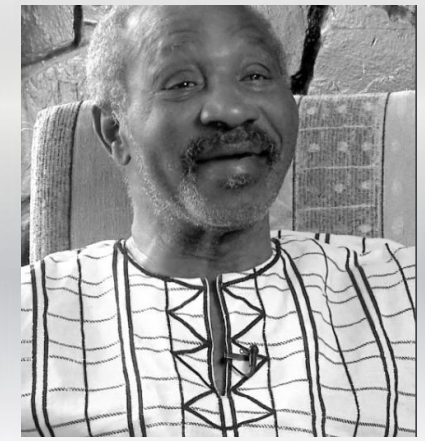
First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Claude Noel

Boxing

Inducted in 2020

This 5-foot 8-inch powerhouse from Tobago became the nation's first boxing world champion, ensuring that his name is forever etched into the minds of all local sports fans.

Claude Noel, the orthodox Lightweight, battled his way to the top, recovered from setbacks and showed what was possible with determination added to his natural skill as a fighter. In his native Roxborough, the young Noel sold mangoes and other fruit by the roadside, before turning to boxing in his late teens. Showing early promise, he soon defeated all challengers in Tobago and then set his sights on doing the same in neighboring Trinidad.

He turned professional in 1973, winning his first bout by knocking out Art de Freitas in the 2nd round. His next fight was not until 1975 but it yielded the same result, Noel winner by knockout over Michael Baptiste. With another win later that year, over Clive Nichols, Noel was now ready to challenge for a title.

In November 1976, the highly rated Fitzroy Guisseppi, holder of the T&T Lightweight title, faced a hungry Noel, with Guisseppi losing by technical knockout; Noel was now the national champion.

A win over his first foreign opponent Francisco Cruz of Puerto Rico, was followed by his first professional loss, by technical knockout (TKO) to Guyanese Lennox Blackmore in February 1977. Noel won his next bout but then lost to Blackmore again in May 1977, again by TKO.

The setback awoke the fire within Noel, who then went on a twelve-match unbeaten run from June 1977 to March 1979. His winning streak included four bouts in Orlando, USA, five victories by knockout and the highlight of a points win over Panamanian Pedro Acosta Nunez to take the Latin American Lightweight title.

With a record of 19 wins and 2 losses, and the exposure provided by his Latin title, Noel now challenged for a world title, specifically the vacant WBA Lightweight belt previously held by Panamanian legend Roberto Duran; his opponent was Ernesto Espana of Venezuela. On a warm June 1979 night in San Juan Puerto Rico, Noel was forced to cede to a superior Espana and lost by knockout in the 13th round. After the bout Noel realized that his right hand was broken.

The result prompted another comeback by Noel, and another winning streak. From January 1980 to July 1981, he won seven matches, including a successful defence of his Latin American belt versus Antonio Cruz of Dominican Republic. Once again, Noel was now able to challenge for a world title.

His opponent was Mexico's Rodolfo 'El Gato' Gonzalez, given the tag of favourite because he was ten years younger than Noel and his record of 19 wins 16 by knockout, with no losses. In Atlantic City in September 1981, Gonzalez and Noel squared off against each other, with Noel's wife and infant son in the crowd. A fiery affair from the 1st round there was little caginess. Noel succeeded in dictating the fight, moving the heavy puncher Gonzalez backwards to the ropes, negating his ability to land the heavy blows.

By the 4th round Noel was scoring with three punch blitzes, but he absorbed punishment as well, his left eye swollen halfway through the fight. He stuck to his tactics and by the final round the commentator was shouting "Look at the 33-year-old go to work on the 22-year-old!" as the crowd was on its feet and television viewers in T&T were in their glee. At the conclusion, the judge's scores were read out: 145-140, 145-141, 144-141, all in favour of Noel. Finally, T&T had a boxing world champion.

He returned home to massive fanfare that epitomized the joy the nation felt with his achievement, before getting ready for his first defence, against USA's Arturo Frias. Held in Las Vegas in December 1981, Noel lost by knockout.

He bounced back by travelling to Australia seven months later to defeat Barry Michael by unanimous decision and take another crown, the Commonwealth Lightweight title. He successfully defended it twice but when he lost it to Graeme Brooke in Australian in November 1984, Noel decided to call time on his boxing career, retiring with a 31-10 record.

Tobago's first major road was named the 'Claude Noel Highway' in his honor, while he was awarded the Chaconia Medal Gold in 1982. The man

that took all the titles available to him, national, regional and world, Claude Noel was inducted into the T&T Sports Hall of Fame in 2020.

T&T Lightweight Champion:	**1973**
WBA World Lightweight Champion:	**1981**
Commonwealth Lightweight Champion:	**1982**
Sportsman of the Year:	**1981**