



Winnifred Russell-Bethell

Member of the National Hall of Fame

Class of 2010

Winnifred "Winnie" Bethell-Russell inherited the high pedigree of that kind of pronounced achiever well set in the proven philosophy of essayist, Mortley, that deeds, not stones, are the monument of the great. As with all forerunners, she fitted with ease into those telling moments when a number of events occurred in this country's sports history during the latter half of the twentieth century, especially as regards the expansion of opportunities for Bahamian women to participate in high level competitive sport. Not only was she a material witness to such historical occurrences, but she was also among those in the vanguard of such change. In so doing, she firmly came to believe that "Sports, properly taught, benefited body, mind, soul and spirit, furthered the well-being of young and older persons alike and provided the opportunity for those like herself, to give back to The Bahamas".

Winnie was born into the large, richly athletic Bethell clan off Wulff Road and Darling Lane, adjacent to the playing field of nearby Southern Preparatory School, now referred to as Stephen Dillet Primary. She accordingly had early exposure to a multiplicity of sporting disciplines, inclusive of Cricket, Basketball, Softball and Rounders or "Porking/Bruising", a youth's game peculiar to The Bahamas. She later expanded her athletic repertoire to Volleyball, Field Hockey, Tennis, Badminton, Squash and Bowling. When she entered Government High School in 1958, her first name had already been shortened to "Winnie", as a reflection of the winning successes, and all of this in spite of her tender years.

Winnie was therefore well prepared to advance the athletic prowess of her renowned high school, particularly as a field events specialist, with a concentration in the throwing events. At the annual Interschool Track & Field Championships at the sports field at the Fox Hill campus of St. Augustine's College, she constituted an alluring and inspiring red-haired force for GHS in the javelin and in both high & long jumps. Heavily influenced by her school's Hall of Fame coach, Keith Parker, she contributed to GHS championships in 1961, 1962 and 1963. It was also as a student-athlete at GHS that she set a national record in the javelin throw of 127' 7", an performance unchallenged or unmatched for the next thirteen (13) years. In that same year, she was presented with the Victrix Ludorum award as the most outstanding female athlete of those Championships.

Consistent with the dexterity traditional to her family, Winnie possessed the physical height and bodily symmetry of the atypical power forward in basketball, and this attracted the informed attention of principals of St. Bernard's Sporting Club, to which all her brothers and sisters belonged. In particular, Fr. Marcian Peters and Coach Lou Adderley recognized her potential and integrated her into the veteran group which formed St. Bernard's Women's Basketball Team. Her elder sisters were also members of the team which proceeded to dominate the local women's basketball scene, clashing against the Pedal Pushers, the Dizzy Dames, and the Seatons.

Upon completion of Government High School, Winnie attended college in the United Kingdom to train as a Physical Education Teacher. It was at this time that she discovered Netball. On her return to The Bahamas in 1968, she and other Bahamians infused the local game with new vigour, and was a member of this Country's first national Netball team which participated in the 3rd World Tournament in Kingston, Jamaica in 1970/1. the Caribbean Games in 1976 and 1977 (held in Nassau) and the 1979 World Tournament in Trinidad. She eventually became president of the Bahamas Netball Federation and it was during her fourteen years of leadership that the only netball complex in The Bahamas was constructed at the Queen Elizabeth Sports Center.

Winnie was the instrument which secured the inclusion of netball in The Bahamas Games as she successfully argued against domination of the Games by events for men, given Bahamian demographics. She was also a leading executive of the Bahamas Confederation of Amateur Sports, an umbrella organization which was able to 'seasonalize' sports so as to avoid clashes of the various disciplines. She was named as a Member of the first Ministry of Sports Council and she also earned the distinction of igniting the Bahamas Games Flame in 1995.

Through her love of and participation in Sports, sons Philip Jr. and Stefan also became notable sportsmen, ably supported by her late husband Pastor Philip Sr., himself a trained Physical Education Teacher. Winnie and her brother, Peter J, Bethell, have become the first brother/sister combination to be selected to the National Hall of Fame.