

Mr Mayor, ladies and gentlemen. I cannot tell you what a thrill it is for me to have been invited to say a few words in honour of someone who was one of my greatest heroes, and I would like to congratulate Worcester City Council, and particularly you, Mr Mayor, for your marvellous decision to confer the freedom of the city on Basil D'Oliveira.

I was lucky enough to see him play soon after he arrived in Worcester in the mid-1960s. I was then living in Malvern and was a university student. I joined the county cricket club and spent many hours at New Road during the summer vacations of 1965 and 1966. I suppose I should have spent more time studying and revising and fewer hours watching cricket – but what a fantastic team we had then. We'd won the county championship for the first time in 1964, and then again in 1965 – thanks to the brilliance of Norman Gifford, whom I'm honoured to meet tonight, Tom Graveney, Jack Flavell, Len Coldwell and - of course Basil D'Oliveira.

How Dolly came to England was a great story. In racist South Africa, ruled by apartheid, there were no opportunities for talented non-white cricketers to make their mark. He wrote to John Arlott, who was one of the finest broadcasters and cricket commentators of his day, saying he wanted to come to England. After a three year battle Arlott got him to play for Middleton in the Central Lancashire League in 1960, and then for Worcestershire in 1964.

In June 1966 he got the first of his 432 caps playing for England against the West Indies. He was a terrific all-rounder, who could hit the ball incredibly hard as a batsman, particularly off the back foot, scoring thousands of runs, and take hundreds of wickets as an outward-drifting medium pace bowler.

The highlight of his test career was the 158 runs he scored for England against Australia at the test match at the Oval in August 1968, almost exactly 50 years ago.

England were due to tour South Africa in the winter of that year, and everyone assumed that Dolly would be in the side. What we didn't know at the time was that the South African government had made up their minds that they couldn't risk having a non-white player who'd been born in Cape Town and later taken British citizenship playing for England.

Pressure was put on the MCC, and the selectors initially left Dolly out of the team. The sense of outrage felt here – not just among those of us who were active in the anti-apartheid movement – was huge, but it

looked for a while as though the tour would still go ahead without D'Oliveira.

Then there was a twist in the story. Tom Cartwright of Warwickshire, who had been picked for the tour, withdrew because of injury. The selectors then did the right thing and called up Basil D'Oliveira.

We all know what happened next. The Prime Minister of South Africa, one John Vorster, one of the most unpleasant and corrupt politicians of the 20th century, made clear that with Dolly in the side England would not be allowed to come.

In the words of Trevor Manuel, who was a minister in Nelson Mandela's government, written following Dolly's death in 2011,

"The South African government refused D'Oliveira entry, prompting cancellation of the tour and giving rise to one of cricket's greatest political dramas. The "D'Oliveira Affair" had a massive impact in turning international opinion against apartheid, eventually prompting changes in South African sport and, ultimately, broader society. D'Oliveira's experience confirmed that there could be no normal sport in an abnormal society; the struggle for nonracial sport became an integral part of our broader struggle for a nonracial and democratic South Africa."

Well done, Mr Mayor and councillors, for honouring this great man in such an appropriate way tonight.