



BREAKING NEWS DJW disputes date in CNC3 report; Bassant: Doesn't change crux of issue

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LITTLE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOMES AND GAMES; BEST REMEMBERS SHELDON—HIS QRC TEAMMATE

Earl Best Friday 18 September 2020 Cricket, Volley 2 Comments

When I told Sheldon Anthony Gomes that Isaac Vivian Alexander Richards had reminded me of him, his response was immediate.

"He as good as you?" I had asked in jest.

"Nah, skip," he responded, "ten times better—at least!"



Photo: A fresh-faced Viv Richards in 1976. (Copyright Wisden)

Richards had singlehandedly run out three Australian batsmen in the 1975 World Cup.

Shelly's mixture of modesty and talent was rare indeed; they don't come more self-effacing than he. It is why I can say without fear of successful contradiction that what I heard on i95.5FM yesterday in the wake of his passing on Tuesday would have mortified him. He was described as 'one of Trinidad and Tobago's sporting greats'.

In the days when he and I played football and cricket together at QRC and elsewhere, I spent many, many pleasurable hours in Shelly's company.

Sheldon was a very, very good sportsman, one of that rare breed who could have represented the country at both football and cricket and in cricket had the potential to rise, like his younger brother, to international level. He did neither, despite opting, once he had moved on from the Secondary Schools League, to focus his energies on the gentleman's game.

No surprise there. He was both a gentleman and a gentle man.

I remember how very gently he would tell the ladies, who literally lined up to get his post-match attention in football season especially, that he simply wasn't interested. Which would not stop some of them from following us all the way to town.'Us' because he, Brian 'Christian' Bain, Selby 'Lagga' Browne, Reynold 'Muck' McKenzie and I all lived up in the East and so I was able to bask in his reflected glory.



Photo: Then QRC cricket team captain Earl Best (far right) leads his colleagues on to the field, followed by Sheldon Gomes (second from right). (via QRC yearbook)

And I remember how, later, he would laugh heartily without embarrassment at the unflattering jokes repeatedly told about the unfortunate, no, horrendous start to his national cricketer's career.

Here's the one I remember best: Just as a wicket falls, the phone rings. It's Mrs Gomes, wife, not mother. A team-mate informs her that her husband is just going out to bat.

"Okay," she says, "I'll hold."

And there's the one about his having just lit a cigarette—you know it's apocryphal because he didn't smoke—when he has to go out to bat.

"Gih mih nah," a teammate says, "Let mi hold it fuh yuh until yuh come back."

In football, he was a striker. Deadly in front of goal! Could turn on a cent! He had pace, he had power and he had a lightning-quick football brain. I remember how reminiscent one of the goals he scored against Naparima was of a goal I saw Pelé miss in a World Cup.

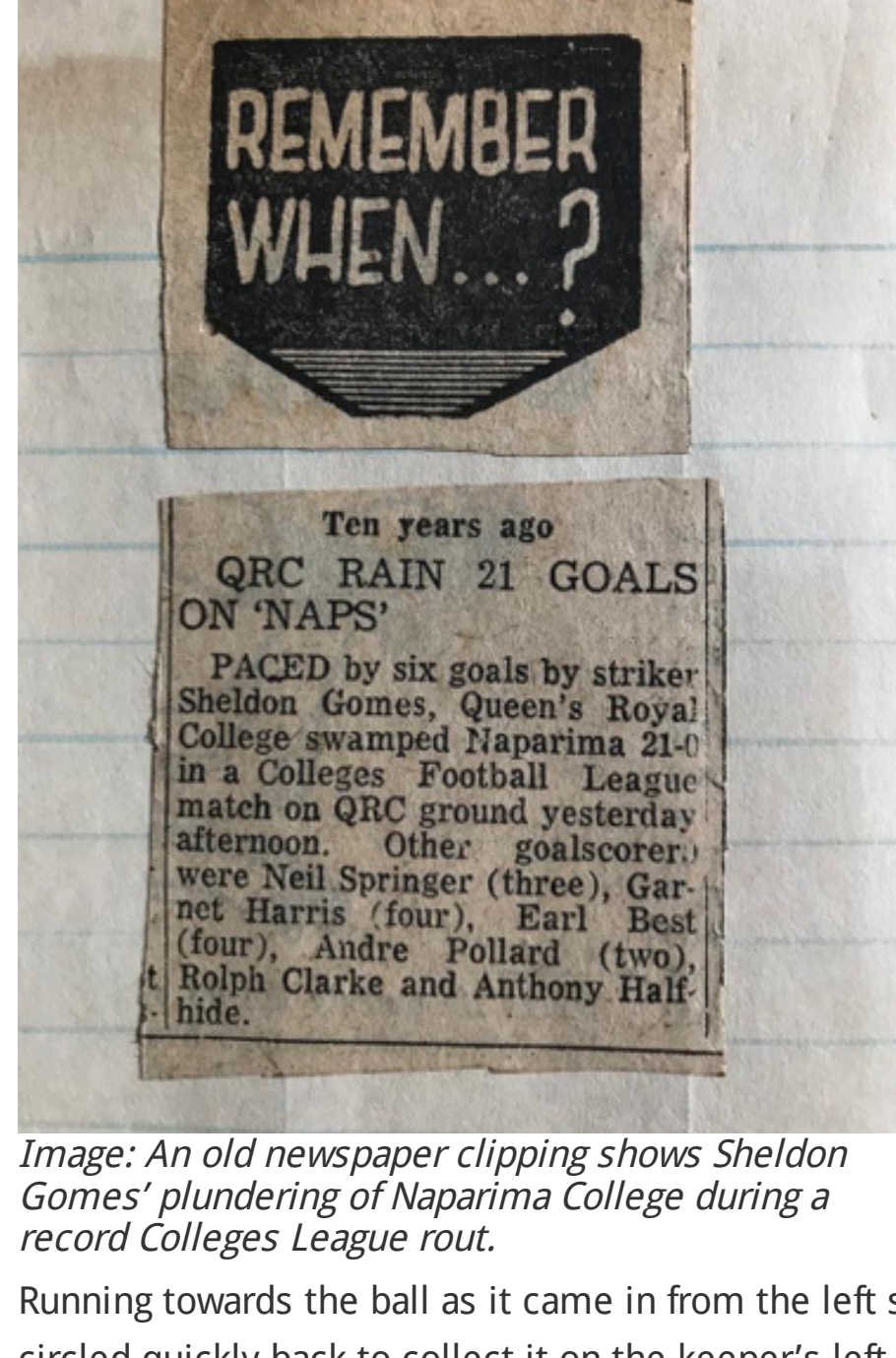


Image: An old newspaper clipping shows Sheldon Gomes' plundering of Naparima College during a record Colleges League rout.

Running towards the ball as it came in from the left side, he dummied the keeper and circled quickly back to collect it on the keeper's left. Pelé missed the target from an acute angle; Sheldon did not, tapping nonchalantly into an unguarded net.

Don't ask me where the defenders were. Where would you have been if you were a defender and the score read 15 or 16 none?

Naturally, he scored a rash of goals in that game, which we won fairly comfortably (21-0) and another slew of them in the 18-0 victory over Fyzabad. My memory is not, however, good enough for me to confirm that that was the same season in which he set the record for the most goals in a single SSFL season. Fifty years is a long, long time ago!

I remember, though, that it was CIC's Luciano Woodley who went one better than him a few seasons later. And that Sheldon went out of his way to find and congratulate him.

I remember too one Senior Grade game against Queen's Park at the College ground. I was batting with him and the now late Everard Gordon was bowling from the northern end. The leg-spinner set an orthodox midwicket and his mid-on straight, more or less in front of the stately Samaan tree that stood—still stands, I think—in front of the canteen.

Three times in succession, Sheldon on-drove him between the two for four.



Photo: The late Sheldon Gomes (right) and his younger brother Larry Gomes. Both brothers represented Trinidad and Tobago at cricket while Larry was also a household name for the West Indies team. (via Loop TT)

At the start of the next over, Gordon pushed the mid-on wider and dropped the midwicket a little deeper.

Shelly came down the wicket and told me: "Watch this."

Three times in succession, he straight-drove him between the bowler and the wide mid-on for four. I thought Gordon would get whiplash. And Sheldon never moved more than a step or two out of his crease as the ball crashed into the canteen.

He was that good!

His fielding had to be seen to be believed. He was a veritable dead-eye Dick, able to hit the stumps almost at will from anywhere in the cover area which his presence literally kept batsmen in their crease. Tony 'Surety' Lewis will attest.

After he migrated, I essentially lost touch with him although for a while his son Mark, a later Royalian cricketer, would sometimes share news of his father.



Photo: Sheldon Gomes (left) enjoys some family time with his younger brother, Larry Gomes.

When Shelly returned home for a spell, we never really reconnected. News came one day that he had had to be hospitalised at Mt Hope. I went there to see him but did not, strangely, they could find no listing for him at the information desk.

Mark knows that, in my playbook, Sheldon's name is written in indelible ink.

And, I feel certain, in the playbooks of Clifford 'Snake' Murray, Roger 'Colt' Matthews, Rolph Clarke and Andre 'Fifi' Pollard to name only those.

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ABOUT EARL BEST

Earl Best taught cricket, French, football and Spanish at QRC for many years and has written consistently for the Tapia and the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian since the 1970's. He is also a former sports editor at the Trinidad Express and is now a senior lecturer in Journalism at COSTAATT.

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- Anbrat Friday 18 September 2020 at 9:19 pm
Excellent tribute to the man! Top drawer! Cheers!
Noble Friday 18 September 2020 at 6:48 pm
Thanks Earl! This is as good as you could have done. This captures the essence of the man. I really appreciated this memorial. You paid homage in a way few would do. I guess it is because these are my memories as well.

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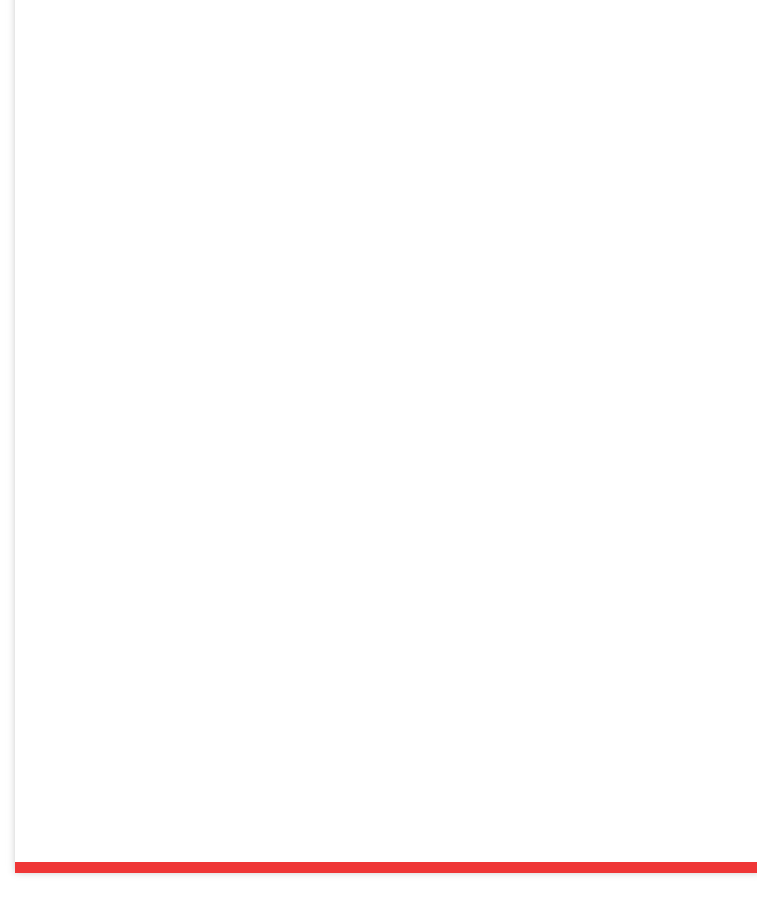
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