

= Salisbury Sports Club tournament in 1970 =

Garfield Sobers , captain of the West Indies cricket team and one of the most prominent cricketers in the world , outraged many in the Caribbean in September 1970 when he took part in a friendly double @-@ wicket tournament at Salisbury Sports Club in Rhodesia (renamed Zimbabwe in 1980) , a country in southern Africa that was unrecognised internationally because of its mostly white minority government . The resulting furore nearly caused him to lose the captaincy , and threatened the unity of the West Indies team itself .

Sobers was captain of the " Rest of the World " team that toured England between May and August 1970 in place of the South Africa national team , whose proposed tour had been cancelled by English cricketing authorities because of apartheid . He accepted an invitation to the Rhodesian competition from Eddie Barlow , a South African member of the Rest of the World team , and arrived in Salisbury on the day of the event . To ecstatic applause from the mostly white spectators , Sobers partnered South African Test captain Ali Bacher in the tournament , and said afterwards that he had enjoyed himself , though he and Bacher had not won . Having established a personal rapport with the Rhodesian Prime Minister , Ian Smith , Sobers left the next day and returned home to Barbados .

Many in the West Indies were appalled by Sobers ' actions , and when he subsequently made positive comments about Smith , Rhodesia and white South African cricketers in press interviews and announced his intention to play more cricket in Rhodesia , the vitriol intensified , with one Antiguan newspaper branding him a " white black man " . A number of prominent figures , including entire political parties , called for Sobers to be stripped of the West Indies cricket captaincy . Guyanese Prime Minister Forbes Burnham barred Sobers from Guyana , and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India announced that if Sobers remained in the team , India would pull out of its upcoming tour of the West Indies . Sobers argued that as a " professional cricketer and a sportsman , not a politician " , he had done nothing wrong .

The West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) contemplated whether it would be better to cancel all matches in Guyana or to sack Sobers ; neither prospect was attractive . The crisis ended when Eric Williams , the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago , wrote a letter of apology for Sobers to sign , which was relayed to the WICB and several governmental bodies in late October 1970 . This was accepted , and the incident was soon largely forgotten . Sobers regained his overwhelming popularity with West Indian cricket fans , continued as team captain until 1972 and retired from cricket two years later . He thereafter retained his stance that politics should not interfere with sport . His Rhodesian visit has been cited as precursoring the South African rebel tours controversy of the 1980s .

= = Background = =

Garfield Sobers , from the Caribbean island of Barbados , was widely regarded as one of the world 's finest cricketers from the late 1950s to the early 1970s , and is placed by many among the best to ever play the sport . An all @-@ rounder , he made his debut for the West Indies cricket team , the multinational side representing the Caribbean in international cricket , at the age of 17 in 1954 . He was a regular member of the team for the next two decades . Sobers set a then @-@ world record highest individual score of 365 runs not out during a Test match against Pakistan in 1958 , and became captain of the West Indies team six years later . In domestic first @-@ class cricket , he was one of the first West Indians to play abroad , representing South Australia and Nottinghamshire during the 1960s and 1970s . His batting , bowling and fielding were all regarded as excellent by contemporaries , but his decision making and tactics were occasionally criticised .

Rhodesia was an unrecognised state in southern Africa , run by a predominantly white minority government headed by Prime Minister Ian Smith . Taking exception to the UK 's insistence on majority rule as a condition for independence , Smith 's colonial administration had unilaterally declared independence in 1965 following a long dispute over the terms . International uproar and the first ever United Nations economic sanctions had ensued , making Rhodesia deeply isolated .

This quarantine variously extended to sports . Rhodesian athletes , including the 1968 , 1972 and 1976 Olympic squads (which were racially integrated) , were barred from international competition on political grounds . Rhodesian cricket and rugby were not greatly affected as these sports largely operated in tandem with South Africa . The Rhodesia cricket team , for example , took part in the annual Currie Cup tournament against South African provincial sides .

As world opinion hardened against South Africa during the 1960s because of apartheid , international governing bodies in various sports introduced boycotts of South African teams and athletes . Until 1976 , non @-@ whites were legally barred from the South Africa cricket team , and , as the law required matches to be racially homogenous , this also applied to visiting squads . The South African government provoked overseas ire in 1968 when it refused entry to the England cricket team because its proposed tour party included Basil D 'Oliveira , a Cape Coloured . Amid the ensuing scandal , Marylebone Cricket Club (which then governed English cricket) called off the tour . Two years later , a tour of England by the South Africa cricket team was cancelled by the English Test and County Cricket Board (TCCB) at a week 's notice following public protests and immense pressure from the UK government . South Africa did not play another official international cricket match until 1991 .

The TCCB sought to recoup the lost revenues for the 1970 season by hastily organising a replacement series of matches between England and a " Rest of the World " team comprising leading cricketers from around the world . This squad , described by the leading cricket publication Wisden Cricketers ' Almanack as " one of the strongest teams ever to take the field " , included five South Africans , five West Indians (including Sobers , as captain) , two Pakistanis and a player each from Australia and India . It defeated England 4 ? 1 over a tour lasting from late June to late August 1970 .

= = Sobers in Rhodesia = =

Eddie Barlow , one of the South African members of the Rest of the World team , suggested to Sobers towards the end of the English series that the West Indian might like to take part in a friendly double @-@ wicket competition in the Rhodesian capital Salisbury on 12 September , the local Pioneers ' Day holiday . Barlow was one of several prominent South African cricketers already booked to play . Sobers was initially noncommittal , but decided to go following assurances that Rhodesia did not practice apartheid and there would be no racial discrimination regarding team selection . Sobers ' intended participation became public on 7 September when a London newspaper reported on it ; widespread condemnation of the West Indian captain followed , but he still travelled , landing in Salisbury early on the day of the event .

Sobers was enthusiastically received in Salisbury by blacks and whites alike ; he described the reception and hospitality as " wonderful " and " just great " . After a few hours ' rest , he made his way to Salisbury Sports Club for the competition , in which he partnered the South African Test captain Ali Bacher , whom he had never met . Sobers received £ 600 for appearing . The largely white capacity crowd gave the Barbadian a hero 's welcome , accompanying his walk out to the wicket with a standing ovation and a chorus of " For He 's a Jolly Good Fellow " . Having flown in just that morning , Sobers underperformed , and he and Bacher did not win . All the same , the other teams formed a guard of honour for them as they left the field . Bacher found Sobers be " a great guy with no airs or graces " ; he suggested to his teammate that he should consider also playing in South Africa .

Sobers spent part of the day sitting with Ian Smith in the stands . Both reported enjoying the occasion ; Smith , a keen sports fan and a talented player in his day , fondly recounted his " lovely day discussing the great men of cricket " with Sobers in his memoirs , while Sobers recalled the Rhodesian premier as " a tremendous person to talk to " . After the tournament ended , they continued their conversation over dinner . Smith told Sobers that he was welcome to come back to Rhodesia whenever he liked . Sobers left the next day , after less than 48 hours in the country , and returned home to Barbados on 15 September 1970 .

= = Controversy = =

Sobers was met in Bridgetown by an enormous and hostile press storm . " To say there was an uproar in the Caribbean is comprehensively to understate what took place , " the Jamaican politician Michael Manley later wrote in his History of West Indies Cricket . The Antigua Labour Party 's Workers ' Voice newspaper damned Sobers as " a white black man " and charged that by playing in Rhodesia , he had " abdicated his loyalty to Africans everywhere , and all West Indians in particular " . Manley 's opinion was that if Sobers did not apologise , he " may not be welcomed anywhere by people who believe that justice is bigger than even sport " . Frank Walcott of the Barbados Workers ' Union , who was a personal friend of Sobers , publicly called for his captaincy of the West Indies to be revoked , as did many others . Sobers told reporters at Seawell Airport that he had " never been bothered about criticism , and I do not see why I should start now " . Sympathy for Sobers amid the affair came mainly from his fellow Barbadians . Vernon Jamadar , Leader of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago , praised Sobers ' " calm dignity in response to the primitive savagery of West Indian gutter politicians " .

Sobers told the media that he had played in Rhodesia as he felt it would be good for cricket , particularly after the cancellation of the South African tour of England , and that politics had not entered his mind . He told interviewers that he had had no problems whatsoever in Rhodesia , that sport in Rhodesia appeared to him to be integrated and that he intended to accept Smith 's invitation to return there in the future to play more cricket . Reporting Bacher 's suggestion of playing in South Africa , Sobers said that he probably would not do so : " I don 't know if I would want to get involved in that , " he said , " but it does show that South African cricketers are willing to play with and against players of any colour , race or creed . " Sobers said that the white South African members of the Rest of the World squad in England had functioned well as part of the multiracial team , and that he hoped for a similar Rest of the World series in the Caribbean as he believed West Indian cricket fans would enjoy seeing the South African players . He expressed confusion regarding the calls for him to be stripped of his captaincy . " I am a professional cricketer and a sportsman , not a politician , " he said . " I went to play cricket . I don 't see why this should affect my position as captain of the West Indies team . "

The crisis deepened on 10 October 1970 , when Guyanese Prime Minister Forbes Burnham announced that Sobers would not be allowed to enter Guyana until he apologised . This was a major issue for the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) as the team played at least one Test match a year in Georgetown , the Guyanese capital . The Jamaica Labour Party called for Sobers to resign as captain four days later ; Indira Gandhi , the Indian Prime Minister , then announced that if Sobers were not removed from the West Indies team , India would cancel its upcoming tour of the West Indies , scheduled for early 1971 . The WICB considered its options . Cancelling matches in Guyana might prompt Burnham to instruct Guyanese members of the West Indian team to boycott , and sacking Sobers might cause Barbados to withdraw in protest ; either way , the unity of the West Indies team was threatened . Meanwhile , no sign of an apology emanated from Sobers .

= = Apology , resolution and legacy = =

Taking matters into his own hands , the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Eric Williams wrote an apology letter for Sobers to sign , addressed to WICB president Noel Pierce , and had it delivered to the West Indies captain by the Barbadian fast bowler Wes Hall . The letter explained that Sobers had not known of the " deep feelings of the West Indian people " on Rhodesia , that he now better understood the political issues , and that he would not go to the southern African country again . " I therefore wish to convey to you and the members of the board my sincere regrets for any embarrassment which my action may have caused , and to assure you of my unqualified dedication whenever I may be called upon to represent my country ? the West Indies ? and my people , " it concluded . Sobers signed , and the apology was promptly conveyed to the WICB in late October 1970 , with copies also going to the council of the West Indies Associated States and the prime ministerial offices of Barbados , Guyana , Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica . " A grateful Caribbean

grabbed the apology with both hands , " Manley records ? " The thought that [Sobers] might be lost as a consequence of a political gaffe was intolerable . For the great majority , the incident was forgiven and promptly forgotten . "

Sobers regained his former popularity and kept the West Indies cricket captaincy until 1972 ; he retired from the sport two years later . He was subsequently knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1975 for his services to cricket , and named one of the ten National Heroes of Barbados by the Barbadian government in 1998 . His controversial visit to Rhodesia has been described by cricket journalist Siddhartha Vaidyanathan as precursoring the West Indian " rebel tours " affair of the early 1980s , in which black cricketers from the Caribbean broke the apartheid sporting boycott and played in South Africa . The West Indian rebel players became wildly popular among South African cricket fans , but were punished at home with bans from all organised cricket (initially for life , but lifted in 1989) , compounded by lasting social and professional ostracism . Sobers retained his stance that politics should not interfere with sport , and was reluctant to criticise the West Indians who toured South Africa . All the same , he came to regret having gone to Rhodesia because of the scandal he had provoked . " Had I known the furore my visit was to cause , " he later said , " I would not have gone . "