bowl to see how Sunny was able to turn the ball. Sunny was invited to more trials where he continued to

said, 'When I played in Port Mourant I would get the wickets of Basil Butcher, Joe Solomon and the rest.' He did well in the local matches and hard work and persistence finally paid off.

Len Hutton's English team was visiting West Indies in 1947/48 and Sunny was picked to play in the colony game. He would represent British Guiana against