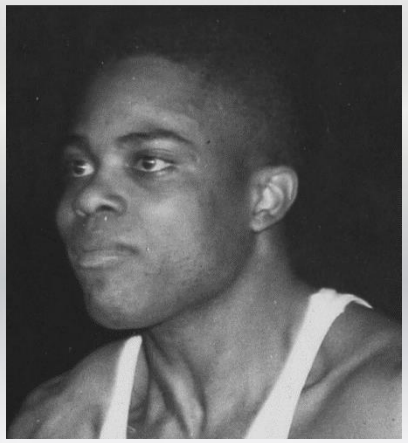
First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Dr. Basil Ince

Athletics

Inducted in 1985

His contribution to his nation as sportsman, parliamentarian, researcher, and author, is immeasurable. So much of what you read on these pages about our proud sporting history performed by our talented and dedicated athletes is made possible by the extensive documentation carried out by one of our Pan American Games gold medalists, Dr. Basil Ince.

Like so many of the elite sportsmen that emanated from Trinidad and Tobago in the 1920s to the 1960s, Ince was a product of Queen's Royal College (QRC) where he began in 1946 and, like so many of the sportsmen of that era, he also resided in Belmont. After trying the two main sports – cricket and football – at QRC, he entered a handicap race at the school's sports day, and won.

The victory, coupled with his proximity to the mecca of sports that was the Queen's Park Savannah, prompted Ince to train for the following year's school meet.

A year later, he provided ample notice of his sporting future with a win in the quarter-mile event (440 yards). His prize for the event would provide further inspiration to continue his training: it was a pair of running shoes.

Now training with the Tranton Athletic Club, Ince achieved an unprecedented feat when he beat all competitors, at every distance from the 100 yards to the Mile, in the 1952 QRC Sports Day. Ince then ventured to competition outside of the school confines, and at 19 years old he moved into the men's B Class, still running the occasional 100 yards while mainly racing on a diet of 220 yards and 440 yards.

By 1955 Ince was balancing his ambitions in both academia and sport, with a keen eye on the developing his training over the quarter-mile where he now had a personal best of 47.8 seconds. For his tertiary education, he opted for an institution that could deliver the best of both worlds: Tufts University in Massachusetts. He found the going tough in his first two years abroad. The US circuit was a competitive hotbed and suddenly Ince was running against athletes who represented their nations at Olympic level.

By his second year at Tufts, he was running 47.6 for the 440 yards and won the New England championship. He was selected to represent Trinidad and Tobago at the 1958 Commonwealth Games at Cardiff, Wales, where he reached the semifinals. "I felt terrible because I knew I could do better."

With new determination and the impetus provided by his final year at University, Ince ran a successful indoor season over the novel distance of 600 yards before switching focus to the more prestigious outdoor events. The benefits of all his hard work were reaping rewards for Ince and Tufts, as he was winning regularly over both the 200m and 400m distances. “I continued to double up in dual meets and in my first meet I opened up with a 20.7 in the 200m and 48.6 in the 400m. I was pleased at the 200m time since it was the first time I had dipped under 21 seconds.” At the New England Championships that year he achieved another milestone, going under 47 seconds for the 400m for the first time with a blistering 46.7 seconds.

A great year continued with his run at the coveted IC4A Championship where – running from lane 1 in the final – he beat the 27-year-old record for the quarter-mile with his own 46.9 seconds. Ince was in the form of his life and there was the Pan American Games coming up that summer.

Disaster struck with a right thigh injury that he tried to train though while working a summer job in New York, a necessity for the amateur athlete at the time with no sponsorship nor elite funding. Realizing that, after a highly competitive year rest was the best approach, Ince immediately felt better. He competed at the West Indian Championship and gained selection in the 200m, 400m and 4x400m relay for the Pan Am Games. Potentially he would be running eight races in Chicago, where the newly federated nations would compete under the British West Indies (BWI) banner.

He drew the dreaded lane 1 for the 200m final and finished 6th as compatriot and friend Michael Agostini won the bronze medal.

Over his preferred distance of the 400m, Ince cruised through the early rounds but spent the night before the final in hospital with stomach pains, which some observers put down to nerves.

In lane 1 once again but for the longer distance, he exited the blocks quickly and was in the top two for the entire race, but Jamaican George Kerr was ahead of him into the final bend, and they maintained those positions to the line. Kerr got the gold, Ince silver, with another Jamaican, Malcolm Spence, in third to complete a BWI clean sweep.

The three medalists then teamed up with Spence's brother, Mel, to form a formidable team for the relay. They won their heat with a comfortable 3min 15secs run, saving the thrusters for the final. Given the results of the individual 400m, they lived up to their 'favorites' tag with the Spence brothers running the first two legs, before Ince turned in a blistering 45.7secs to hand over the lead to Kerr, who anchored the team home for gold.

Naturally, Ince now began to think of the following year's Olympics in Rome. "I had been preparing for the Games since I went to Tufts." His alma mater recognized the excellence of his consistency by awarding him the Houston Award. Ince was the first track athlete to take a prize usually given to American football and baseball players.

His Pan Am medal haul had provided confidence. "At last I had learned how to run the quarter-mile. The key to it was relaxation. Finally, in 1959, I discovered that I could come out fast and keep going almost as fast through relaxing."

Continuing his job in New York and preparing for Rome, suddenly Ince fell ill with a condition that baffled the many physicians he visited seeking a cure. He missed the crucial indoor season and, unable to run outdoors by the Spring of 1960, told the selectors not to consider him for the Olympic team. It was a blow to the medal aspirations of the team that had impressed so greatly in Chicago. No one could have predicted that it would turn out to be Ince's last competitive outing.

He had retired from racing at the age of 26, but eventually returned to Trinidad and Tobago and served as the President of the National Amateur Athletic Association (NAAA) and was the manager of the 1976 team that secured the nation's first Olympic gold (Hasely Crawford). A career in teaching followed, then he served Trinidad and Tobago further with stints as Foreign Minister, Minister of Sport & Culture, as well as High Commissioner to Great Britain.

In 1985 Basil Ince was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame.

Pan American Games: 1959 Gold 4x400m Relay
1959 Silver 400m