First Citizens Sports Foundation

# HALL OF FAME



## Ahamad Charles

**All Rounder**

**Inducted in 1984**

Cricket, hockey, football and cycling, Ahamad Charles took the term ‘all-rounder’ literally, exceling in the latter two disciplines during his time in the Caribbean sporting limelight of the late 1930s and 1940s.

His strong physical frame was made to endure the rigors of training and intense competition and, by the time he reached secondary school, his cycling results saw him quickly rise through the ranks to challenge and eventually overcome the then king of the local track cycling scene, Laurie Rogers. In one of the most memorable races at the Queen’s Park Oval, Charles drew level with Rogers, and the finish line is sight when his foot slipped out of the pedal. While struggling to get it back into the moving pedal cage, Charles kept the other leg pumping to cross the line just ahead of a stunned Rogers.



Having dominated the Trinidad and Tobago scene, by 1937 the Siparia native took on the best wheelmen across the Caribbean, in particular Jamaica's Lance Hailes and R. Robb. Charles' ambition to become the region's best cyclist was almost undone by illness. Travelling to Kingston to take on the Jamaicans in their backyard, Charles awoke on race day with a hot fever and decided to miss the race. His manager encouraged him to at least start the race, having travelled the long distance by ship to compete. Being tucked in the racing bunch stoked his competitive flames and Charles soon found himself in a grandstand finish with Hailes, who he beat on the line. There would be no fervent celebration afterwards, for a sick Charles was so weak that he had to be carried away.

When he was not scorching the regional cycling tracks, he was establishing himself as a quality center-half for the South Trinidad team, a position that he soon replicated for the Trinidad and Tobago national team. Described as an elegant player, Charles would become integral to the team's fortunes. He chose to represent the country in both football and cycling, even if it meant that competing in one discipline prevented him from participating in another.

Sometimes it worked. In May 1938 he came off the boat from British Guiana where he had played for the national football team, threw his football boots into a corner, picked up his cycling cleats and proceeded to the Siparia Sports Day, where he duly won the 5 mile and 9 mile races in front of his home crowd. On other occasions he was forced to choose. In November of that same year he could not go to Jamaica to compete as a cyclist because he was part of the football team that was going to Grenada at the same time.

Eventually, football took preference, evidenced not only by his reduced cycling racing, but by a statement that he made to the *Jamaica Gleaner* that he loved football more than cycling.

A June 1939 report of a 3-3 result in a North versus South match summed up his center-half style: “Charles was intercepting brilliantly and lobbing the ball dangerously before the opponent’s goal mouth.” That talent saw him cement his place in the national team for the next five years, excelling even in his final competitive year, 1944.

As a talisman in the squad, Charles was amongst all the action in a thrilling Trinidad and Tobago tour to Barbados in May 1944. He opened the campaign with a goal in a 2-1 win over Empire Club. In the second match he was even better, scoring two more goals as Trinidad and Tobago beat Spartan 5-1, though not everyone was impressed; the Trinidad and Tobago Football President said that “Charles was below par!”

In the next game he was sent off for telling the referee that an opposing player ‘handled’ the ball. The referee took umbrage, sent Charles off, then contravened the rules of the game by stating that Charles could come back onto the field of play if he apologized. Charles chose to obey the rules of the game.

He completed a successful tour by starring in a 4-1 win over Barbados, scoring two goals within a minute of each other. A good season was capped with another goal against British Guiana in October of that year.

By his early thirties he retired from all sport (having also represented South in cricket and hockey), concentrating on his working life with the

Forest Reserve, then Texaco, and eventually returning to his beloved Siparia. His all-round accomplishments made Ahamad Charles an easy choice for the first intake of sportspersons to the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 1984.