First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Compton Gonsalves

Cycling

Inducted in 1985

The first in the long line of cyclists to represent T&T at the Olympics, Compton Gonsalves would serve the sport as both rider and administrator, in both cases creating the path for others to follow.

Born in Guyana, Gonsalves came to Trinidad in 1940, where he attended St Mary's College in Port of Spain. There, he entered a cycling race at the age of 17, won it, and never looked back. He entered races outside of the school confines and had the same results, with a memorable victory in a 5 mile A Class race, beating the very best in the country as a relative newcomer.

His rapid climb up the standings led to him being included in the large contingent of eight cyclists sent to Barranquilla, Colombia, for the first multi-sport event following World War II, the 1946 CAC Games.

In Trinidad the cyclists were accustomed the bunch races that circled the track for various laps depending upon the race distance, but international cycling events consisted of different formats, including timed individual and team events.

On the Colombian track, Gonsalves and his teammates George Terry, Felix Brown and Ellis Bryan, had very little time to familiarize themselves with the intricacies of the 4000M Team Pursuit, but to their credit they put up a time of 6mins48.7secs to secure a bronze medal. It remains T&T's only medal in the event in international competition and meant that within one year of taking up the sport, Gonsalves was an international medal winner.

One year later, he was regarded as the best wheelman in T&T and had the credentials to prove it, by becoming the 1947 national champion. He raced (and won) in Guyana, Barbados and Jamaica, then stopped cycling altogether to begin studying to enter the Jesuit priesthood. The 1948 London Olympics were coming up but there were serious doubts about T&T's ability to send a team, therefore the Games did not feature in Gonsalves' plans. However, with mere weeks left it was decided to send a five-man team to an event that represented the world's resurgence after years of being ravaged by war and uncertainty. There was a place for one cyclist, and though he was not training, Gonsalves was still considered the best in the land and as such, was on the boat to England.

At the Olympics, he rode the Match Sprint and Kilometer Time Trial, finishing joint 9th place in the former, and posting 1min21.5secs for 16th place in the latter. It was a good showing for an underprepared athlete, and it rekindled his love for cycling.

Gonsalves resumed training and in 1950 he returned to the CAC Games, held in Guatemala, participating in the same two events as London. This time, he came away with a medal in each. Despite limited experience in the sprint and the tactical nous involved, Gonsalves made it to the final against Oscar Layne of Panama and won the silver medal. In the 'Kilo', his 1min16.7secs earned him a bronze medal.

In 1951 the inaugural Pan Am Games were being held in Bueno Aires, with Gonsalves and fellow rider Ferdinand 'Ferdi' De Gannes selected as part of T&T's team. At the time the sport of cycling was represented by the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) and for many years there was a brewing power struggle by the cyclists to form their own national governing body. Gonsalves and De Gannes were at the forefront of this movement and refused to go to Argentina unless the AAA agreed to allow the formation of a cycling federation. The AAA replaced the two cyclists, but their refusal created the necessary attention for their cause and soon the world governing cycling body became involved, ruling in favour of the formation of the T&T Cycling Federation. Gonsalves missed the opportunity to compete at a Pan Am Games but was instrumental in securing the governance of his sport for future riders. He would later serve as President of the TTCF (Trinidad & Tobago Cycling Federation).

For his achievements and services to cycling, Compton Gonsalves was inducted into the T&T Sports Hall of Fame in 1985.

CAC Games: **1946 Bronze Team Pursuit**
1950 Silver Sprint
1950 Bronze 1 Kilometer Time Trial