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The Important Link between Cup Match and Emancipation in Bermuda

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The Important Link between Cup Match and Emancipation in Bermuda



Ministerial Statement by the Minister of Social Development and Sports, The Hon. Michael A. Weeks, JP MP

Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning, a few days before the start of the Annual Cup Match Classic, to remind Honourable Members and the people of Bermuda about the historical importance and significance of Cup Match, in particular its connections to emancipation of slaves in Bermuda. As Minister responsible for both

Culture and Sports, I deem it a privilege and an honour to share with my honourable colleagues significant historical facts about this important aspect of our heritage. **Mr. Speaker**, I wish to highlight the excellent Bermuda Heartbeats event held last evening featuring Dr. Eva Hodgson who spoke about race relations in Bermuda as part of the annual Dr. Kenneth E. Robinson/Cyril Outerbridge Packwood Memorial Lecture.

Mr. Speaker, Many Bermudians love cricket, and who does not enjoy the excitement of Cup Match and the revelry amongst fans that begins long before the first ball is delivered. We look forward to our annual two-day holiday of Cup Match with great anticipation. We love the competition between St. George's and Somerset. We rally around our teams and fans. The food is a must. Many of us even dabble in a bit of "Crown and Anchor" on those two days! All part of the festivities and fun! And why not! Where else in the world is there a two-day holiday such as this?

Mr. Speaker, whilst I love all of these festivities, I would be remiss, as the Minister of Culture, if I did not also share the historical significance of this two-day holiday; and place it in its correct historical context.

Mr. Speaker, Cup Match has its earliest beginnings when Bermuda had recently moved from the post-slavery period. The origins of Cup Match harken back to a part of our heritage that is sometimes ignored.

Mr. Speaker, The Slavery Abolition Act was signed on 23rd August 1833, which led to the emancipation of all enslaved people in the British Empire – including Bermuda – with effect from 1st August 1834. There have been those who have suggested that slavery in Bermuda was "genteel" or benign. However more recent Bermudian scholars – such as the late Cyril Packwood, the late Dr. Kenneth E. Robinson, Dr. Eva Hodgson, Mr. James Smith, Dr. Clarence Maxwell and Dr. Quito Swan, have countered such narrative. Historian Cyril Packwood, author of *Chained on the Rock* wrote that "...a benevolent slave system would never have resulted in the numerous slave escapes and conspiracies which occurred...".

Mr. Speaker, there are accounts not only of slaves often attempting to escape slavery by running away; there are also accounts of rebellion orchestrated by those who were enslaved. Many of us are aware of the valiant efforts of Sarah "Sally" Bassett, a renowned historical figure who, in June 1730 was found guilty of attempting to poison her masters Mr. and Mrs. John Foster and an enslaved servant named Nancy. For this, Sally Bassett was burned to death, with Crow Lane being the site of the execution. History records that on the way to her execution Sally Bassett stated "*no use you hurrying folks, there'll be no fun 'til I get there!*" Sally Bassett's alleged acts of poisoning coupled with that statement illustrates the defiance against the institution of slavery.

Mr. Speaker, according to Dr. Clarence Maxwell there were also other poisoning plots that occurred in Bermuda between 1727 and 1730. As well, there were other attempted rebellions, such as the one that took place in 1761. That event involved at least half of the black population. Indeed, **Mr. Speaker**, the actions of some of our forefathers and foremothers stand testament to their abhorrence of being enslaved. Acts of direct rebellion, or resistance by attempting to run away, refute any assertions of the benign nature of slavery in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's most renowned opponent of slavery was Mary Prince. She took her plight to the Anti-Slavery Society in London. The story of Mary Prince was used by Members of the British Parliament to advocate for the ending of slavery. Mary Prince demonstrated courage, resilience and perseverance. Her story helped to bring about the ending of slavery throughout the entire British Empire. Mary Prince, from Brackish Pond, Devonshire, Bermuda, had an enormous global impact. That is truly phenomenal and worthy of celebration.

Mr. Speaker, the writings of many researchers and scholars have recorded that Cup Match began as a day to commemorate and celebrate the emancipation of enslaved persons in Bermuda. This holiday is unique to the island of Bermuda. The forerunner to Cup Match was introduced after the abolition of slavery when members of Friendly Societies from Somerset and St. George's would gather to celebrate the anniversary of the abolition of slavery. The men and women gathered at picnics; and one of the highlights of the picnics was the playing of a friendly cricket match.

Mr. Speaker, in 1901, during a cricket match between two major Friendly Societies, an agreement was made to play for an annual trophy. Members of the Friendly Societies and Lodges raised funds and in 1902 a silver cup trophy was introduced and played for annually.

Mr. Speaker, Cup Match was officially born!

Mr. Speaker, that first formal Cup Match cricket game was played on June 12th 1902 and as painful as it is for me to say this, the historical fact is that St. George's won that match by 7 wickets!

Mr. Speaker, in 1947 two official national public holidays were introduced and celebrated annually on the Thursday and Friday before the first Monday in August. The first holiday, Cup Match Day, was renamed Emancipation Day in 1999 and continued the tradition of remembering the end of slavery. The second holiday, Somers Day, commemorated the arrival of Admiral Sir George Somers who helped to colonize Bermuda in 1609. There is some question as to the validity of Somers Day being celebrated the day after Emancipation Day. We as a community have to take a look at whether or not there is an appetite to change the name to something more befitting of emancipation.

Mr. Speaker, Cup Match is attracting more and more visitors to the Island to participate in our two-day celebrations. This is welcomed, as we have a story to tell, and a fantastic experience for visitors to participate in. The two cricket clubs, Somerset and St. George's, are to be commended for doing their part to attract tourists to the game and participate in all the festivities.

Mr. Speaker, because cultural tourism is on the rise worldwide, I suspect that with appropriate marketing and respect for the origins of Cup Match, Bermuda is now well-positioned to elevate our Cup Match Classic as a unique must-see, must-experience event on our cultural and sports calendar.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda can take pride in the fact that our Cup Match tradition has been sustained for well over a century, and can take even greater pride in the knowledge that the legacy of Cup Match lives on in the hearts and minds of all Bermudians, and represents a cultural coming together through sport. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Friendly Societies for passionately being the originator and early torchbearer for this great cultural celebration.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**

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