

Assignment: Feature Story

Name: Leonardo Salmon

Institution: University of Technology, Jamaica

ID#: 2406054

Lecturer: Jovan Johnson

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From Clarendon to FIFA's Global Stage: The Remarkable Rise of Jamaica's Football President

By Leonardo Salmon



*Beres Hammond (left) and Michael Ricketts (right) pose for a picture at the National Stadium in Kingston on October 14, 2025.
Photo Credit: Leonardo Salmon*

Born in May Pen on April 15, 1957, Michael Ricketts has risen from the grassroots to the global arena. He has earned re-elections at home, leadership roles across the Caribbean and an appointment as FIFA's Vice Chairman for Global Grassroots and Amateur Football. Ricketts' journey, marked by steady perseverance and moments of intense public scrutiny reflects the resilience of Jamaica's premier football administrator.

When Michael talks about his childhood, his tone immediately softens. It becomes clear that May Pen and the tiny community in Denbigh where he grew up still hold a special place in his heart. Born to Herman and Elaine Ricketts, he grew up in an environment where values were taught more through example than instruction. His earliest dreams were shaped on the playfields of Denbigh Primary, where he played football and cricket with the kind of wholehearted joy only a child can muster.

He remembers the pride he felt when he became one of only seven students to earn a scholarship to Glenmuir High School. At Glenmuir, he continued to shine in cricket, representing the school and building the discipline, teamwork and resilience that would one day become his signature traits as a leader. He graduated in 1976 with plans to pursue cricket but football had its own plans for him.

Ricketts' entry into football administration in the early 1980s was almost accidental. Vere Technical needed a manager for their football team, and in 1981 and 1982, he stepped willingly into the role. He discovered he had a natural instinct for organizing, problem-solving, and motivating people. Others noticed it too.

Two influential figures in the parish of Clarendon, Dr. Winston Dawes and Lloyd Plumber, invited him onto the Clarendon Football Association's executive committee. He didn't think much about the appointment at the time but looking back he acknowledges that it changed the trajectory of his life.

By 1985, Dr. Dawes would become President of the Jamaica Football Federation (JFF) and Ricketts ended up filling his role as the President of the Clarendon Football Association (CFA).

It was a time of growth, but also political tension. In 1988, after the creation of Galaxy FC by Jimmy Chin, he made the difficult decision to resign from the CFA and become the team's manager. It was a move grounded in principle as holding both roles would be a conflict of interest. Two years later however, he returned to his post as the president and handed the managerial reigns of galaxy over to someone else.

Still, that setback didn't slow him down. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, he continued climbing the administrative ladder: Chairman of the South-Central Confederation, Chairman of the Competitions Committee, Referees Committee, and Club Licensing Committee. These were not glamorous roles, but they offered experience and insight. He gained firsthand knowledge of the structural weaknesses holding Jamaican football back, and he began shaping ideas for reform long before he ever imagined leading the JFF.

His national breakthrough came in 2014 when he was appointed Vice President of the JFF under the late Captain Horace Burrell. Then came 2017 the year that changed everything. Captain Burrell passed away, leaving a leadership vacuum and a federation in mourning. The period that followed tested not just his skill, but his emotional resilience.



Michael Ricketts (right) greets a supporter at the National Stadium in Kingston on November 18, 2025. Photo Credit: Leonardo Salmon

In 2019, after years of steady work and growing national respect, he was elected President of the JFF. But leadership, he soon learned, comes with its own shadows. Early in his presidency, he faced what he recalls as harsh and sometimes unfair scrutiny from sections of the media. The criticism was sharp, often personal, and for a moment, it threatened to overshadow his mission. He, however, did not fold. Instead, he found strength in family. His wife, Sharon, whom he married in 1992 and his daughter.

In 2021, he was re-elected and in 2024, he was re-elected again. An unprecedented level of confidence from Jamaican football stakeholders. In 2020, he also rose to the regional stage as Vice President of the Caribbean Football Union, extending his influence beyond national borders.

FIFA appointed him Vice Chairman for Global Grassroots and Amateur Football. The boy from Denbigh, who played cricket on Glenmuir's grounds, that same boy now held one of the highest global positions in football development

When he reflects on the moment, he attributes it not to ambition, but to service. "Football has always been a community thing for me," he has often said. "I never thought it would take me this far."

But his journey is far from finished.



Michael Ricketts poses for a picture at the Met Life Stadium in New Jersey on August 14, 2025. Photo Credit: Michael Ricketts

Today, he speaks passionately about the future. Strengthening youth development, improving club structures and ensuring that Jamaican football becomes not just a story of occasional brilliance but one of long-term stability and global competitiveness.

Ricketts' life's story, in many ways, reflects the story of Jamaican football itself: humble beginnings, extraordinary potential, moments of conflict, and an enduring belief that greatness is possible.

From the fields of Denbigh Primary to the offices of FIFA, his journey is proof that leadership doesn't always announce itself loudly. Sometimes it grows quietly in dedication, in service, and in the refusal to give up on a dream that started in a small corner of Clarendon.