

Game mourns Conrad Hunte

MIKE
COWARD



SIR CONRAD HUNTE is dead. The noble West Indian cricketer renowned internationally for his humanitarianism and inspirational work as an activist and social reformer and educator died in Sydney on Friday.

Hunte, who was 67, suffered a massive heart attack following a game of tennis just hours before he was due to give the keynote address at the opening of an international conference of the Moral Rearmament movement at the Collaroy Conference Centre.

The theme of his speech was: "An agenda of hope for the new millennium."

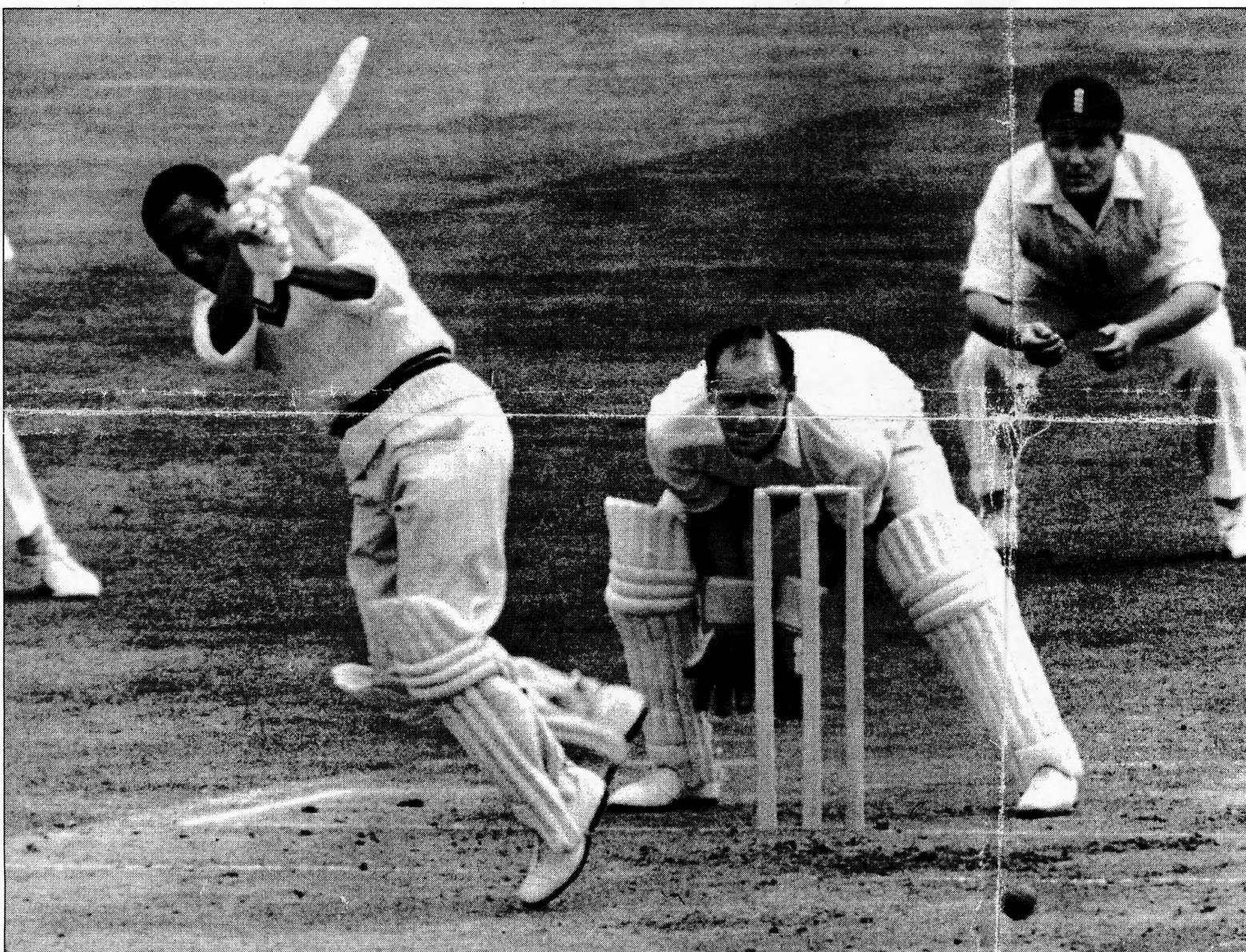
Hunte's body will be returned to Barbados this week where he is expected to be given a State funeral. He had been scheduled to travel to Canberra today to see Labor leader Kim Beazley and to speak to a Christian Fellowship gathering at Parliament House where it was anticipated he would meet Prime Minister John Howard.

Earlier this year he returned to live in Barbados after 43 years — the last seven in South Africa where he used cricket as a vehicle to reach and teach the dispossessed and disadvantaged in his ministry as the national coach of the United Cricket Board of South Africa (UCBSA). Within six months he was appointed to a position within the Education Ministry and was elected president of the Barbados Cricket Association.

Hunte, who fought against prejudice, fear and ignorance all his life, was introduced to the Moral Rearmament movement when he was in Australia with Frank Worrell's celebrated team in 1960-61 and thereafter lived his life by its tenets of "complete honesty, purity, love and unselfishness".

At various times he carried out work for the movement in England, Papua New Guinea, USA, Fiji as well as South Africa. While playing Lancashire League cricket in England in the 1960s he took his message to some of the most disenfranchised black communities and publicly challenged the views of outspoken politician Enoch Powell who aggressively opposed coloured immigration.

A richly talented opening batsman who was prepared to temper his strokeplay to ensure a solid foundation for an innings, Hunte played 44 Test matches between 1957-58 and 1966-67 accumulating 3245 runs at 45.06 with eight centuries. He made his first-class debut in 1950-51 but had to wait seven years to play his first Test series against Pakistan. He announced himself emphatically with 142 on debut in front of his home crowd and in the third Test in Jamaica



Richly talented: West Indian Conrad Hunte hits out against England's Derek Shackleton

scored 260 in a partnership of 446 when Garry Sobers amassed a then record unbeaten 365.

He returned 662 runs at 77.75 for the series and was an automatic selection for the next eight years. On his only visit to Australia as a cricketer he played in the tied Test at Brisbane and for the series gathered 377 runs at 37.70 with one century at Melbourne in the second Test.

He toured once to Pakistan

‘I was born black. I was born poor. I was born disenfranchised’

SIR CONRAD HUNTE

and twice to India and England when he was vice-captain to Sobers in 1966. In 1961 and 1962 he was deputy to Worrell.

A fine hooker and driver he was also an outstanding fieldsmen — particularly close to the bat — and occasionally bowled at slow medium.

Hunte was born into an impoverished community at Shorey Village, St Andrew, in the north-east of the tiny coral country which is renowned for producing some of the greatest of all cricketers.

These days the Shorey

Sports Club bears his name. His speech written for Friday night included a reference to his early days.

"You are looking at someone who before he drew his first breath, before he took his first step, had three strikes against him," he said. "I speak in terms of the prejudice some people hold towards people like me. I was born black. I was born poor. I was born disenfranchised.

"According to a lack of vision of those people, I am not

Mahatma Gandhi and during his time in South Africa he worked from Johannesburg where Gandhi developed his creed of passive resistance against injustice.

Hunte was adamant that God's power and not black power was the answer to white power and this fervent belief underpinned his personal philosophy.

When he reached South Africa in 1992, he said: "I have been prepared by history and by the commitment of my faith for this moment in history. My whole upbringing has been a preparation for this moment."

He meditated every day and had boundless enthusiasm. On Thursday night he told his close Australian friend Jim Coulter, a former chairman of Moral Rearmament in Australia, how he yearned to assist with the rehabilitation of West Indies cricket and provide support and counsel for the enigmatic captain Brian Lara.

He will be mourned throughout the international cricket community and far beyond, particularly by many hundreds of children and their parents in the iniquitous townships of South Africa. He gave them hope.