

'HISTORIC' BUTCHER TELLS HIS OWN STORY



LEGEND: Roland Butcher in action during his England Test debut against the West Indies at Bridgetown, Barbados, in 1981; below, standing next to the statue of Sir Gary Sobers at the Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, in 2022 (photos: Getty Images)

ROLAND BUTCHER was the first Black cricketer to represent the England Test side in the early 1980s. A stellar career saw him play around the globe for Middlesex, Barbados, Tasmania and Suffolk. Along the way he made countless friends and created memories.

Barbados-born Butcher has just penned his first book, co-authored by Dr Sasha Sutherland, entitled *Breaking Barriers; Barbados to England... And Back*. Here he talks to *Voice* sports editor Rodney Hinds about his latest work.

RH: How satisfying is it to finish the book?

RB: The fact we have reached this point is very satisfying. It is not something I really had been planning. I knew one day that I would eventually do an autobiography, but I wasn't sure exactly when that was going to be or when I wanted to do it.

I think what really brought it forward, people have been saying to me for ages, 'listen, you need to write, you need to do an autobiography.'

About a year and a bit ago, a very close friend of mine, Dr Sasha Sutherland, encouraged me too. She said to me, 'you should really write your autobiography, and she was really thinking then that I should get somebody to do it.'

She's never written any books before, but I knew she would take it on. I would say between October and now, this book

The man who became the first Black cricketer to play a Test for England reveals all in his new book. By **Rodney Hinds**

has been produced, she's been amazing.

We burned the midnight oil for a long, long period, and we're very satisfied with what we've got right now. It was just a case of us sitting for hours, she would ask questions, and I would provide the answers.

Each chapter was developed, and obviously you've got to

contact people to do forewords, remarks and tributes.

RH: You have some stellar names endorsing the book. That must be pleasing?

RB: I've got some very interesting people such as Sir Clive Lloyd, Lord Ian Botham, Professor Hillary Beckles, Michael Holding OBE and Sir Garfield Sobers amongst others.

These people are very important in my life. Sir Gary was a hero of mine when I was a kid in Barbados growing up. Michael Holding, now we go back a long way. My first game for Barbados was against Michael with Jamaica.

RH: These friendships that you've developed and maintained, that's a very special part of your life and career, isn't it?

RB: That is the real part of your career, because you spend so much time away from your families, you're either on the training ground or in the dressing room or travelling, or in the field.

When you're in the field, you're in the field for six hours, so those friendships are gold. The friends you make through cricket really last a lifetime.

I cannot honestly say there's anyone through cricket that I hate! I mean, there are some people that annoy you, but you will never say that you really hate someone through cricket, because it is not that sort of a game. So those friendships are very, very important to me.

I also remember the other person who did a remark was David Gower, who was my teammate. When it comes to tributes and testimonials, you've also got Ebony Rainford-Brent, who is a very close friend. She's got her own story to tell, she's done amazing things, and continues to do amazing things. Once she was getting involved in ACE, the phone rang and I was asked to be a patron, so I've worked with her for a while.

RH: You've always told me that being the first Black man to play in Tests in England never really connected with you at the time. Do share about that landmark moment

RB: It was just a page in history.

It was probably thought about more by other people than me. I didn't really pay a lot of attention to it, but I think when I sat down, and Sasha was probing me about everything related to that first Test match, and my feelings, you get a different perspective then on the whole thing.

We delved deeply into that, something I hadn't done before, and that was quite refreshing, because in cricket an event happens, and you move on. It has been a good journey, I've enjoyed it.

RH: How challenging was it writing the book?

RB: It is not just the writing. Once you've written a chapter, you've then got to sit down and go through that chapter, from beginning to end, make sure it makes sense, the spelling, if you've got to move things around. That is the difficult part.

Then talking about it, and getting it written, but the detail of getting everything in the right place, and how it flows etc.

RH: The book highlights your family's support. What role have they played over the years?

RB: My family is very much a central part of the book. My upbringing in a very poor household in a rural area of Barbados is explained and what it really meant to me and what it did for my development.

That's the central part of my story,

that really shaped my thinking all the way through in relation to family.

Family plays a huge part of the book, and, of course, the sacrifice of my wife, in particular, and children have had to make along the way.

RH: What's the next phase of your journey?

RB: The book certainly talks about the future. It also really gives people the drive that they can do things as well.

It is a book to show people that it doesn't matter what background you come from, what religion, what colour, whatever, there are things to do that you can become successful. It's about teaching people, young people, particularly, that, yes, they can achieve and do great things.

RH: Where does this completion of the book sit amongst your proudest moments?

RB: Since the book captures everything, it must sit, I think, at the top of all my achievements, because it is a collection of everything that has happened right through my life, good and bad.

