

# Last Girl In: Kerry-Ann Fights to Stay in the Game

*Celebrating cricket, Windrush families & girls in sport*

*A middle grade story by British-Caribbean author,  
Cheryl Diane Parkinson*



# Cricket is an inextricable part of Caribbean-British history



## **The Windrush Generation**

In the years following the second world war, the British government invited men and women from the Caribbean to come to Britain and help to rebuild the country, as it attempted to recover from the war effort. Many islands in the Caribbean had previously been colonised by the British and forced to become part of the British Empire. The people living in those countries therefore spoke English, were familiar with the idea of Britain, had learned British history at school and were British subjects.

Thousands of families, and young men, and women, relocated to Britain from Jamaica and from other parts of the Caribbean. These immigrants have become known as the Windrush generation.

One of the many ways in which the Windrush generation contributed to British society was through cricket. Cricket was a beloved pastime for many who came to Britain and they brought their passion – and skill – to the cricket grounds of their new home.

## **The sport of empire**

Cricket had been spread to the Caribbean via the British Empire. The West Indian Cricket Team (which is still known today as the WINDIES) was formed in the 1890s and was mainly comprised of players living in those Caribbean islands that had been colonised by Britain. For many years, only the colonisers were allowed to play, so the team was made up of white players only. Gradually, through the campaigning of local men and women this changed – although non-white players were only allowed to play in certain positions and they were not allowed to captain the team.

## Campaigning for change

Caribbean lawyers, writers and politicians, including the politician Noel Newston Nethersole and the writer CLR James, campaigned for change and eventually the authorities began to accept that their refusal to acknowledge the leadership qualities of Black players could not go on. First, in 1948, the Black Jamaican player George Headley, was allowed to captain just one international match (against England). Headley was a brilliant batsman and today, undoubtedly, he would have been appointed the full time captain of the WINDIES.

In 1960, the talented Bajan cricketer Frank Worrell, (who also played for Jamaica) became the first Black cricketer to captain the WINDIES for an entire series of international matches. His captaincy was an important victory for those who love sport and fair play – and for those campaigning against colonial rule.

The connection between cricket and resistance is inextricable – from the pioneering George Headley and Frank Worrell to the glory days of the WINDIES team, captained by Clive Lloyd in the 1970s and 1980s – there is much Black British history wrapped up in the game.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, many West Indian cricketers of the Windrush generation played for English county clubs. Learie Constantine, who played for the West Indies team and later for Lancashire County Cricket Club was a pioneer for Black cricketers in England, breaking down barriers and paving the way for future generations.

In *Last Girl In*, Kerry-Ann's grandpa, who is of the Windrush generation, has passed on his love of cricket to his granddaughter, teaching her to play as soon as she could hold a bat! Like many of his generation he can often be found watching, or listening to the cricket and as shown in the book. When he arrived in England, he would have played cricket in the parks and commons near his home, with his fellow Caribbean friends. These groups of friends sometimes formed their own cricket clubs.

## **British Caribbean cricket clubs**

The Windrush generation set up their own clubs and leagues for British Caribbean players. Although the talented top cricketers could play for English county sides, at a recreational and local club level the newly arrived Black players wanted to create a place where Black cricketers could meet, play and be themselves – without encountering hostility. These Caribbean cricket clubs became a place where young men and women, and their families, could socialise and have fun. Often, the young men who played cricket with these clubs were not welcome in the pubs and nightclubs of 1950s Britain – but they were always welcome in the Caribbean cricket clubs. For the Windrush generation, West Indian cricket clubs in the UK were places of refuge, community, laughter, excellence and fun. A place to feel at home.

Cricket is a special part of the heritage of Black and brown British children.

*Last Girl In* is a book to be enjoyed by cricket fans and all readers who love a good story and fair play.

Today, the connection to cricket is less strong in the Caribbean community. Between 1994 and 2019 there was a 75% decline in professional Black cricket players in England and Wales. However, the first Black woman to play for England, Ebony Rainford-Brent, has set up a charity called ACE, to encourage greater participation in cricket among Black children, as well as others who are underrepresented in the game, and they are enjoying great success in reviving the cricketing tradition among the descendants of the Windrush pioneers.

## **Further Reading/Organisations**

[The African Caribbean Cricket Association](#)

[The Ace Programme Charity](#)

## The Notting Hill Riots

On their arrival in Britain, the Windrush generation encountered some genuine friendliness but also a lot of hostility and prejudice. In London and other cities, regular racist attacks – physical and verbal – were directed towards the newly arrived immigrants. Disaffected white working-class young men, so-called “Teddy Boys” – white teenagers and young men who favoured formal suits – were openly racist and violent; they would carry out unprovoked violent attacks.

In 1958, in the Notting Hill area of west London one of the worst violent clashes occurred. In our story, Kerry-Ann witnesses her grandpa and his friends getting caught up in the riot (as young teenagers).

The disturbances in area, during which Teddy Boys and other racist groups (such as the White Defence League) would attack Black people and their property, began at the end of August 1958 and lasted for several nights. These attacks were not the only violence that was directed towards Caribbean people in this period – it is just one of the best know examples.

In the Notting Hill Riot, mobs of up to 400 white people were in on the street, many were armed and looking for Black people to attack. The Teddy Boys brought sharp knives, iron bars and leather belts that were weighted with dangerous bits of metal such as nuts and bolts. On the first evening of the riot five Black men were left lying unconscious on the pavements of Notting Hill. Many others were injured on that evening and on subsequent evenings.

After the disturbances ended, a Caribbean Carnival to showcase Caribbean music and culture was organised by the newspaper editor and activist, Claudia Jones. The event was one of the precursors of today’s Notting Hill Carnival. It was held on 30 January 1959 in St Pancras Town Hall and set up in response to the riots, and community tensions.

