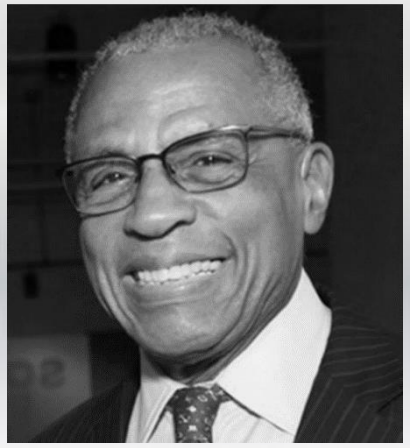
First Citizens Sports Foundation

# HALL OF FAME



## Wendell Mottley

**H.B.M.**

**Athletics**

**Inducted in 1985**

A shining example to the nation, in the spheres of sport, education, business and politics: that this elegant athlete could combine all these factors into a single lifetime is remarkable; that he achieved the greatest highs is a boon to Trinidad and Tobago.

Athletics was thrust onto Wendell Mottley. He was not discovered by a coach while playing another sport. Athletics was part of his life from an early age, with his father officiating at athletic meets. The young Wendell tagged along and witnessed all the events taking place, becoming enamored with the sport and taking his first steps into competition.

Leaving Tranquility school for the much-vaunted Queen's Royal College (QRC), Mottley entered and won in the 100 yards (standardization to metres would occur in 1966) right through to the 880 yards (half mile), and for good measure used his speed off the ramp to take the Long Jump title.

Basking in the glory of the *Victor Ludorum* award for best all-round athlete, even then he was aware that what he desired for himself was to be the best all-round individual that was possible. His education was on equal footing with his athletics and his performances outside the school setting – including competing at the Southern Games and representing Trinidad and Tobago at the West Indian Championships in Guyana – put the 17-year-old Mottley on the radar of many American universities, who by then (1959) were acutely aware of the benefits of scouting the Caribbean isles for the talent to represent their schools.

Mottley chose Yale and flourished academically while becoming more specialized with his running events. He had moved up a level in competing on the US College circuit, and quickly realized that while he possessed natural speed, his slim 5-foot-8-inch frame needed more power to be competitive in the 100m and 200m. But in the 400m and quarter-mile, his beautiful and consistent stride found its home.

The winter months brought a new dimension to Mottley's stage: indoor meets. He shone in the 600 yards and ran the 300 yards to gain precious points for Yale. Peculiarly, in his first three years at Yale, he found that when the outdoor season began, he struggled to match the performances that had blitzed the tracks over winter. If it was a case of burning himself out on the indoor tracks, there was little choice in the matter as he was required to represent Yale.

That twinned focus upon studies and running meant that the 1962 Commonwealth Games and 1963 Pan American Games passed without Mottley putting himself forward for selection. As he later confirmed, "There always seemed to be some other conflict, whether academic or

job or otherwise." But the big one, the Olympics, was taking place in October 1964, and it was a happy coincidence that June 1964 would be his graduation from university.

The period leading to that graduation also coincided with a now mature 23-year-old athlete being able to cope with the switch from the indoor to outdoor seasons. He left little doubt about his indoor form in early 1964 when he knocked off 48 secs for the 440 yards, 55.5 secs for the 550 yards, and 1min 9.2secs for the 600 yards. These were all world marks, the best for the year across the globe. His form was then confirmed with a 400m win for Yale at the prestigious IC4A meet – where he was eliminated in the two previous seasons – in 46.1 secs.

His place at Yale offered other fortuitous offerings. Mottley's college coach was also the US Olympic coach and, due to his connection with his star quarter-miler, Mottley was offered a place in the US training camp in California ahead of traveling to Tokyo. "This was the break that I wanted. That is when I started to see my times coming down very radically."

At the Olympics, he opened with 45.9secs in his heat and immediately installed himself as one of the favorites for the 400m gold medal. A 45.8secs run in the second round only confirmed that belief. A semi-final time of 45.9secs – this time easing up at the finish line – left Trinidad and Tobago in eager anticipation that a medal was on the cards and that it could be the most precious one of them all. Running hard rounds took its toll, but Mottley had the foresight to employ a large Japanese masseur to work out the lactic acid and soreness from those overworked muscles.

In the final, Mottley was in typical graceful stride and was leading at 200 meters. Coming into the final 100 meters the American Mike Larrabee began his trademark kick for the line, moving from 5th place to 2nd over the last 80 meters of the race. Mottley provides the details from the best perspective. “I thought I had the race won coming off the final turn. I was out in front and could actually taste the gold.”

With 20 meters left, the effort could be seen in Mottley’s once gliding steps, as his body was now tightening up, with Larrabee sprinting with every fibre of his being. At 10 meters to go he caught Mottley, going on to win in 45.1secs to Mottley’s 45.2secs. It was a brilliant run by the Trinbagonian. A mere two years after the country’s Independence, here was one of its athletes winning a silver medal in one of the most prestigious Olympic events. There would be more to come.

The Tokyo athletic team contained more than just Mottley. There was Ed Roberts, Ed Skinner (also a 1964 400m finalist) and Kent Bernard. All four represented the cadre of quarter-mile talent emanating from the country. The world’s media earmarked them as medal contenders for the 4x400m relay and they did not disappoint the nation, even if the runners themselves felt otherwise. Mottley says, “We felt as though we were head and shoulders with the US, and instead we fell back to third position. It was an emotional let-down for me personally and all my teammates.” That an Olympic bronze could bring disappointment is a clear indication of the passion and desire that filled those four runners as they faced the starter’s pistol. Regardless, Mottley, like Edwin Roberts (200m bronze), was a double Olympic medalist.

Now entering his prime as an athlete, he took a scholarship to go to Cambridge University and with it the opportunity to compete in a less hectic environment than the grind of the US circuit. A more relaxed atmosphere created a more relaxed runner, which is exactly what Mottley had perfected, that oxymoronic state of grace where he could be relaxed but putting out the incredible effort to run regular times of 45.9 to 46.1secs. He reveled in the European circuit, winning in London and Zurich.

By 1966, the completed package, he ran an indoor world record 47.3secs. The Commonwealth Games, almost being held 'at home', in Kingston Jamaica would be his swansong and he was determined to go out in style.

For the scholar, the 440 yards almost became academic once he posted 45.8secs in his heat. In the final, with teammate Kent Bernard in Lane 4, Mottley hit the front from the start and glided to the finish while all competitors wilted from the effort of trying to stay with a man whose stride never changed. It was one of his most perfectly executed races, with victory made sweeter by Bernard's second place.

Awaiting the medal ceremony for their historic 1-2 the flagpole broke, but the ceremony was about to go ahead. The two Trinidad and Tobago athletes dealt with the matter, Mottley insisting, "We wanted everyone at home to know that the two Trinidadian flags were raised side by side. KB and I refused to receive our medals until the flagpole was repaired." As in Tokyo, there was more to come.

With the memories of the Tokyo relay still fresh, the Trinidad and Tobago relay team (this time 4x440 yards) was eager to show the world its true potential. The relay was the final event of the Games, with the Jamaican

team also installed as favorites. Lennox Yearwood, Kent Bernard and Edwin Roberts ensured that the baton reached Mottley in first place, shocking the home crowd. But once the shock of not winning the gold had past, the crowd realized that Mottley's glide was representative of sealing a fantastic team display, one that was about more than the gold medal. When Mottley comfortably crossed the line, it was a new world record, 3mins 2.8secs. They had proven that, in 1966, they were the best in the world.

The euphoria of his Commonwealth victories did not dissuade Mottley from his decision to retire. At 25 years old there were the 1968 Olympics on the near horizon, but he felt that his responsibilities as a husband and his ambitions in business warranted his focus. In addition, retiring in that Kingston stadium meant that he had gone out at the very top.

Post athletics, he entered the business world with his keen interest in Economics, before once again serving Trinidad and Tobago, this time as a politician, culminating in his tenure as Minister of Finance in 1991.

This recipient of the Hummingbird Gold Medal in 1979 and the country's highest award, The Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (2018), Wendell Mottley was also inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 1985.

**Olympic Games: 1964 Silver 400m**
**1964 Bronze 4X400m Relay**

**Commonwealth Games: 1966 Gold 440 yards**
**1966 Gold 440x4 yard relay**

**PB: 400m 45.08secs**
**440 yards 45.2secs**