First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Eric Ancil Pierre H.B.M.

Athletics

Inducted in 1985

His ability to jump high would manifest itself while he was still in his teenage years, and it would take him far and wide, beyond the shores of Trinidad and Tobago, with ground-breaking performances.

At the age of 14, Eric Pierre was already competing abroad, representing the Trinidad Boy Scouts in British Guiana. He returned to Trinidad and entered the senior ranks three years later, earning a bronze medal in the Amateur Athletic Association championships at his first attempt.

Pierre's target was John Ashmead, the AAA championship winner in 1935 and 1937, who was setting new standards in high jumping by becoming the first Trinbagonian to clear six feet. Ashmead would form part of Trinidad and Tobago's second ever team to attend a major sporting event, the third British Empire Games (later to become the Commonwealth Games) held in Sydney, Australia, in 1938.

When he returned, Pierre took on the reigning AAA champ and beat him with a jump of 5 feet 11 inches.

The AAA's win earned Pierre selection for a national team to take part at a meet in British Guiana, where without the benefit of a landing pit (venues were not standardized in the 1930s), he was still able to jump 6 feet 3 inches, erasing the 6 feet 2.5 inches West Indian record of Jamaica's Joe McKenzie.

In 1939 Pierre retained his AAA crown with a jump of 5 feet 11 inches. He was now considered to be performing at a global standard, and was selected – together with runner JRN Cumberbatch (also in the Hall of Fame) – to represent Trinidad and Tobago at the British Amateur Athletic Championship in White City, England. It was a rare outing beyond the Caribbean region for Trinbagonian athletes, as funds were restricted. It also meant that the selectors thought it was worth the spend.

The British Amateur Athletic Championship was, despite its name, open to all entrants from around the globe, and in 1939 only the German and French athletes did not turn up as they were involved in the early skirmishes that would soon develop into World War II. The British press spoke of 'The West Indian Challenge', given that the five-man team that attended the championships in White City was the first ever from the Caribbean region.

There, Pierre jumped 6 feet 1 inch, good enough for the bronze medal, and with Cumberbatch also winning bronze in the 220 yards earlier on the same day, Pierre was part of the pioneering duo that became the first Trinbagonians to win medals at an international event.

Pierre successfully defended his AAA's title from 1940 to 1942, though it was not without its challenges. In the 1941 event, Pierre and Barbadian Louis Cyrus were literally head and shoulders above the rest of the competition, but each time the bar was set at a new height, they were matching each other. Finally, with a storm approaching, the organizers allowed one more jump each, setting the bar at 6 feet 4 inches. Pierre, his title on the line, ran up and cleared the bar easily, retaining his winning sequence, though the measurement was later adjusted to 6 feet 1.25 inches.

By 1944, he began to compete in the long jump, earning a silver medal in that event at the AAAs, while his rival, Cyrus, took the high jump title. Pierre returned to the winner's row in 1946 with another AAAs high jump title, and would repeat in 1948 with 5 feet 11.75 inches. He proved his versatility by winning the long jump title in 1950, again at the Queen's Park Oval, with 19 feet 9 inches.

An avid footballer, he played with the Preston Sports Club, winning the Second Division title before taking part in basketball which was growing in popularity and to which Pierre's height was suited. In the early 1950s he also took an interest in rifle shooting, echoing what he achieved in other sports by becoming good enough to represent his nation at Bisley, England, in 1956.

In 1989 he was awarded the Hummingbird Medal (Silver) for services to sport, and in 1985 the trailblazing Eric Pierre was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame.