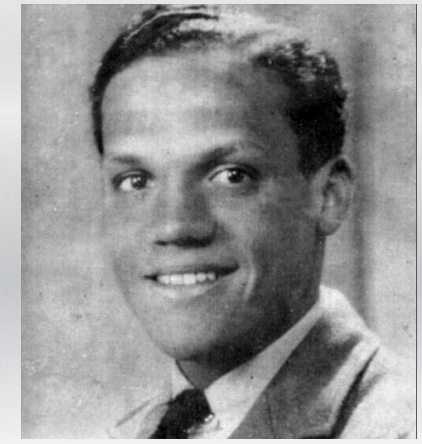
First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Michael Cipriani

All Rounder

Inducted in 1984

The man that wowed crowds in the early part of the 20th century with a bicycle, football, cricket bat, boxing gloves, pole vault, and then an airplane, packed a lot into his 44 years of life.

The third of fourteen children from Pembroke Street, Port of Spain (specifically, Cumberland House, which still exists today), Michael Cipriani wasted no time in establishing himself as one of the nation's revered sportsmen. By the age of 15 he was not only competing against other local cyclists on the ultra-competitive tracks across Trinidad and Tobago, but he also took on the best from Barbados, Jamaica and Guyana. In 1910, having defeated his regional opposition throughout the season, he declared himself the 'Cyclist of the West Indies'.

Not satisfied with this title, Cipriani expanded his skills repertoire to represent Trinidad and Tobago in an intercolonial match against eternal rivals Barbados.

The all-rounder also became a formidable footballer within the local club scene, a point evidenced by the description that his ability to play in every position provided a headache for selectors.

Perhaps hinting at his later preoccupation with taking flight, Cipriani became a pole vaulter of renown, winning the event at sports meets across the country and captivating crowds with his airborne ability that set several national records.

'Marvelous' then entered the boxing ring to test his mettle, but it was a larger battle that then caught his attention. At the peak of his athletic powers, World War I began in Europe. Britain had entered the war and Cipriani – like many young men within the colonial sphere – felt it was right to fight on behalf of the mother country. He wrote to the UK Army advising that many young men of color wanted to serve. He was soon on board a ship to join the effort against Germany.

Most of his Battalion was wiped out in Belgium. Cipriani was one of the lucky few that survived and was later decorated with the Medal of Mons, named after the town where the massacre took place.

During his cycling days he also studied to become a solicitor, returning to Trinidad from the war and opening an office on St. Vincent Street. His sporting prowess was on the wane, but his mind remained fixed on the small planes that he witnessed above him in Europe. With the same verve that he used to pursue a multitude of sports, he quickly learned to fly via lessons in England, bought a small two-seater plane that he christened *Hummingbird,* and by 1931 he thrilled the local populace with regular flights over northwestern Trinidad from the Mucurapo airstrip.

He was the natural choice for the inaugural flight from Trinidad to Tobago as part of the efforts to establish an airbridge between the two islands. On Sunday 3rd June, 1934 the *Hummingbird* left Mucurapo and, while attempting to scale over the Northern Range, hit a tree and crashed. An entire population were in shock, never giving up hope until the crash site and bodies of Cipriani and his co-pilot were found seven days later. Over 15,000 people attended Michael Cipriani's funeral, testament to the place that 'Marvelous Mikey' had earned in their hearts with his soaring achievements.

He was inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame in 1984.