First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Rex Courtney Burnett

Football

Inducted in 1985

Nicknamed ‘Ropo’ but later dubbed ‘The Artist’ because of the manner in which he created wonderful scoring chances for his teams, Rex Burnett left an undeniable mark upon Trinidad and Tobago football in the 1940s and 50s.

At secondary school, St. Mary’s College, he shone at football and cricket and was quickly snapped up in 1938 by one of the powerhouse Port of Spain football teams of the era, Notre Dame.

Reprising his St. Mary’s role as a left winger, within two years in the senior ranks Burnett was terrorizing defenders with his dribbling and his ability to cut in from just inside the line. In 1941 he played an important role in Notre Dame securing the First Division League Shield, as well as the Gooden Chisholm Cup, a now defunct competition played between the champions of North Trinidad and the champions of South Trinidad.

Touring Barbados in 1942 as part of a hybrid Notre Dame/Casuals team, Burnett continued to impress in either scoring or setting up goals, and that meant that the national team selectors took notice. The following year he returned to Barbados in national colors and scored the most goals on tour.

Now a fixture in the national team, the resumption of inter-colonial football triangular tournaments in 1944 saw Burnett form a deadly duo with 'Nattie' Sealey. With each team playing each other twice, Trinidad and Tobago, as hosts, went unbeaten against British Guiana and Barbados. This run included a 6-1 thrashing of Barbados where Sealey scored three and Burnett scored two.

In 1946 the national team toured Jamaica, where the Gleaner newspaper anticipated his arrival onto their shores: "Rex Burnett of the Notre Dame Club, acclaimed the cleverest inner left in Trinidad. He is a real artist in the game." The label stuck, but Trinidad and Tobago lost the series against Jamaica, part of the decades long football rivalry between the two nations.

Burnett returned to domestic football and helped Notre Dame win the 1946 League Shield before touring with the Trinidad and Tobago team once again, this time to Curaçao and Aruba. In late 1947, Trinidad and Tobago again hosted the inter-colonial tournament, and the national captain, a Malvern player, chose an entirely Malvern front line to play for the national squad. 'Ropo' was on the sidelines.

Incensed, he took out his frustration on the Malvern defenders in the 1947 FA Trophy semi-final, with a scintillating display of football where

he ran past players to lay up the scoring chances for his teammate, Terry Bates, to score both goals. Notre Dame went on to win the final.

Burnett remained one of the first names on the Trinidad and Tobago start list for several years afterwards, touring to Guadeloupe, Suriname and hosting Haiti. The team won on their travels, won at home and won another inter-colonial tournament. It proved to be the catalyst for them to undertake a bigger challenge: a tour of the United Kingdom.

This they duly did in 1953, boarding the SS Golfito in June of that year. It was the national team's first exposure to international competition outside of the Caribbean region, a crucial first step on the journey that would eventually lead to the highs such as 2006 World Cup qualification.

Playing 14 games, Burnett was now very much the senior player on the squad, but still played a starring role, being instrumental in the 5 wins and 3 draws.

A glittering career capped off with an unprecedented tour to the home of the game, Burnett retired from competitive football upon return to Trinidad in October 1953. It had been a glorious 16 years.

Rex Burnett was duly inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 1985.