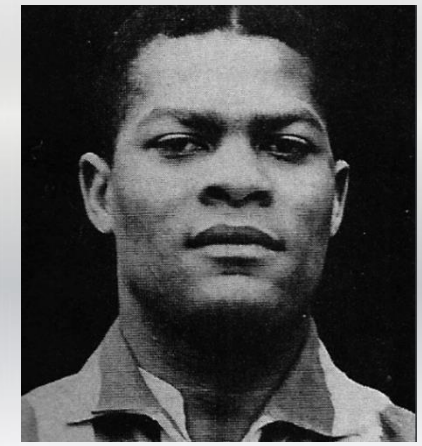
First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Alfred P. Charles

Football

Inducted in 1984

To be christened 'King' in a chosen sport is to have excelled and entertained to such a degree that no other moniker will suffice. Alfred Charles, footballing trailblazer for professional players of color not just from Trinidad and Tobago but from across the globe, was given the name after another dominating display of football in 1931.

The man that would become Trinidad and Tobago's first great footballer was yet another gifted sportsman born in Belmont, Port of Spain. He honed his early talent for ball sports, specifically cricket and football, at Newtown Boys RC School, and with his family considered lower-middle class, Charles – in line with the culture of early 20th century Trinidad – joined a sports club that was made up of his social peers: Everton FC. It was a club that was founded by Charles' father and took part in the highly competitive Port of Spain Football League.

With sport divided across colour lines, it was inevitable that the rivalries within the league were also split along the same margins. Regardless, with Charles' ability to play in many positions, either as a forward or full back, Everton took on all comers and were wildly successful. Everton captured the FA Cup in 1929 before winning the local quadruple of the Port of Spain Football League, FA Cup, Sperling Cup and the Wincairns Trophy from 1930 to 1932 under Charles' captaincy.

Charles was then selected for the national team during this time, with outstanding displays against Barbados and British Guiana, the latter prompting the match report: "Playing at centre-half, he shone like a beacon in that position and so amazed the Guianese that they christened him 'King Charles'."

In September 1933, tensions between Everton and the club of the local upper-class, Casuals, came to a head during a match, with an on-the-pitch altercation resulting in a two-year suspension for Charles, a one-year suspension for the Casuals captain, and an indefinite suspension for Everton FC.

Charles had little choice but to try to concentrate on cricket, and accompanied his friend and fellow local standout Learie Constantine as a valet on the West Indies tour to England. Constantine's involvement and influence would extend further, as he used his position as a sport celebrity in northern England to suggest to English Second Division club Burnley that they sign Charles.

Burnley duly obliged, the signing generating mass media attention across the Caribbean and England, and Charles made his debut as a full back in 1933 against Preston North End in the Northern Midweek League. At the

time there were no other black professional footballers in England. He struggled to make the first team and spells at Nelson FC and Darwen followed, until he played for Stalybridge Celtic FC in Manchester. Playing in his more favoured forward role, Charles scored a brace of goals for the team and was on the radar of bigger clubs.

He joined Southampton FC in January 1937 to play in the First Division (now the English Premier League), a significant milestone for all black players at a time when there were few – if any – faces of color on the streets of Southampton, in a league that now represents the diversity of the world (it would be another 40 years before Southampton would sign another black player).

He scored two goals in five matches for the Reserves before making his first team debut on 9th January, 1937 against Bradford City, but was not playing at his very best. Charles returned to Stalybridge FC then endured a serious cartilage injury before the outbreak of World War II put a stop to any intended comeback.

He remained in England, playing cricket in the Lancashire area until the 1950s, before retiring from sport to run a pub in Nelson (Constantine's hometown).

Appropriately enshrined into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 1984, Alfred Charles' talent and career laid the path for many others to follow in the world's most popular sport.