

Memories of Ivan from Kiwiland

★ I MET Ivan while working on the Sun in London, an encounter that turned into a long friendship with plenty of adventures along the way.

He mentioned one night in the pub that he was starting a tabloid newspaper in The Bahamas and would I want to come along and give him a hand for a few weeks.

Starting your own newspaper was obviously a harebrained idea. That's never going to work, but what the hell, a few weeks in Nassau couldn't hurt.

It turned into one of the more exciting periods of my life.

Bloody hard work, no end of problems to solve, chaos seemingly always around the corner but it all came together, week after week, with Ivan the ever-calm ringmaster at the centre of it all while *Harvey* and the rest of us jumped through the hoops.

It was great fun as well,



● Peter O'Neill, long-time Ivan friend & colleague, in Phuket, Thailand

as most things were with Ivan, especially the long dinners on those never-ending contra deals. Always people slipping over to have a quiet word with the boss as well (*how can one bloke know so many people?*), which kept the *Private Eye* (*Grapevine*)

column ticking over nicely.

It was the time of the first Gulf War so there were many hours of Ivan sounding off on world affairs, not that he ever needed much encouragement on that score.

Cricket got a look in as well, of course. That Benson

& Hedges Cup Final at Lord's did come up an awful lot.

And funny how driving past the pink Pindling mansion would always set him off. Like clockwork.

It was an exhilarating ride, one that I happily repeated in 2001 when Ivan flew me into Nassau during a time when I was getting over a bad ski accident and needed a change of scene.

Same old, same old ... Bloody hard work, no end of problems to solve, chaos seemingly always around the corner ... but it always came together on the night. Or two nights a week by then. Not such a harebrained idea, then.

Twice the Kalik chicks (Page 3 Girl) to find, twice the agony aunt (Doc's Tonic) columns to piece together... Long dinners night after night (how can one bloke have so many contra deals?).

Post-9/11 as well so no encouragement needed to get Ivan's singular take on global trends.

Or as he was soon styling

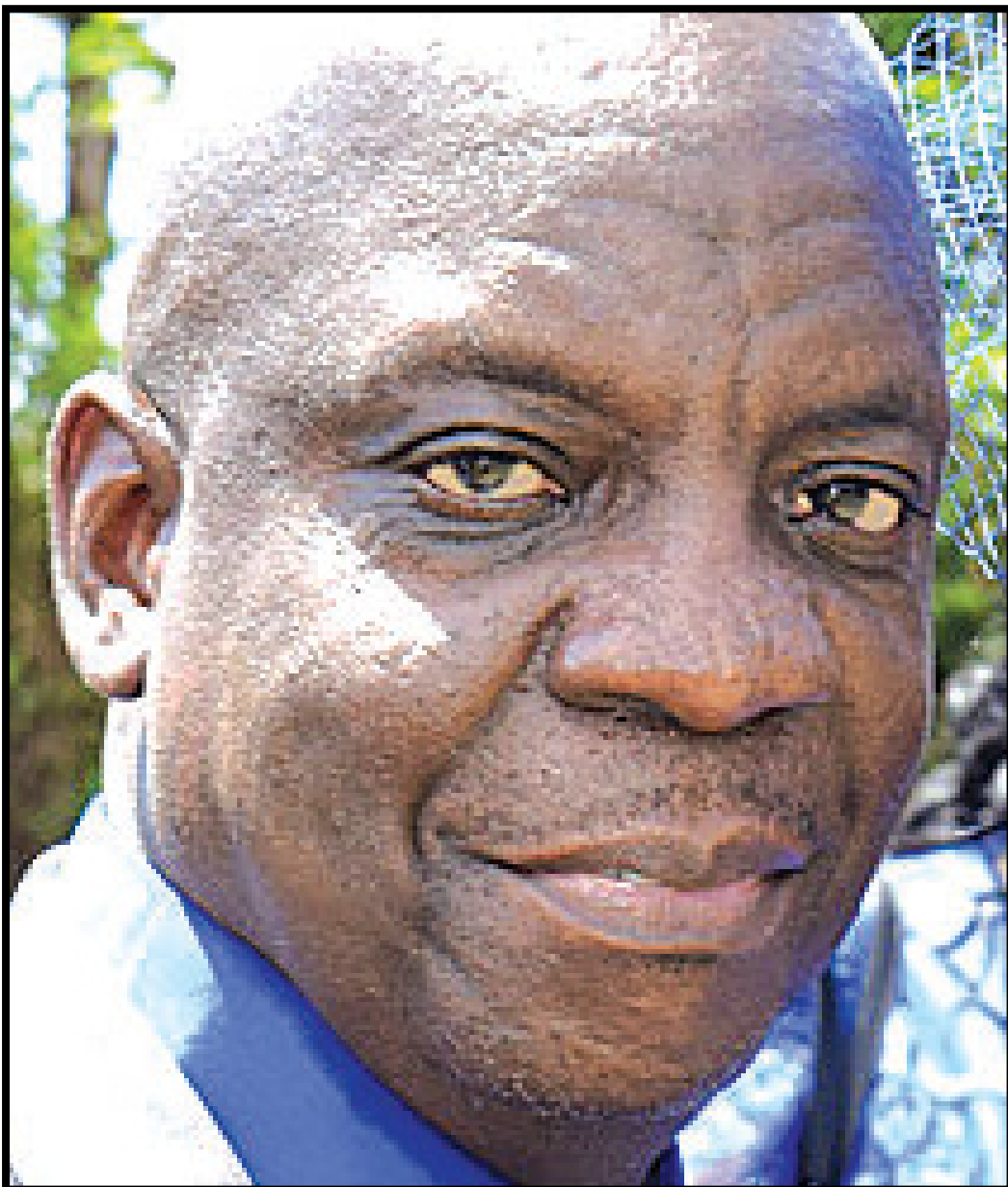
himself: *Ivan El Terrible*, aka *Ivanovitch*, *Punch Tzar*, whose mission he once defined as: "*Keep on bashing the third-rate politicians, tyrants, liberal-illiberal hypocrites, the politically correct cretins and the tiefin' two-faced lawyers.*"

I also remember the great Christmas lunch I had with the Johnson family and the many chats in the office I would have with Ivan's dad *Basil* when he dropped in to keep an eye on the circus.

When I left Nassau for a trip across Mexico before heading back to New Zealand, Ivan drove me to the airport. As I was about to board, he pressed a sizable wad of U.S. dollars into my hand. Pretty much paid for the Mexican jaunt.

That was Ivan. A fine, generous mate, a tried and true friend, simply one of the finest people I have ever met.

Peter O'Neill
New Zealand



● **SOME** people come into your life and make a difference. Others come into your life and cause you to become different. Ivan Johnson was one of the former persons who made a difference. He helped to shape and mould the way that I accepted the field of journalism as a profession.

I remember I was writing a story about cricket. And I only mentioned the fact that he was one of the premier players in the country. That obviously didn't sit too well with him, because I got a call from Mr Johnson who advised me of his accomplishments. As a young reporter on the sports beat at *The Tribune*, I acknowledged my innocence and he accepted my apology. He further admitted that one could have easily bypassed such vital information if more thorough research was not done.

Lesson learnt.

Mr Johnson and I became closely connected after that. He would frequently drop in a line to congratulate me on a column written or to share some constructive criticism on the way forward. Over the years, as his own publication began to flourish, he would constantly ask for a contributing piece to supplement his sports page, to which I occasionally obliged.

There was never a dull moment in a conversation with Mr Johnson, who knew just about any and everything about sports. He always said he yearned for the day when he would see more athletes, especially in cricket, excel to the professional ranks. He was fond of those who made their accomplishments like the Golden Girls and the Golden Knights and Ray Minus Jr, just to name a few. But he always felt that we as a country could have done so much more to advance the performances of so many others.

I will miss those conversations. But I will cherish the memories of the knowledge of sports that he so gladly shared. He's gone, but his insightfulness will linger on.

May his soul rest in peace.

From the Sports Desk of
Brent Stubbs, Senior Sports Reporter, *The Tribune*