



Rangers Outreach

reaching out to all our members

Interview with **LESLIE CLAUDIUS** - June 2010

Website: www.melbournerrangersclub.com

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Leslie Walter Claudius is one of the prominent hockey players of India. A legendary sports personality, Leslie Claudius was born on the 25th of March in the year 1927 in Bilaspur. Leslie Claudius has been awarded with several laurels for his immense contribution in the Indian hockey.

Leslie Claudius began his career in sports by playing football. In the early years of his career, he was a prominent footballer. However, he later on changed his affinity from football to hockey and became a legend in the history of Indian Hockey.

Leslie Claudius was part of the great Hockey Team that had won gold medals for a consecutive three Olympic Games from the year of 1948 to 1956. His brilliant performance in the Olympic Games led him to win the highest number of medals which comprises of three gold medals and one silver medal.

Keeping in mind his excellent track record, Leslie Claudius's name features in the Guinness Book of World Records. He was crowned with the Padma Shri Award in the year of 1971 for his excellent career in hockey that made India proud.

A right- half player, Leslie Claudius showed remarkable consistency and persistency. Leslie Claudius had ruled the world of hockey for more than two decades. After his retirement from the sport, Leslie Claudius was assigned with the job of a manager in Bangkok Asian Games of 1978. According to the players, his encouraging and optimistic attitude made the players feel motivated to win the matches.

Early Life & Introduction to Hockey: He was born on the 25th of March 1927 at Bilaspur, Madhya Pradesh in a family with 9 children. Initially, he was very much interested towards the game of Football, and used to skip school so that he could play the game. He was an accomplished Football player, and even got a chance to be a part of the Bengal Nagpur Railway (BNR) team as a Left-Half in the Indian Football Association Shield Tournament. Leslie's first introduction with the game of Hockey happened during a very strange event. While a practice session between the 'A' and 'B' Hockey teams of the Bengal Nagpur Railway (BNR) was going on at Kharagpur, and the teams were preparing for the Beighton Cup tournament going to be organized in Calcutta (now Kolkata). Leslie was sitting by the field, just watching the game. A player was found short in one of the 2 teams, and the Captain Dickie Carr asked Leslie to play for them. Dickie had the recognition of playing for India at Berlin Olympics 1936. Although Leslie didn't know much about Hockey, Dickie liked his style of playing and called him for a trial. Just a few days after, Leslie was inducted into the BNR team, some players of which enjoyed the status of being an Olympian. The team managed to finish second at the Beighton Cup, and Leslie found the game of Hockey exciting enough to leave Football.

International Career: Claudius played for Port Commissioner's team as a Center Half in the Aga Khan tournament held at Bombay in the year 1948. He delivered a wonderful performance and caught the eye of the nation. In the selection trials for the London Olympics right after the Aga Khan tournament, Leslie had a fracture in his hand. Still, he did so good at the trials that he was selected for the event at the age of 21. It was just 2 years that he had begun playing Hockey. He got to play in only one match at the London Olympics, which gave India its first Gold Medal as an independent nation.

Leslie was a part of the Indian Olympic squad that made a hat-trick of Gold Medals at London, Helsinki and Melbourne Olympics. His skills as a strong Mid Fielder got him worldwide recognition and fame.



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Captaincy: In the year 1959, Leslie Claudius was declared the Captain of the Indian Hockey team, while Dhyan Chand was the Coach of the team. He led the team to a Europe tour where the team played 19 matches, won 15 out of them, drew 3 and lost just 1 match. At the Rome Olympics 1960, Leslie wanted to become the first Hockey player to have been a part of the team winning 4 Hockey Gold Medals in a row. Till then, India had a wonderful record of 30 consecutive victories in Olympics since the year 1928. But India lost to Pakistan in the Final match of the event, which broke the dreams of Leslie. Still, he managed to establish a world record of winning 4 Olympic Medals in Hockey, including 3 Gold and 1 Silver. He was also the first Hockey player ever to represent his team in 4 Olympic events. Claudius ended his International career after the Rome Olympics, and represented Bengal and Calcutta Customs in the domestic Hockey for next 5 years.



Awards and Achievements: Figured in the Guinness Book of World Records for maximum number of Olympic medals in hockey (3 gold and 1 silver). He was honored with a Padma Shri award in the year 1971 by the Government of India, and was the 6th Hockey player to receive the honor. He served the Indian Hockey team as a Team Manager for Asian Games 1974 and 1978, and also remained the member of the Selection Panel of the Hockey Federation for some time.



Photograph of Leslie Claudius in Melbourne, June 2010