
Throughout the West Indies, “Reds” Perreira is known as an incisive cricket commentator. But Perreira has never been content only to be an observer. He is a lifetime sports organizer, whose talent found its best outlet when he served as the Sports Coordinator for the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) between 1984 and 1996. Full disclosure: it was during those years that I worked with him training basketball referees.

Perreira’s focus has always been on using sport to achieve social progress. His work during the 1960s with a second-division football team based in an economically depressed area of Georgetown, Guyana, illustrates this point. Members of that squad had, as Perreira euphemistically puts it, “a reputation for losing their tempers.” Believing that the team’s poor performance on the pitch had little to do with ability, Perreira attempted to address the issues that did. He describes how he spent “evenings and weekends visiting with the players and their families, enlisting their relatives to support their endeavour, making sure they attended practices, kept decent hours and had clean uniforms.” It was, he recalls, “thrilling to watch the community mobilized.” His efforts included mounting a “one-man demonstration” in protest when the team was suspended because its secretary failed to attend the requisite number of league meetings (p. 26). A picture of the solitary Perreira carrying a hard-to-decipher placard calling on other footballers to “help your brothers” is included in the book (p. 29).

Perreira is a Caribbean regionalist. He was there during the halcyon days of West Indies cricket, providing a pan-Caribbean radio audience with vivid descriptions of the accomplishments of the region’s team. Because he was part of the broadcast group that linked the squad to its followers, his role was important in creating the bonds that even today connect the people in Jamaica to those in Guyana and all of the islands in between.

Perreira’s twelve years at the OECS Sports Desk were a period of real accomplishment. But at the same time they were always difficult and sometimes contentious. The job was demanding. Perreira reports traveling
two or three times a week. He needed to be personally present at the events his desk sponsored since administrators were scarce and the risk of mishaps always loomed. The Sports Desk benefitted from the fact that these were relatively prosperous years for the Windward Island banana growers. Though money was always tight he did have a budget to work with. He also negotiated some very beneficial deals, such as securing an intraregional discount from LIAT by which the airline provided a 50 percent discount to athletes traveling to OECS tournaments during LIAT’s slack travel season. This allowed for a very active, concentrated, calendar of activities ranging from boxing to basketball.

In this work, Perreira showed himself to be a bit of a feminist. He writes, “when the Sports Desk was announced, everybody thought it would be a macho affair but I am happy to say we pushed for netball and had the OECS under 23 tournament and the OECS Club Championships which gave the best clubs in the sub-region a chance of meeting and deciding the best OECS netball club” (p. 91).

A disappointment concerns Perreira’s attempt to build clubs to support teams. He preached the need for “a club structure that encouraged people in the communities to become involved” (p. 92). But even today this remains largely absent. Perreira mentions but does not detail various rebuffs and defeats he experienced throughout his career. For example, when he took the job at the OECS, there was resentment that an outsider (someone from Guyana and not from the subregion) had been appointed to the post. He writes that he “did not allow it to bother me because the proof of the pudding is in the eating” and that “within months my detractors were conceding that I was doing a good job because they were seeing action” (p. 86). He is more forthcoming about his difficulties with UNESCO. That organization provided funds to pay his salary, but not for programming. Some of UNESCO’s requests for information were “almost laughable.” Disregarding them, he focused more on “the information that was relevant and positive and showed the growth and potential of Caribbean sports,” commenting that “Paris had a European view of sports administration that did not necessarily obtain in the Caribbean” (p. 92).

Perreira’s ability to focus on the positive and work to overcome the limits he faced persists today. Slowed by a stroke, he continues to seek ways to contribute (and to gently grouse when his efforts are shunned). If there were
more people like Reds Perreira, the regional integration process and development of the Caribbean would be far more advanced than it is today.

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