First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Eugenia Pierre

Netball

Inducted in 1989

She became known as ‘the dancing queen’ for her exploits on the court, her graceful movements that belied the effort and disguised the explosiveness of her goal shooting. ‘Jean’ Pierre’s name is synonymous with excellence, both in her native Trinidad and Tobago and in the global netball game. To many, she is considered the greatest netball player from the Caribbean. She was an inspiration to her team, to budding players, and to the women of the nation. It is little wonder that she wore the hats of world class sportswoman, Parliamentarian, coach, multiple national award winner and world champion.

Born in Fyzabad, south Trinidad, Pierre’s exposure to netball occurred early in life while she attended the Southern Oropouche Primary School and played for the junior team at Forest Reserve. But when her father passed away, her family moved to Port of Spain where she attended the Mucurapo Girls RC School.



Like many athletes of the 1950s and 60s, Pierre later found the perfect balance of education and sport at the Progressive Educational Institute, her attendance made possible by winning a scholarship while only 15 years old.

She made the most of the opportunity, with her desire to always find ways to improve her game. After graduating from Progressive, she played for the Saints team, continuing her role as Goal Shooter. Not one to rest on her natural ability, she made a concerted effort to improve goal shooting. Working hard at the Woodbrook Youth Centre, where Pierre and Saints coach Hilton Worrel examined every aspect of her talent with tremendous results, she soon became the best Shooter in the country.

The timing of this was fortunate because the inaugural Netball World Championships were being held in England in August of 1963, with Trinidad and Tobago sending a team. Pierre's performances for Saints meant that, despite her youth, she was selected ahead of experienced Shooters such as Monica Hernandez and Joslin Pelthea. It was her first tour abroad and she and the team gained invaluable exposure and experience which would bring benefits in the future. They began with a 58-22 drubbing of Wales, a close 33-28 victory over South Africa, and a 59-11 demolition of Northern Ireland. They also won against Ceylon, Jamaica, and Scotland, but losses against England, Australia and New Zealand meant that they finished just outside the medals in 4th spot.

When Pierre returned to Trinidad she moved to the Carib Senators, a powerhouse of a team. As the Senators dominated the Port of Spain League, she built towards the 2nd World Netball Championships which were being held in Australia in 1967, with Trinidad and Tobago eager to improve upon its 4th place four years earlier. The squad earned good results, including a massive 73-9 win over Singapore (the largest winning gap of the Worlds) and came close to emulating the results of 1963 with 5th place.

In 1968, Pierre added a new string to her bow when she formed the Pan Am Marvelites team and became both captain and coach. It fitted in well with her job as a physical education teacher. She recruited players that would help form the ethos of a familial club, though she was described as a tough taskmaster – albeit a caring one. Three years later, still an outstanding fixture of the national team, Pierre attended her third World Championships (in Jamaica) where Trinidad and Tobago showed their consistency with another 4th place.

She travelled to New Zealand for the 1975 World Championships, and it was to be a frustrating 4th place once again behind the usual suspects Australia, England, and New Zealand. But the gap was closing, evidenced by a 39-37 loss to England and 45-37 loss to Australia, coupled with wins such as 82-17 versus Papua New Guinea and 53-50 against Jamaica. Pierre was phenomenal at the tournament, cementing her place as one of the best Shooters in the world. Her efforts were recognized when she was named Sportswoman of the Year 1975.

She continued to develop her game off-court, creating analytical charts for the Marvelites and bringing the concepts to the national team. Trinidad would be hosting the 1979 World Championships, and Pierre and her teammates were determined to make full use of their talent and homecourt advantage. They took part in intense preparation more than a year before the tournament began in August. Defending champions and three-time winners Australia were clear favourites and were a team (together with England and New Zealand) that the hosts had never beaten in World Championship competition. To get into the medals, Trinidad and Tobago were going to have to go into unchartered territory. With the likes of Pierre, they had the means to do so.

When the tournament started, they were at their tactical best, using Pierre's reputation as the most dangerous Shooter in the championship to draw the opposition's defence, while Cyrenia Charles took care of the early scoring. Pierre would then get into the scoring action later in the match, and the results showed that the tactic worked. Trinidad and Tobago's 'Calypso Girls' defeated Australia and England, lost to New Zealand – their only loss – and became World Champions. Pierre, in her fifth and final World Championship, had finally achieved the unthinkable. For a player that was accustomed to collecting numerous accolades, there was the title of Top Shooter of the tournament – a fitting award for a player who was always included in the top ten list of world netball players from 1970 onwards.

She turned her attention to politics, but remained steadfastly involved in netball with her coaching. In 1991, she contested the seat of Port of Spain South at the general election and won, becoming an MP and being appointed the Minister of Sport until 1995.

Pierre then emigrated to the Cayman Islands, with netball never far from her thoughts as she became their national coach. A brief return to her homeland saw her bring her considerable experience to the helm as Trinidad and Tobago national coach, utilizing her qualifications as an examiner of netball coaching.

She is one of the most decorated local athletes, having also been awarded the Hummingbird Gold Medal in 1974, the Chaconia Gold Medal in 1979, as well as the Trinity Cross in 1979. The nation's top sporting facility, the West Port of Spain Regional Park – where she won that world title in 1979 – was renamed the Jean Pierre Sports Complex and remains the scene of many outstanding performances across several sports, a fitting legacy for one of the country's finest athletes. In 1989 there was the addition of one more honour when Jean Pierre was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame.

Netball World Championships: 1979 1st

World Championship Top Shooter title: 1979

Sportswoman of the Year: 1975