

TEAM BAHAMAS on the way to becoming champions of the Nagico T20 Cricket Tournament for the second consecutive year in 2015 with a victory over The Rest of the World in the championship game at Windsor Park.



Come on - it's simply not cricket

OFFICIALLY, cricket is the national sport of The Bahamas. Officially, oatmeal without sugar and cream is really good for you.

Officially, it is against the law in The Bahamas to sleep while reversing. No kidding.

Officially, there is a whole range of stuff that is, well, official but not necessarily correct, like having cricket as our national sport. We understand how cricket came to be the national sport. There were people here from England, many of them, and there were civil servants whose ancestry dates back to India where the English used cricket as one of the country's earliest sports exports. And cricket's history is actually fun and filled with touches of humour, but that does not qualify it to be the lingering national sport.

Let's be honest, how many of us actually know what a wicket keeper does or how many players there are on a team or what that hand-held instrument is made of that someone, probably not Bahamian, uses to hit a ball.

We can tell you all about the NBA draft. We fly to Florida for Miami Heat games or even the Marlins. We know that when it's football season and someone says the Fish, they are not talking about a boil or a trip. They mean Dolphins.

Because something is official does not mean it

By Diane Phillips



cannot be challenged or changed when reasonable people, armed with reasonable information, sit down and reasonably discuss why that which is official needs to give way to a substitute that is more suitably official. (Like sleeping while reversing should be sleeping while operating a vehicle, officially making sleeping while driving a misdemeanor instead of a need for Starbucks.)

The recent discussion about what should be the national sport of The Bahamas was like many national conversations, filled with fervour and passion. And the reason the discussion started is because of growing awareness that in a nation filled with sports heroes and international stars, our official national sport is something that we don't even play.

'If this game that many island nations further south continue to enjoy is not exactly the right national sport for The Bahamas, the question becomes what is? There is no shortage of suggestions and each makes a certain amount of sense.'

Once a part of physical education programmes in at least a few schools, cricket today is largely found only on the pitch at Fort Charlotte. Walk upstairs to the Cricket Club, hail Chris and Connie, the ultimate host and hostess, glance at any of the TV screens and you are far likelier to see motor sports, soccer, rugby or Wimbledon. Some of the British diehards who have called The Bahamas home for decades must marvel in near disbelief that cricket is still the national sport of The Bahamas.

Just as an FYI – the game of cricket dates back to the medieval period, maybe a celebration for survivors after rats and fleas led to a plague that took 75 million lives, a gruesome detail included just to emphasise how long

ago the game appeared as a distraction on the scene.

Hitting a ball with a stick and trying to get it through a wicket gate that was probably modelled after a gate through which sheep were herded was a basic recreation and, after a horror like the plague, could have provided much-needed relief for children in the street.

The first evidence of adults trying their hand at the game comes from a church record where two parishioners were caught dodging Easter Sunday service to play cricket and were fined one penny each.

So, if this game that many island nations further south continue to enjoy is not exactly the right national sport for The Bahamas, the question becomes what is?

There is no shortage of suggestions and each makes a certain amount of sense. Why not track and field, some say, where we have had more stars and won more medals, including Olympic gold, relative to our population than just about any place on the face of the earth with the exception of Jamaica and possibly Kenya and Ethiopia? Or, why not basketball where we have had two first round draft picks, including Deandre Ayton just last month, and Mychal "Sweet Bells" Thompson in 1978 and we have promising professional players like Buddy Hield and players who delivered on the promise like Rick Fox?

There are those who argue it should be tennis. It is a little-known fact The Bahamas once had the highest number of tennis courts per capita in the world and another little-known fact that a court on Market Street is the oldest, continuously operating clay court in the Western Hemisphere. That court was here before Wimbledon was the high priestess of tennis championships, when it was just a tube stop southwest of London.

There are good reasons to support swimming as the national sport or you could make the argument for diving or many other athletic activities and people

have. Open airways have given the Bahamian people a voice, social media has stoked the verbal volume.

But there is really only one sport that stands out as the true national sport, native sloop sailing. The reason that native sloop sailing - and by extension sailing in general - stands mast ahead of all the other categories of sports activities is because the Bahamian sloop is found only in The Bahamas.

Native sloop sailing is the only sport that is completely unique to The Bahamas. We own this sport. We created it. We take pride in it. We did not borrow someone else's game or their rules for competition. We did not model our field or our rules after anyone else's. We built these boats from scratch. We rigged their masts and attached their booms. We designed those masts to defy physics, in A Class twice as tall as the vessel is long. A 28-foot boat with a 55-foot or greater mast and no winches to grind, just sheer physical strength and steely teamwork at a start line, pulling anchor, hoisting a massive mainsail going into the wind, finding clear air, avoiding crashes and calamities.

We own this playing field, the waters of The Bahamas. We did not borrow or beg this idea from anywhere else. We created the sport and we set the rules. There is nowhere else in the world where the spectacle of these majestic wooden sloops with the wind filling their ivory-toned canvas-like sails, the team hiked out on a pryboard to steady the boat and keep her afloat - exists, all of it a dramatic image, surging into our memories as a sight and a sport that cannot be seen anywhere else.

The idea of sailing becoming the national sport was first proposed - officially - when Zhivargo Laing was a Minister of State. A group that consisted of the late Roy Bowe, Lundy Robinson, Danny Strachan, Philip McPhee, Larry Phillips, Jimmy Lowe and others including the Dunkley brothers presented the

proposal almost 20 years ago. There have been other attempts at gaining funding for junior sailing and for sailing programmes that will guarantee the survival of the sport. Most funding requests have met with the same lack of fortune as the initial proposal but perhaps the timing was just not right. The urgency to claim that which is ours and which provides a sense of pride that swells our hearts feels current.

We are very good at celebrating the wins our sailors bring home.

We spent a year honouring Sir Durward Knowles as he marked his 100th birthday and there would have been no doubt that he would be top of any heroes list, the country's Olympic star, bringing home the gold along with crew Cecil Cooke in the 1964 Star Class Sailing championship in Seoul, South Korea.

We congratulate our legendary sailors like Sunfish world champion Donnie Martinborough whose 20th Century record eight-time Bermuda win can never be broken. We've watched those like the late Robert H "Bobby" Symonette bring home the honours in his Sloop John B and more recently Gavin McKinney winning the 5.5 Metre Worlds in France with two other Bahamians, Mark Holowesko and Peter Vlasov, finishing second.

Four times The Bahamas has been number one in sailing in the world and yet cricket remains the national sport - officially.

Sailing is an integral part of the history not just nationally but globally with The Bahamas as the gateway to the New World. It is a history we too often neglect and too rarely emphasise. Let us get on with naming the waters the Lucayan Sea, creating a visual history we can see and touch along with the waterfront of New Providence and other historic landmarks where history unfolded and let us, please, enjoy cricket at the pitch and sailing as our national sport. This is a race the nation can win.

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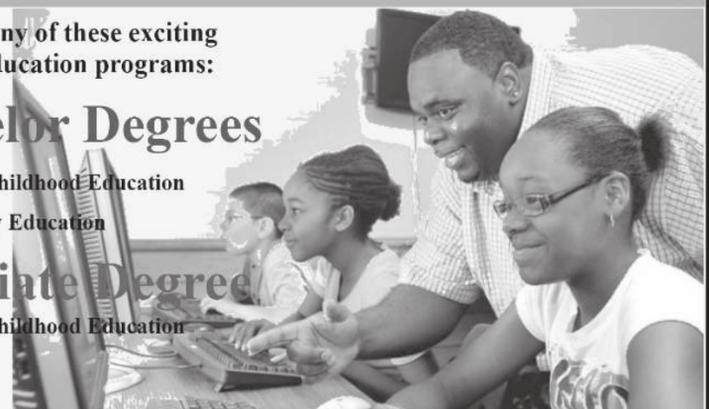
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