

New history examines the colonial birth of the West Indian international cricket team

The West Indies Cricket Team was formed in 1884 and made its first overseas tour just two years later – to Canada and the United States. This almost forgotten early tour that marked the beginning of the West Indian international journey is now examined in a new book, *The First West Indies Cricket Tour: Canada and the United States in 1886* by Hilary Beckles.

Despite the huge enthusiasm amongst the black community for playing cricket, there were no black players on the first tour. Only recently emancipated and not yet politically enfranchised they were not deemed capable of representing the nation. Nor was the team a carefully selected elite of professionals. The local economy was crumbling and each player was required to fund their own expenses, in fact several of the best players didn't tour because of business commitments. It was however, the very first expression of the "West Indian nation" on the cricket field.

Within the book, the diary of the WI captain, Laurence Fyfe, is reproduced in its entirety and it provides a fascinating insight into the nineteenth century details of the tour that has, until now, been largely forgotten. It includes press reports of games, personal commentaries, descriptions of social events, celebrations of dinner menus, and match scores.

The tourists played thirteen matches during August and September; they won six, lost five and two were drawn. The first match was played against the Montreal Cricket Club, 16–17 August, 1886. It ended in a draw after which the West Indians moved on to Ottawa, Toronto and Hamilton. They arrived in the United States to play several matches in Philadelphia where cricket was well established and the local clubs – including some English professionals – proved too strong for the tourists. This book reveals the Canadian and American influence on the cricket culture that was to emerge decades later as the most powerful force the game had ever seen.

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The First West Indian Cricket Tour: Canada and the United States in 1886
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