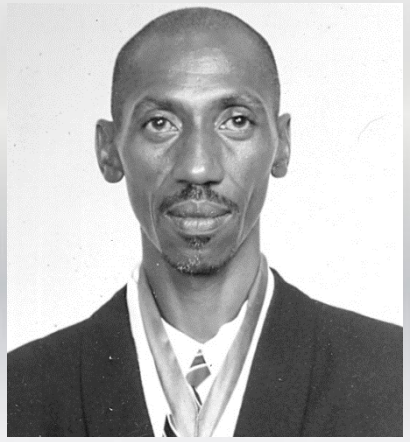
First Citizens Sports Foundation

# HALL OF FAME



## Ian Morris

**H.B.M.**

**Athletics**

**Inducted in 2004**

How many times has an injury in one sport led to excellence in another? Football's loss was athletics' gain.

This was the case with a 400m runner from Siparia, who carried the hopes of the nation during the latter half of a medal dearth that lasted from 1980 to 1996, when Trinidad and Tobago failed to land precious metal at the Olympics.

Ian Morris was football crazy. He played other sports, but football was his priority, and at some points in his youth he was turning out for three teams in the same season. After he played as a student at Siparia Boys RC, then the Technical Institute, Morris joined Super Kegs and Roots, who played in the South Zone Super League and produced national players; the standard was high.

A knee injury curtailed his ambition, forcing Morris – who tried to play through the occurrence – to have an operation, which in turn forced him to have to take up running as part of his rehabilitation. Morris' coach, Oswald Joseph, invited the recovering footballer to join the new athletic club that he had just formed and soon Morris was training with the Falcons at the Siparia Savannah.

Morris was taking part in the various meets of the early 1980s, but like many athletes new to the sport he was aiming at the 100m and 200m events. Injury would again play its part when he pulled a hamstring and his coach put him into the 400m, a less explosive event that would save further aggravation of the muscle damage. His first event over the distance was no easy contest, Morris was in the 400m at the 1985 Tesoro Games, meaning that the very best from Trinidad and Tobago were present. An unknown, he shocked everyone by winning, and doing so comfortably. Morris' trajectory was sealed.

A few weeks later, he confirmed his one-lap ability by winning the 400m for local runners at the Neal & Massy Games at the Hasely Crawford Stadium in 46secs flat, a time that would have earned him third place in the international 400m at the same event.

A year later, Morris was selected for the Central American and Caribbean (CAC) Games in the Dominican Republic, repeating his penchant for getting immediate results on a new stage. In the individual 400m he won the silver medal with 45.02 secs before he teamed up with Carlye Bernard, Michael Paul and Ali St Louis to take silver in the 4x400 Relay. Trinidad and Tobago joined the boycott of the 1986 Commonwealth Games, so Morris was unable to test himself against further competition.

He was fast-tracked for a scholarship, starting at Abilene Christian College, Texas, in 1986. Morris was an immediate hit and adapted well to the indoor tracks of the winter season, using the tactic of racing behind the main contenders as they jostled for position, then using his speed to overtake in the final 200 meters. Sometimes it worked well, other times he failed to pass everyone but, despite some criticism, Morris maintained that this was his style of running.

His preparation for the 1987 Pan Am Games was thrown into jeopardy when he contracted chicken pox a mere two weeks before the Opening Ceremony. Morris recovered as best as he could and made it to the final where he finished in 4th place in 45.53 secs. He then attended the World Athletics Championships in Rome and ran an uncharacteristic 48.06 secs in the Heats.

1988 was an Olympic year. Morris had a solid season of indoor and outdoor College competition behind him before he went to the European circuit to hone his form before heading to Seoul. In Budapest he ran a personal best, 45 secs flat, that put him on a confidence high for the Olympics.

He won his first heat with 45.84, then went faster than ever before when he won his quarter-final in 44.70 secs. When he ran 44.60 secs in the semi-final, he not only broke his own personal best, but also set a new national record and earned a place in the Olympic final.

As the USA ran to a clean sweep of the podium, Morris represented with 44.95secs and took 7th place, his place amongst the world's elite confirmed. Further verification was added when Morris returned to Budapest in March 1989 for the IAAF World Indoor Championships. His

47.09 run in the Heats was followed by 46.52 in the semifinals, which saw him comfortably cruise into the finals. There, Morris' 46.09 saw him win silver, Trinidad and Tobago's first ever medal at the Indoor Worlds.

At the 1991 Pan Am Games in Cuba he was expected to medal, and did not disappoint when he ran 45.24 to win the silver medal, one of only two medals that Trinidad and Tobago won at those Games. With good form, he traveled to the World Athletic Championships in Tokyo, and cruised through the rounds to make it to another final. His 45.12secs made him 6th best in the world and was an indicator that he was getting better, with the Olympics a year away.

At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Morris – ever the mark of consistency – was carrying the hopes of a nation. Together with cyclist Gene Samuel, they represented the best hope of a long-awaited Olympic medal. Morris was purring. Quincy Watts of the USA may have been the outstanding favourite, but Morris was a definite medal contender. He was comfortable winning his heat in 45.65, got faster winning his quarter-final in 44.78, then blitzed a 44.21 in his semi-final where he finished 3rd. For the second Olympics in a row, he was in the 400m final.

Running in lane 6, Morris found himself out of his desired position at the halfway point, later stating ,"At the top of the turn I asked myself 'Why am I here?' As a reflex action, I started to go faster." He began to catch runners ahead of him and on the straight was approaching the line fastest. Then, an error. "I looked to the right and to the left, I did not dip. I ran through the line. Had I dipped, I would have won the silver medal." It was not a biased perspective, the fast-finishing Morris was a hundredth of a second off an Olympic medal, in 4th place.

He rebounded by joining a new crop of Trinidad and Tobago 400m runners – Neil de Silva, Alvin Daniel, Daziel Jules – to win a silver medal (Morris' second world medal) in the 4x400m Relay at the 1993 World Indoor Championships held in Toronto (3mins 7.02secs). He had also not yet attended the Commonwealth Games, doing so in 1994 when they were held in Victoria, Canada. Now 32 years old, he left the individual event for the younger Trinbagonian athletes but ran the Relay. The team of de Silva, Morris, Hayden Stephen and Patrick Delice qualified fastest in 3mins 2.97secs but settled for bronze in the final even though they went faster with 3mins 2.14secs. He may have just missed an Olympic medal, but Morris now had one from every one of the other major games available to him.

The 1995 Pan Am Games in Argentina was his swansong. He finished 4$^{th}$ in the 400m, nine hundredths of a second off the bronze medal winner. He then took part in the Relay where Trinidad and Tobago (with Robert Guy replacing Patrick Delice from the Commonwealth team) won bronze with 3mins 2.24secs.

Morris, despite coming into the sport relatively late in his 20s, had wasted little time reaching the heights of his sport. He retired from competition and returned to his native Siparia, working as a coach with the Ministry of Sport.

His remarkable consistency is evidenced by his medal haul, while his patriotism and dedication were recognized by the awarding of the Hummingbird Silver Medal in 1993. His exploits added to Trinidad and Tobago's proud tradition of 400m running and served as an inspiration for the fine cadre of Trinbagonian quarter-milers that followed a decade

and a half later. Ian Morris was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 2004.

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| **CAC Games:** | **1986 Silver 400m** |
| | **1986 4x400 Relay** |
| **Pan Am Games:** | **1991 Silver 400m** |
| | **1995 Bronze 4x400 Relay** |
| **Commonwealth Games:** | **1994 Bronze 4x400 Relay** |
| **World Indoor Championships:** | **1989 Silver 400m** |
| | **1993 Silver 4x400 Relay** |
| **Sportsman of the Year:** | **1992** |