



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF BODYBUILDING AND FITNESS  
*FEDERACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE FISCOCULTURISMO Y FITNESS*

# GENESIS (The 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting)

By: Javier Pollock, IFBB Vice President & CACBBFF Founder

## THE INVITATION



In January 1973, with the successful separation of Bodybuilding from Weightlifting at a national level the previous year, I started to visualize a similar regional movement in the Central American & Caribbean (CAC) area, as I was a true believer in the concept that triumphs should not have boundaries. By March 1973, I had already acquired seventeen CAC addresses and was ready to launch an international invitation to CAC national federations to visit Puerto Rico and join me in the meritorious cause to divorce bodybuilding and weightlifting for the progress and prosperity of our sport. My step-father, Jose Del Coro, was not supportive of that idea, as he wisely argued that many CAC federations were still economic dependants of government funds through weightlifting. He proposed sending an invitation to celebrate something, instead of “bitching & whining” about weightlifters.

Jose Del Coro

“I can always do another contest” was my immediate response. We continue discussing alternatives, as I was uncomfortable proposing another competition, considering the amount of money he spent in the 1972 Mr. Puerto Rico with Ben Weider and Arnold Schwarzenegger as invited guests; plus its television transmission through channel 7 - a commercial TV network. But we finally agreed on a Central American & Caribbean championship as the best option for an invitation.



## THE FRUSTRATION

In April 1973, I was in possession of six responses. However, St. Lucia and the U.S. Virgin Islands were vehemently opposed to a CAC competition, as this would disrupt support for their beloved West Indies Bodybuilding Association. Knowing that a “Mr. West Indies” was not a suitable title for a “Mr. Antilles” as the best solution. When ask of athletes from Central America, they both America was an enigma with no business in committed to continue helping me financially, diminished when he became aware of my



contest to be held in Puerto Rico, they proposed what would happen with the possible participation declined to participate contending that Central West Indies affairs. My step-father was still but not with TV coverage. His enthusiasm was difficulties with these two federation leaders.

In May, via multiple exchanges of special deli- to invite athletes from Central America; but with include them in future international competi- Virgin Islands in the list of participating coun- “Mr. Caribbean” was unanimously accepted. However, my suggestion to include the creation of a Caribbean federation (with subsequent conversion into a CAC confederation) in the meeting’s agenda was rejected by the same two country representatives.

very mail and expensive phone calls, I agreed not an understanding that I reserved the right to tions. This decision reinstated St. Lucia and the U.S. tries. My proposal to substitute “Mr. Antilles” for

## THE MEETING

Originally set for San Juan by the end of August 1973, the gathering was held in early December at “Boquerón” Beach Resort; near the town of Cabo Rojo; inside one of five “cabañas” assigned to our group by the Department of Recreation and Sports of Puerto Rico. The following countries and leaders were present in that reunion:

|                                |                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| BARBADOS                       | ⇒ Winfield N. Bascombe |
| CURACAO (NETHERLANDS ANTILLES) | ⇒ Victor A. Copra      |
| CURACAO (NETHERLANDS ANTILLES) | ⇒ Rene Raphael         |
| DOMINICAN REPUBLIC             | ⇒ Camilo F. Leslie     |
| PUERTO RICO                    | ⇒ Javier Pollock       |
| ST. LUCIA                      | ⇒ Robert Sandiford     |
| U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS            | ⇒ Imbert Roberts       |

Being the most senior sports veteran present, Victor accepted to chair the meeting after I welcomed all delegates, on behalf of our national federation. I also thanked them for accepting my request to congregate.

The meeting started at 1:00 PM, lasting for approximately one hour and consisting, mainly, on introducing ourselves with brief biographies of personal and institutional accomplishments. It continued with discussions on the next prospective venues for the Mr. West Indies contest. Robert and Imbert agreed on St. Lucia to host the 1974 West Indies competition, with the 1975 edition to be hosted by Imbert in St. Croix, USVI. I attempted to introduce a new competition structure, based on regional Olympic programs, but my effort was politely rejected by Imbert and Robert with a reminder on our previous agreement to uphold the traditional West Indies configuration. Winfield proposed to expand the existing structure with more contests, like Mr. Antilles, Mr. South Caribbean and have Mr. West Indies to be the culmination of every calendar year. This was accepted by all, with my vote against it. I insisted in following a new competitive direction, but Imbert interrupted me with rationalizations on traditions, loyalty and my enthusiastic but young and inexperienced connection with realistic functions. The meeting concluded at around 2:00 PM. I was so disappointed on my failure to express ideas that I had embraced for many months. But since I was invited to St. Lucia (as a guest of honor) for the 1974 West Indies contest, I thought that better times will come for my dreams to be fulfilled.

## THE ACCIDENT

At approximately 2:15 PM, the resort office received a telephone call for me with an urgent message. The bus that was supposed to transport all delegations from Boquerón to Cabo Rojo for the contest finals was engaged in an accident with a drunk driver. The most reasonable timeframe for a ride into the finals venue at Cabo Rojo's square was three hours away. I immediately convey this news to all delegates and respectfully beg them to give me a chance to explain my ideas for a brief period of time, insisting in the sincerity that I would not disappoint. Imbert and Robert refused to allow for such deviation of protocol, but Victor, Winfield and Camilo decided to permit my presentation as deference to the hosting federation leader.

## THE EXPERIMENT

After thanking them for returning to the reunion "cabaña", I began with a general reminder on the successful 10th CACSO/ODECABE Games in San Juan (1966), with the possibility for the same city to host the 8th PASO/ODEPA Games in 1979 and the efforts being conducted by the IFBB to acquire Olympic recognition.

I also express my concern for the world of sports and humanity to continue portraying bodybuilders as narcissistic egomaniacs with low intellect and poor social skills. Copy of a press clipping, depicting those assertions, was distributed; it was part of the "war of words" that erupted the previous year within the process of divorcing from weightlifting.

Highlighting that bodybuilders being recognized as athletes would never be achieved outside unrecognized sport structures was somewhat insulting to Imbert and Robert, but I was not interrupted. I persisted with a barrage of ideal examples and circumstances in which the inclusion of additional countries into a new administrative composition, paralleling the Olympic movement, would give us much needed credibility for expansion and funding. Although my concluding opinions were intense, I left an open space for the possibility to execute my vision as an **EXPERIMENT**, in case anyone should classify my proposals as unacceptable.

Being in Public Relations, Winfield was the first one to express his support for my ideas; he recognized the potential for progress and growth. Inspired by Winfield's comments, Victor joined-in embracing the same remarks. With Imbert still opposing, the real **MEETING** got on its way.... for almost 90 minutes.

During the initial discussions, I began feeling slightly emotional realizing that my arguments were breaking through the fears of innovation.

While the group continued debating pros and cons, every time Robert (seating to my immediate right) got involved in the conversation, a stench of unprocessed alcohol blew my way. In retrospect, when a single beer was enough to knock me down, this human could drink a mid-size bottle of rum and still walk.... and talk.... I had never witnessed such an incredible alcohol tolerance in my short life.

Finally, the time for a vote arrived. Realizing they were in a minority bracket for the approval of a Caribbean Federation, Imbert and Robert proposed to substitute "federation" for "experiment", in order to avoid problems with the West Indies Association. Victor's response alluded to a new Caribbean bodybuilding movement conducted as an experiment, but the name would have to be associated with standards recognizable by international establishments.

Considering that Imbert was seated to my close left, it was easy to sense that the 4-2 result was not a pleasant event; he remained silent and somber through my congratulatory and thankful dialogue.

### THE FIRST PRESIDENT



Victor Copra

Following my grateful commentary, Winfield announced his availability to assist the new Caribbean Bodybuilding Federation in the Public Relations field, as he was already traveling between several islands on company business. I proposed Victor to be the President of the new federation, which he accepted and appreciated. But Imbert and Robert had other ideas.

Imbert was large, vertical and horizontally. His measurements from head to toes and from shoulder to shoulder were quite impressive. Whenever he rose in a closed environment, the room became darker. I was so mortified with his decision to rise from his chair.... obviously out of frustration with my previously convincing arguments.

With everyone looking up, Imbert insisted that we were already entertaining a mistake and it would be unwise to establish a Board of Directors with permanent expectations. He continue disputing what we have done, in terms of imminent confrontations with the West Indies Association; but also recognizing some value in our intentions. He vehemently insisted in the virtue of having a President that would respond to upcoming conflicts without affecting the reputations and achievements of other board members if this Caribbean "EXPERIMENT" failed. He reverently recommended me for that task. Victor inquired if he was proposing an "expendable" president; Imbert's head movement confirmed his desire. Robert was also in favor of me to lead, but not with much to care about. He just wanted the meeting to end....



With everybody's support, I accepted the challenge. I also remember making a comment along the lines of my election as President being a product of my "good looks" and not as a "scapegoat" for third-party inquisitions. Everyone laughed, except for the already familiar twosome.

### THE AFTERMATH

It was significantly surreal for me to accept the fact that I was about to lead a group of older, matured and highly experienced individuals into the unknown.

My first undertaking was to complete our Board of Directors, which was configured as follows:

- PRESIDENT** ⇨ Javier Pollock
- VICE PRESIDENT** ⇨ Victor A. Copra
- GENERAL SECRETARY** ⇨ Imbert Roberts
- TREASURER** ⇨ Robert Sandiford
- MEDICAL COMMISSION CHAIRMAN** ⇨ Camilo F. Leslie
- PUBLIC RELATIONS** ⇨ Winfield N. Bascombe

The second assignment consisted on hosting country selections for future Mr. Caribbean editions. Winfield requested Barbados for 1974; Victor applied for Curacao (N.A.) in 1975, I solicited to stage the 1976 competition and Camilo asked for Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in 1977. All petitions were approved.

The third project involved my earlier reference to evolve from Caribbean to Central American and Caribbean Championships, in order to follow Olympic competition standards. Robert expressed concern about non-English speaking athletes, with a "strange" culture, in future contests. In a highly intellectual exposition, Camilo enlightened all participants on the convenience of growing into a large multi-cultural/multi-ethnic institution and the fully bilingual capabilities of our current leadership, gesticulating between him, Victor and me. Imbert inquired on our plans with the French territories. Camilo reiterated his remarks on inclusion principles and disclosed having many French friends in his country and neighboring Haiti that he could bring to future events, if needed. We all agreed to pursue constant expansion as a highly desirable goal.

The final installment concerned an efficient administrative approach to deal, not only with sub-continental expansion, but also with the IFBB. Steve Victory, from Guyana, was briefly discussed by Victor and Winfield as being ineffective, judging from the amount of correspondence that was never answered. During his visit to Puerto Rico in 1972, Ben Weider confided that Mr. Victory's appointment as IFBB Vice President for the Caribbean area was coincidental to being the only one available at that time. Victor proposed me to run against him in the IFBB election the following year, but I graciously rejected his suggestion conveying my full awareness of the immense objectives ahead and the need for everyone's help to achieve them. I proposed Victor again, this time to replace Mr. Victory as IFBB regional chief and for both to work in absolute coordination on all development missions coming our way. This was unanimously approved.

The meeting that was not supposed to happen ended with a heartfelt thanks to all on behalf of my federation and instant reciprocity from all participants. Even Imbert and Robert were smiling, probably for different reasons. There was plenty of hope and satisfaction on what had concluded, combined with anxiety and curiosity about where this experiment would be landing next.

That night at Cabo Rojo's city square, after the conclusion of the successful contest finals, Winfield approached me, shook my hand and said: "We are on our way".

## 21st CENTURY EVALUATIONS



I always admired **Ben Weider**, not just for his overpowering leadership and charisma, but also for his vision and desire to perpetuate a legacy of excellence in sports management. **Rafael Santonja's** mentoring by Ben was more than a premonition. He knew that the little dynamo from Spain would take the IFBB into new heights, as they both shared the same visualization on the unexplored potential of our athletes and sport disciplines.... and Rafael delivered.

**Rafael Santonja**



**Ben Weider**

For years I witnessed the infiltration of mediocrity in the CACBBFF board of directors, masqueraded as professionalism. I never worried too much about that trend because I thought that, ultimately, common sense would prevail.... but I was wrong. My attempts to follow Ben Weider's legacy protocols (**to leave the CACBBFF with the best Executive Council**) were just derailed efforts; as my intentions to coach, mentor and institute excellence in leadership resulted in a monumental waste of time. But since the current management was democratically elected in 2010, it is gratifying to recognize the CACBBFF now has the administration it deserves.

Looking back into our humble beginnings, I should have used my moments after the accident to relax in the calm waters of Boqueron Beach, instead of pursuing bodybuilding dreams. Following my stepfather's advice (to become his successor) would have catapulted my career into unparalleled business accomplishments, leaving "small-thinking" lifestyles to West Indies bodybuilding bureaucrats.

If it is destiny for my life to end in disappointment for what I created, so be it. By modern standards, I realize this is a very common occurrence. It will probably take two or three generations of new sport leaders to regain the departure of current CACBBFF substandard managers from sanity and decorum. My only regret is that I will not live to see it. But I am sure that, approaching the next century, my spirit will still be around to enjoy the evolution of my conception into a significant, respected and reliable organization.

As for impending snubbed parties, you never apologize for the truth. Honesty might not be pretty, desirable, welcomed or acceptable; but it is what it is.... it would be disingenuous for me to portray convenient conclusions, considering their sportsmanship unawareness and reluctance to accept the pragmatism of their personalities.