



**BERMUDA INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL FESTIVAL**  
COMMUNITY OUTREACH THROUGH FOOTBALL

**Overview:**

The growing anti-social behavior exhibited by a number of Bermuda's disaffected young men; the wanton killing of more than thirty young black men in the prime of their lives; the seemingly assembly line of new recruits ready to take the step from innocent Middle School student to "gang banger", should be enough to spur those of us on the outside looking in, to mobilize a counter movement to reverse the trend.

The task at hand is not for the faint of heart, it will require innovation; commitment; and honest endeavor to reach the young men in question, and a concerted effort to replace desperation and despair with hope and prospects of a brighter future.

## **Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Violent Crime and Gun Violence:**

In a special report compiled by the above committee in 2011, and signed by now Premier The Hon Michael Dunkley J.P. M.P. and present speaker of the House of Parliament, The Hon K.H. Randolph Horton J.P. M.P., members stated the following: “The challenges confronting Bermuda are very wide and complex and the committee has made a first step towards erasing violent crime and gun violence from our community and to encourage continued dialogue amongst all, and to bring the Government and Private Sector together consistently to address this social problem.”

Chairman Horton added: “There needs to be a sustained effort to address gang culture, gang recruitment and gang affiliation through the school system at all levels, because by the time youngsters reach high school they are more receptive to being recruited into gangs. He added: “The guidance process to prevent recruitment should start in elementary schools where younger students would be more amenable to information and advice from mentors.”

While the 2011 Joint Parliamentary Report was quite direct in its recommendations, very little has been done in the broader community to tackle the problems. Few community initiatives, outside of the familiar helping agencies, have come to the fore.

## **Bermuda International Football Festival 2017:**

A new committee, including former professional footballers Clyde Best, Shaun Goater, and David Bascome, and businessman and former president of the Bermuda Football Association Charles Marshall, headed by former coach and media executive Rick Richardson, have embarked on a project to engage the community and reach our young men through football as other communities have done in the United Kingdom, and the United States. The committee also includes

Leroy Nibs Lewis, youth football advocate and former National team player Troy Harvey; and project director Mervyn Grant.

An exciting day of activities, commencing with Youth football finals, an East Vs West select of senior footballers; an exhibition of the latest aspect of the game Freestyle Football featuring a young man who performed at the last World Cup in Brazil, special guests from the U.K. and the U.S to assess our young players; and culminating with a free concert, will start the process of bridging the community divide. In this process we will also take time to gradually identify at risk youngsters who require special attention. We must and will demonstrate that our communities can and must begin the healing process.

### **The BIFF Objectives:**

Our project calls for an exciting Football Festival involving a mixture of the Island's best school boy teams pitted against each other in the East Vs West schools final.

The community outreach is further achieved in our proposed senior East Select vs West Select involving all of the teams from the various communities in Bermuda. This has the effect of breaking down the artificial barriers constructed by the isolated communities and advent of gangs.

Clubs fielding senior teams in the respective leagues of the BFA will be invited to submit the names of their best players for consideration for the respective East and West Select teams. These players will have their names and photos featured in the respective media so that the public can have its say.

As we go through the process we will demonstrate to the players that there can be unity in the community through the game they all love.

During the day of festivities we will feature individuals who have been involved in the Bermuda National Teams over the years. Respective club presidents will be asked to assist in compiling the honor roll of former national team players.

These individuals will be our VIP guests during the April, 29th event.

### **Sustainability:**

The Bermuda International Football Festival (BIFF) will engage Government; Corporate Bermuda; and The International Companies, to support and sustain this important project. It is but one step in the range of initiatives identified by the Joint Select Committee on Violent Crime and Gun Violence as something urgently needed.

In 2018 the Festival will launch the International Star Sevens, a seven-a-side round robin tournament involving four other countries and Bermuda.

The format will continue to embrace the East vs West match as the core reason for the event.

### **Education and Intervention component:**

While we have deliberately used the popularity of the game of football to keep our youngsters engaged, we have pledged the funds raised to assist in the development of programs supported by the BFA, and charity GSP to assist the children left behind by gun violence and violent crime.

In addition to this we are supporting an intervention program supported by the Department of Court Services; Department of Workforce Development; and Bermuda College. The project, "Successful Academic and Vocational Education (SAVE) will extend a life line to a number of young men already engaged in criminal activity and anti-social behavior.

We look forward to wide spread participation by our stake holders to make the Bermuda International Football Festival a success, it is but one initiative to save our communities.

Rick Richardson

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