First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Stern John

Football

Inducted in 2015

The man at the top of a prestigious pile of talented strikers, an elite marksman, Stern John remains - as at 2022 - Trinidad and Tobago's all-time top scorer. Not only does he possess that coveted stat for his country, but at the time of his retirement he was 7th on the list of international goal scorers (in 2022 he was 18th).

When Trinidad and Tobago became the smallest nation ever to qualify for the World Cup in 2006, it was apt that John's efforts helped to propel the team to the greatest stage of all.

A phenomenal goal machine, his life in football began in earnest at Five Rivers Junior Secondary before he became a standout success as a centre-forward for El Dorado Senior Comprehensive in the Secondary Schools Football League. At the age of 19 he was handed his first Trinidad and Tobago cap, scoring on debut in a friendly against Finland in 1995.

He then left for the USA to attend Mercer County College but returned to Trinidad and Tobago duty for the Caribbean Cup in 1996, scoring two goals in the semi-final against Martinique (Trinidad and Tobago won 2-1) to put his team into the final where they beat Cuba for the trophy.

Back in the USA he moved to New Orleans Riverboat Gamblers of the now defunct A-League before fate and family intervened. Ansil Elcock, Trinidad and Tobago international and John's older cousin, was a defender at Major League Soccer club Columbus Crew and recommended that the team give John a try-out. They did and the rest is Crew history.

John was prolific. In his first season (1998) he scored 26 goals to easily win the MLS Golden Boot. In addition, he won the MLS Scoring Champion Award that awards two points per goal scored and one point for an assist. It made him an easy choice for the MLS Best XI at the season's end. In 1999 he was almost as impressive, scoring 18 goals for Columbus. With a tremendous ratio of 44 goals from 55 matches, John now cast his eye on the home of football, England.

In between, he was on fire once again in the 1998 Caribbean Cup, scoring an amazing ten goals for the tournament which included four against Dominica. He would also score a golden goal in the 119th minute the following year to defeat Haiti in the 1999 Caribbean Cup final.

Past First Division and European Cup winners club, Nottingham Forest, signed John in November 1999. He spent three seasons there, scoring 18 goals in 49 appearances before he transferred to Birmingham City who were pushing for promotion to the Premier League. John proved to be just the signing that they required. He scored a last minute away goal at

Millwall to put his new team into the 'world's most lucrative match' – the playoff final to gain promotion to the riches of the Premier League. That game against Norwich City went to penalties, with John scoring the final one to help set off the celebrations as Birmingham (and Stern John) would be in England's top league.

He scored just nine Premier League goals but they, were memorable – last-minute equalizing header in the derby against Aston Villa, a sensational turn and finish at West Ham. By September 2004 he moved to Coventry City in the First Division scoring 12 goals despite starting less than half the matches for the season.

The 2005-06 season was crucial for John. It included the 2006 World Cup qualification matches and Trinidad and Tobago made it through to the final round of six within CONCACAF. John's goals against Panama home and away kept the team in the frame, but it was his predatory double against Mexico leading to a 2-1 win that put Trinidad and Tobago into 4th place and a playoff against Bahrain.

The team beat Bahrain 2-1 on aggregate and John and his teammates had fulfilled the dream for all their countrymen by qualifying for the World Cup. He played in all three matches in Germany, giving defenders a hard time and having a clear scoring chance cleared off the goal line against England.

In 2007 he moved back to the Premier League briefly, scoring one goal in one appearance for Sunderland, before a transfer to First Division Southampton where his scoring rate went up once again. From 2007 to 2009 he found the back of the net 20 times in 40 appearances, including a double on debut against West Brom and a hat-trick versus Hull City

which included a 25-yard volley. His goals played a huge part in the team avoiding relegation and John quickly became a fan favourite.

Despite his success at Southampton, the club was cash strapped and put John on loan to Bristol City where he scored two goals, as Southampton were relegated the following season. John did not want to play in the 2nd Division, so he moved to London club Crystal Palace, where he picked up an injury on debut, but returned to score against Watford later in the season. The team and John could not agree terms to continue his contract, so he returned to Trinidad in semi-retirement. He came out of retirement in 2012 to play for WASA FC in the National Super League, scoring on his debut once again. In 2016, with one eye on coaching, John joined Central FC as a player/coach, which is where he eventually hung up his boots, as he led them to the league win.

He continued to amass his coaching badges, and in 2020 was made coach of the Anguilla national team. Gaining experience there, he then took the role of head coach of the St. Lucia national team in 2022.

His 70 international goals are testament to his skill and accuracy as a striker. It is a record that will stand for a long time (fellow Hall of Famer Angus Eve is 2nd on the list with 34 goals). Stern John showcased Trinidad and Tobago football to the US and England while helping the country qualify and take part in the World Cup. That achievement was honoured with the Chaconia Gold Medal in 2006, while he was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 2015.

Caribbean Cup: **1996, 1998, 1999, 2001**
MLS Golden Boot: **1998**
MLS Scoring Champion: **1998**