First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



George Bovell III

Swimming

Inducted in 2020

'It's in the genes' is a common term around elite sport, and it is partially true for this extraordinary swimmer that brought home precious metal from the highest global levels, including the big one, the Olympics. His father, George Bovell II, was a Trinidad and Tobago Sportsman of the Year in 1969 for swimming, while his mother Barbara was a track & field athlete who represented Barbados and Canada, so genes were a factor for George Bovell III's amazing sports career. But, he knew that it was not enough. He married his natural talent to a penchant for hard work, dedication and sacrifice – for which he is universally renowned – and in the process made Trinidad and Tobago extremely proud.

As a baby he was swimming before he could walk, doing laps in his grandmother's pool. Later, he took up the mainstream sports of football and cricket, coupled with tennis, gymnastics and sailing. But, as Bovell is fond of explaining, swimming chose him.

He was intrinsically linked with the water and with trying to be the absolute best that he could be when competing in it. Bovell was competing and winning in local swimming, but most of all he was involved in the ideology of personal bests, trying to improve his times on every occasion that he faced the starter.

Those times marked Bovell as a special talent and Trinidad and Tobago selected the then 16-year-old for the 1999 Pan Am Games in Winnipeg and the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. There, Bovell competed in the 100m Freestyle, 200m Individual Medley (IM) and 400m Individual Medley. He was there for the experience, to gain knowledge and exposure for the future, but there was a hint of the potential in his best placing in the 200m IM.

In 2001, he attended the World Championships in Japan where he swam 2:01.35 in the 200 IM to reach the final and become ranked 6th in the world. Such performances garnered the attention of Auburn University, Alabama, and Bovell was recruited for their legendary Tigers swim team. It took Bovell to a new level with his training, and competing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) gave him the best platform to prepare for the major games.

It came to fruition at the 2003 Pan Am Games in Santo Domingo. In the 200m Freestyle he sped home in 1:48.90 to take the gold medal. In the 200m IM it was the same, gold secured in 1:59.49. Proving his versatility, Bovell also won silver medals in his other events: the 100m Freestyle and the 100m Backstroke.

This haul put him firmly into the national consciousness and gave hope that Bovell could medal on the biggest stage of them all, the Olympics.

One year later, in Athens, he delivered. He warmed up (and issued a warning his rivals) in the best way when he broke the 200 IM short course world record in March 2004 in a scintillating 1:53.93. At the Olympics, when he reached the 200 IM final with a time of 2:00.31, he had not yet broken two minutes for the competition. But in final he stopped the clock at 1:58.80 to take the bronze medal behind USA's Michael Phelps and Ryan Lochte. It was Trinidad and Tobago's only medal of the 2004 Olympics, its first in swimming, and the fourth won outside of track & field (the other three were in weightlifting in 1948 and 1952).

Bovell did not rest on the laurels that were presented to him on the podium. He attended the Central American & Caribbean Games (CAC) in Colombia in 2006, returning home with gold in the 50m Freestyle and a bronze each in the 100m and 200m Freestyle. At the 2007 Pan Am Games he took the bronze medal in the 50m Freestyle. In the following year's Olympics, Bovell was the proud flagbearer in Beijing's 'bird nest' stadium for the opening ceremony but competing in the 50m and 100m Freestyle he made it to the semi-finals in the former but did not advance.

He successfully defended his 50m Freestyle crown at the 2010 CAC Games in Puerto Rico, adding a team medal with silver in the 4x100m Freestyle, and silver in the 50m Backstroke. He was building towards his fourth Olympics when disaster struck. Bovell was involved in a vehicular accident, colliding with a truck. He avoided being crushed by moving onto the passenger side but the head injuries that he suffered resulted in Bovell having to rest to avoid getting a stroke. Unable to train for weeks, he was determined to return to his best and put in the hard yards to ensure that he could attend the 2012 London Olympics. He made it to

the final of his new pet event, the 50m Freestyle and finished 7th. In December of that year, he returned to the 100 IM at the World Championships, and won a bronze medal in 51.66, a satisfying comeback from his accident.

One year later, at the 2013 World Long Course (50m pool) Championships, he proved his mettle in the 50m Freestyle with another bronze medal in a time of 21.55; two world's medals in two years proved that Bovell was getting better with age, testament to his dedication.

2014 brought gold in the 50m Freestyle at the CAC Games in Mexico. Bovell now had a hat-trick of victories at the event. He backed it up with bronze in the 100m Backstroke. He attended his first and only Commonwealth Games later that year with a 5th place in the 50m Freestyle.

Bovell's medal haul continued at the 2015 Pan Am Games in Toronto, Canada, winning the bronze medal in the 50m Freestyle. His selection for the 2016 Rio Olympics made Bovell a five-time Olympian (a Trinidad and Tobago record matched only by Kelly-Ann Baptiste). In Brazil he concentrated on the 50m Freestyle but did not advance to the final.

With a prolific career that also included 41 Swimming World Cup medals – with 13 gold – and having won medals in every major competition available to him, bar the Commonwealth Games, Trinidad and Tobago's greatest swimmer called time on his competitive career. He remains an advocate and an example of the virtues of commitment towards a goal, evidenced by his swimming results as well as his academic results. Trinidad and Tobago recognized his contribution to the nation by awarding him the Hummingbird Medal Gold in 2003, and the Chaconia

Medal Gold in 2004. In 2020, George Bovell III was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame.

CAC Games:	**2006 Gold 50m Freestyle** **2006 Bronze 100m Freestyle** **2006 Bronze 200m Freestyle** **2010 Gold 50m Freestyle** **2010 Silver 50m Backstroke** **2010 Silver 4x100m Freestyle** **2014 Gold 50m Freestyle** **2014 Bronze 50m Backstroke**
Pan American Games:	**2003 Gold 200m Freestyle** **2003 Gold 200m Individual Medley** **2003 Silver 100m Freestyle** **2003 Silver 100m Backstroke** **2007 Bronze 50m Freestyle** **2015 50m Freestyle**
Olympic Games:	**2004 Bronze 200m Individual Medley**
World Championships (Short Course):	**2012 Bronze 100m Individual Medley**
World Championships (Long Course):	**2013 Bronze 50m Freestyle**
Sportsman of the Year:	**2004, 2014**