

## SPORTS

# “Competitive”

## soccer breakthrough, a notable national sports milestone



LESLEY ST. FLEUR, pictured in action at the state of the art soccer complex in New Providence. St. Fleur is an international player who competes in the Jamaican Premier League when not leading Team Bahamas.

### First international win came against Ecuador

The national soccer program has come full circle.

Once ago, during the 1940s, the 1950s, and the 1960s, the sport ranked as one of the more popular pastimes. For instance, soccer at the Eastern Parade was prominent in the Golden Era of Bahamian Sports. Local clubs took on, during wartime (World War II), highly competitive British Navy teams.

With the Dynamos, led by the incredible striker Leroy “Uncle Lou” Archer as the sharpest thorn in the side of the visiting squads, Bahamian soccer was quite notable. Archer and his fellow nationals also participated in exchange tournaments in Florida and the Caribbean, winning their share of matches.

It was a good time for Bahamian soccer.

The national soccer program, particularly in New Providence and to some degree in Grand Bahama, stayed vibrant from a local standpoint throughout the 1970s and the 1980s but made no inroads regionally and definitely not internationally. A building process began when Anton Sealey, ably assisted by Lionel Haven took over the administration of the Bahamas Football Association.

Sealey anchored a soccer movement that, for the first time, became meaningfully accepted in the upper echelon of world soccer, the Federacion Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), or now simply known as the International Football Federation.

Administratively, under Sealey, Bahamian soccer soared to the point of winning a bid to host the prestigious FIFA Congress back in June of 2009. That was a major accomplishment. The Bahamian soccer administration accordingly gained even greater worldwide acceptance.

However, although performing with great integrity and efficiency as an administrator, Sealey and company could not get that characteristic transferred to the field of play. We made

a few efforts to seek to enter the doorway of the regional soccer power group, but failed because of a lack of consistency, despite the international coaching personnel brought on stream.

Then, the Beach soccer phenomenon hit the world scene. This proved to be the avenue that was ideal for Bahamian soccer. In Beach soccer, The Bahamas began to register notable performances.

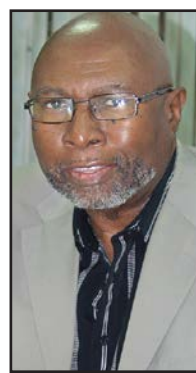
FIFA liked the combination of a sophisticated administration and a rising beach soccer pro-



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## SPORTS SCOPE

By Fred Sturupp



ANTON SEALEY— He is the architect of a solid Bahamian movement in world soccer.

gram. FIFA collaborated with the BFA and the Bahamas Government to put in place a high quality beach soccer facility at the foot of the Sydney Poitier Bridge on East Bay Street in New Providence.

Several regional tournaments were hosted and the Bahamian national men gave the country a taste of what was to come. FIFA kept pace with the

inspired soccer outlook in The Bahamas by awarding the country the 2017 Beach Soccer World Cup and helping to upgrade the beach soccer facility to a state of the art complex.

The Bahamas recorded its first international victory, beating Ecuador, flirted with a victory against Switzerland, and missed an advance in the prestigious Group A mix virtually by

the width of a goal post.

However, the overall effort sent a signal to the world. The Bahamas had reached a point in world soccer, never before attained by past national squads. The competitive side of Bahamian soccer had moved up alongside the administrators. It was fitting indeed that the Senior Men’s National Soccer Squad was selected the Nas-

sau Guardian’s Team of The Year.

It’s a deserved honor.

Congratulations to you Anton and your administrative colleagues!

Well done, Soccer Team Bahamas!

(To respond to this column, kindly contact Fred Sturupp at sturupp1504@gmail.com or on WhatsApp at 727-6363).