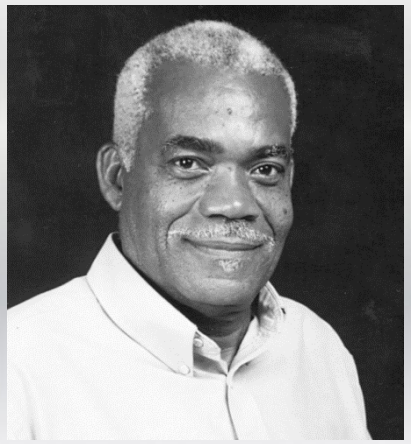
First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Edwin Skinner

Athletics

Inducted in 1989

Part of Trinidad and Tobago's celebrated 4x400 Relay team of the 1960s, this St. James-born runner dipped in and out of athletics, until his own class and talent was so evident that there was little choice but to fulfil his potential.

Perhaps his path was dictated by his parents, who upon seeing their son, a 9-year-old Edwin Skinner, tear up the track at Tranquillity Elementary School, decided to forego the trend of buying a pair of football boots, and instead invested in track running shoes for the speedy youngster.

The shoes proved to be a good investment. Skinner dominated all the distances between the 100 yards and the 440 yards, then moved onto Queen's Royal College (QRC), where he expected more of the same. It was not to be. He came up against his old Tranquillity school

mate, Wendell Mottley, at the QRC Sports Day, and lost at all his pet distances in the Under 15 division. Disappointed, Skinner hung up his spikes.

By his final year in QRC, Skinner decided to re-enter athletics but came up against Mottley once more, who was on his way to the Victor Ludorum trophy, while Skinner was finishing second. This prompted Skinner's second retirement, but this time he took that speed and made use of it playing football. Now graduated from high school, Skinner entered the working world and decided to come out of 'retirement' while also undertaking expert training by joining the Dookie School of Athletics, headed by local legend and fellow St. James resident, Mannie Dookie.

The training was rigorous; Dookie had Skinner complete three months of roadwork before any track running. When the season began, Skinner intended to run the 100 yards, until Dookie convinced him to run the 440 yards, believing that Skinner had the particular gifts to be a good quarter-miler. The results were immediate. In 1961 he ruled the 'B' Class division and was promoted to the 'A' Class for the following season. The fruits of his roadwork labour really showed at that year's Southern Games, where Skinner won the 200m in 21.1secs then half an hour later won the 400m in 47.0secs. It established Skinner as a dominant force at those distances, but there was more to be gained than the winner's medals.

The Southern Games drew a large international contingent, and two Maryland State College (MSC) athletes who were present saw Skinner's

performances and suggested that he apply to the College. Within months he had earned himself a scholarship to run for MSC, departing from Trinidad in August 1962.

Skinner was now part of the College circuit, competing indoors and outdoors across the entire USA. MSC recognized how vital a role he could play in relays and had Skinner running the anchor role in the 4x100m, the 4x200m (a rarely held event) and the 4x400m. He also began to have muscle injury issues, which kept him out of top shape at the beginning of 1964, an Olympic year. He recovered by May of that year, posting a 47.2secs for the 2400m, giving him a base to work with as preparation. Skinner was based in New York for that summer – but there was still one problem. It was summer, the Olympic Games were being held in October, and he had not yet achieved the qualifying time to represent Trinidad and Tobago.

At the Metropolitan Games held in New York he had the opportunity and did not disappoint, clocking 46.8secs in a star-studded field to earn his trip to Tokyo. His summer was spent training with local rivals Edwin Roberts and Kent Bernard who, coincidentally – with Wendell Mottley – were the four men chosen to run the 4x400 Relay in Tokyo.

The quartet united for a pre-Olympic meet in Vancouver, where they gelled, practicing their baton passing and changeovers in the knowledge that the four of them represented a real chance of earning an Olympic medal. In Vancouver they ran their first competitive relay together and won.

In the individual 400m at the Tokyo Olympics, Skinner came second in his heat with 46.5secs, before winning his quarterfinal in 46.9secs. Skinner recalls: “The gun went off and the next thing I remember was that I was out front…I could not remember if I waved to the crowd. I may have. I won the race. And that was a great feeling, winning a race in front of 100,000 people.”

Together with Mottley and Bernard, Trinidad and Tobago had three runners in the Olympic semi-finals, with Mottley and Skinner then qualifying for the final (Skinner posting 46.5secs). In the final, Skinner was in lane 4, and at the start he bolted from his blocks, making up the stagger on a few rivals, including eventual winner American Mike Larabee. He later stated that he thought that it was too fast a start and he cut his speed on the back straight, later regretting that action as others made up the ground that Skinner had initially made. “It was through my lack of experience.”

He would have a chance to set things straight, for the 4x400m Relay was next, and with three runners in the individual semi-finals, and 200m bronze medallist Ed Roberts to join them, Trinidad and Tobago were one of the favourites. Skinner volunteered to run the first leg and they won their heat in 3mins 5.3secs.

The order remained the same for the final, and their individual times were Ed Skinner (46.0 secs), Bernard (45.6secs), Roberts (45.0secs) and Mottley (44.7secs). Their time of 3mins 1.7secs earned them the bronze medal, a superb indication that a nation of just over a million people

could produce four runners of such caliber. Skinner, just three years out of his last 'retirement', was now standing on an Olympic podium.

Skinner returned to MSC and completed his studies, graduating with honours. Up to graduation time he was running for his college but was being plagued by muscle injuries once more. He attended the 1966 CAC Games in Puerto Rico while nursing a pulled muscle, but was still able to join Roberts, Lennox Yearwood and Benedict Cayenne to secure the silver medal in the 4x400m Relay (3mins 9.4secs). His big goal for the year though was the Commonwealth Games being held in Jamaica, with the 'first' team from Tokyo seeking to not just win the gold but leave a marker by breaking the world record.

In the first round of the Commonwealth individual 440 yards (the Games would use metric measurements from 1970 onwards) Skinner ran 48.2secs to qualify for the semis, which he was unable to start due to ongoing pain. He did not recover in time for the Relay. Trinidad and Tobago brought in Yearwood and broke the world record.

A year later, he fought through continuing injuries, competing in the US indoor and outdoor circuit to earn selection for the 1967 Pan Am Games. But in Winnipeg, where the Games were held, he pulled the muscle once more and was unable to face the starter for his heat.

For the 28-year-old Skinner, the injury issue was too persistent, and this time he retired for good. He pursued his career in agricultural economics and later became involved in coaching at the Memphis Pioneers Club. In

2006 he was awarded the Hummingbird Silver Medal for services to sport, while in 1987 Edwin Skinner was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame.

Olympic Games: **1964 Bronze 4x400m Relay**