First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



William Rodriguez

H.B.M

Cricket

Inducted in 1987

His all-round ability has made him the holder of a unique record in West Indian sport, while his all-round ability in cricket has ensured that the name 'Willie' Rodriguez is enshrined in the annals of Trinidad and Tobago's record books.

Born in the very same St. Clair area in Port of Spain where the Queen's Park Oval is located, Rodriguez attended St Mary's College where he established himself as a defender in the school's football teams, a position that was not defined by his build nor, in his opinion, speed. "I was not very fast; it was my anticipation. You try to read a game as best as you can and, when you see a play developing, you have a vision of the field and you know where the ball is likely to go."

While at St. Mary's he came under the tutelage of the legendary coach, Kelvin 'Pa' Aleong, who worked with Rodriguez on his batting and honed his obvious ability as a leg spin bowler. For such a specialist skill, the young Rodriguez could produce a mesmerizing googly on demand.

He was noticed by the top clubs in north Trinidad and joined Queen's Park Cricket Club.

He hit domestic cricket like a storm, taking wickets and scoring runs, which got him selected for the Trinidad and Tobago team in 1954. All the while he continued playing football for Shamrock FC and made it onto the national team as well. It also meant that – especially as a defender – he was suffering injuries that prevented the West Indies cricket selectors from choosing him for the regional team.

That all changed in January 1958 when a touring Pakistan team played Trinidad and Tobago at the Oval in between the 1st and 2nd Tests and, with the hosts in trouble, Rodriguez came to the crease and scored his maiden first-class century. It got him onto the Windies team for the 1958 tour to India and Pakistan. There, he took 7 for 90 against Indian Universities but was not selected for the Test matches. It was while he was in India that he received the invitation to tour Britain as part of the first (and to date, only) West Indian football team.

That tour comprised 18 games played between August to November 1959, with Rodriguez taking part in every match. The resulting injuries convinced him to focus solely on cricket.

1960 saw Rodriguez blaze a trail through the domestic league for Queen's Park, as well as for the North Team, in highly competitive matches against South. He says, "It bridged the gap between levels and geared you for territorial and Test matches."

By the time India toured the Caribbean in 1962, Rodriquez's record in regional matches was enough to earn him selection for the West Indies. His debut came at Kingston, cementing his place in history as the only person to have played both cricket and football for the West Indies.

In his second Test at Port of Spain, he used the familiar surroundings to score his maiden fifty, and bagged three wickets in the first innings as the Windies won the game and series.

As part of the West Indies 1963 tour of England he was again hampered by injuries on the early part of the tour, suffering cartilage damage. But, he recovered in the latter half to score 93 against Yorkshire after being promoted to open the innings, a role that he replicated for the 5th Test at Kennington Oval, scoring 28 in another Windies victory.

His fifth and final Test appearance came in Port of Spain, on the back of another superb bowling display, when Trinidad and Tobago played England and Rodriguez took 6 for 51. In the Test he had match figures of 4 for 179, with captain Garry Sobers' infamous declaration in the first innings that the Windies then lost the match.

By this time his greater strength was his bowling. Between 1965 and 1969 his batting average was 18.10, but his average was 22.21, built largely upon his remarkable performances in the regional Shell Shield matches. He was made captain of the Trinidad and Tobago team in 1966, nurturing the belief amongst the players that they could land their first win in the overall competition. His final two seasons of first-class cricket saw him return 6 for 30 against Barbados in 1969, 5 for 12 against Guyana, and 5 for 76 against Jamaica in 1970, as Trinidad and Tobago

won the coveted regional title for two consecutive years with 'Willie' a crucial part of their attack.

Rodriguez decided to go out on top, announcing his retirement and prompting such headlines as 'The googly wizard has called it a day'.
He concentrated on his career and family but remained close to the game, managing the West Indies tour to Australia and New Zealand in 1979-80, and later becoming President of the Queen's Park Cricket Club. He was a great thinker of the game. "You don't play sport with your legs or your hands, you play it with your brain. That was the principle that I operated on." It earned him, and by extension, Trinidad and Tobago, success.

In 1994 'Willie' Rodriguez was honoured with the Hummingbird Silver Medal for services to sport as both player and manager, while he was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 1987.

Matches: Test 5; First Class 64

Batting: Test 96 runs, Average 13.71, Fifties 1; First Class 2,061 runs, Average 24.83, Hundreds 1, Fifties 9

Bowling: Test Wickets 7, Average 53.42; First Class Wickets 119, Average 28.08

Fielding: Test catches 3; First Class Catches 36