First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Cheryl Ann Sankar

Taekwondo

Inducted in 2020

A trailblazer. It is a ground-breaking achievement to be the first athlete to represent a nation in a sport at a major games, but to have won medals as well adds a little more value to the accomplishment. Further, when it is done in what is considered a minority sport within said nation, it is even more impressive. Cheryl-Ann Sankar achieved all of this, creating a pioneering trajectory for the sport of Taekwondo with the results to back it up and creating the example that others have followed.

The Port of Spain-born Sankar came from a family of sports enthusiasts. She took part in hockey and football, but once she came across the martial art of Taekwondo she had had discovered her niche. It was gaining popularity very quickly in Trinidad from the mid-1980s onwards, aided by a few coaches who migrated to Trinidad and Tobago from the sport's home of South Korea.

Sankar had immediate success, winning regularly on the local circuit which was enough to convince the selectors to send her to the 1990 Central American & Caribbean (CAC) Games held in Mexico City. Competing in the 55kg category, Sankar gained experience which would be beneficial in the years to come, but she did not reach the medal round.

The intervening years until the next CAC Games (1993, in Puerto Rico) were spent honing her skill and moving up to the 59kg category. When Sankar returned to the CAC stage, it was to medal. The new weight division suited her, and she confidently negotiated the early rounds to make it to the gold medal match. Facing hometown favourite Brunilda Martes was no easy task, but the single-minded Sankar blocked out all distractions to take the gold, an immense result for the sport back in Trinidad and Tobago, buoyed by the bronze medals also won by Nicholas Velasquez and Nigel Garcia at the same competition.

Later that year she travelled to New York City for her first World Championships, before returning to Trinidad to focus on her next Games, the Pan Ams. Held in Argentina in 1995, it was a step-up in the level of competition, where she was taking part in the Bantamweight division. Sankar again made it to the medal round, this time earning a Pan Am Games bronze. The feat would also earn Sankar the accolade of Sportswoman of the Year.

Qualification for the 1996 Olympics eluded her but she took part in the Pan American Taekwondo Championship in Cuba, moving up to the 55kg division once more, and came home with the silver medal. It was testament to her consistency and gave her sport the necessary exposure

in Trinidad and Tobago to grow, especially when she repeated as Sportswoman of the Year.

The 1998 CAC Games were held in Venezuela and Sankar earned a bronze medal in the 55kg category. The following year was all about the seemingly impossible: to become the first athlete to represent Trinidad and Tobago at Taekwondo at the Olympic Games. There were two Olympic spots available for her category at the Pan American Regional Qualification Tournament in Miami in 1999. Sankar was at the top of her game, using her experience and skill to win her early bouts and move through to the semi-final. When she won that as well, her place at the 2000 Olympics was assured. She won the silver medal at the tournament, but the main goal had been achieved.

Competing in the Lightweight division at the Sydney Games, Sankar lost to eventual silver medal winner Tran Hieu Ngan of Vietnam, as well as to Jasmine Strachan of the Philippines in the repechage, in which she battled to a 5-5 draw then lost a tie-break. However, history was made. Sankar had created a proud moment for Trinidad and Tobago Taekwondo, Trinidad and Tobago sport and women's sport.

She would continue to represent the nation for another decade. Along the way she earned further CAC Games medals, bronze in the 59kg in 2002, and another bronze in the same category in 2006. She then bowed out after her appearance at the 2010 CAC Games held in Puerto Rico. She opened the Sankar's School of Taekwondo in Petit Valley, which has grown to become a dominant force under their decorated and experienced master, producing elite level athletes such as Stefan Biput and Khaidem Neblett.

For her pioneering contribution to sport, for her medal winning achievements, Cheryl-Ann Sankar was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 2020.

Pan Am Games:	**1995 Bronze Bantamweight**
CAC Games:	**1993 Gold 59kg Division** **1998 Bronze 55kg Division** **2002 Bronze 59kg Division** **2006 Bronze 59kg Division**
Pan American Taekwondo Championship:	**1996 Silver 55kg Division**
Sportswoman of the Year:	**1995, 1996**