First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Ato Boldon

Track & Field

Inducted in 2008

It was fitting that this ebullient sprinter would be the athlete that ended a 20-year Olympic medal drought for Trinidad and Tobago and in the process be at the beginning of a 20-year period of sustained medal success for the nation. When he came along in the 1990s, the sprinting game was changing, reworking itself into the global showmanship worthy of athletics' blue-ribbon event, and Ato Boldon was at its forefront.

Boldon backed up his swagger with medals, plenty of them, building a prolific career and etching his name forever into Trinidad and Tobago's history books.

Born in Port of Spain, he attended Fatima College where his schoolmates knew he was fast, not because he was running on the track, but because it was on full display when he played football, his first love. "I wanted to be Diego Maradona, I wanted to be the next big football star". That changed when he emigrated to New York at the age of 14 and, still playing football at his new school, Jamaica High, the track coach spotted Boldon and invited him to

train with the athletics team.

The results were immediate. The 15-year-old returned times of 10.8secs for the 100m and 21.4secs for the 200m in his first season. Though he was establishing himself as a sprinter, Boldon was still not convinced of the trajectory he could take in the sport until he viewed the epic battle in the 1991 World Championship long jump between Mike Powell and Carl Lewis. It flicked a switch in Boldon's brain, telling him that competing at the highest level in athletics is what he wanted to do. The continued improvement in his times meant that Trinidad and Tobago's selectors took notice – especially when he won the 100m and 200m at the 1992 Central American & Caribbean (CAC) Junior Championship – and sent Boldon to the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, strictly for experience. He did not make it past the heats, but was able to take what he learnt for his next big engagement, the World Junior Championships in Seoul, South Korea in September 1992. There, he announced himself on the world's stage with the sprinter's double: the 100m in 10.30secs and the 200m in 20.63secs, the first junior to win both events at the same championship.

His sprinting education continued with his attendance at the 1993 senior world championships where he made the quarter-finals of the 100m and the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada, where he qualified for the 100m final, eventually finishing 4th in 10.07secs. By now he was enrolled at UCLA and honing his talent on the NCAA circuit, home to numerous athletic greats. The benefits of his training and competing all came to the fore at the 1995 World Championships in Sweden when Boldon finished in 3rd place in the 100m final behind the Canadian pair, Donovan Bailey and Bruny Surin. At 21 years old, he was the youngest

athlete to medal at a senior World's 100m. Suddenly, with the Olympics on the horizon, Boldon was amongst the top three in the world.

With the 1996 Olympic Games on 'home turf' for Boldon (his mother lived in Atlanta), he was gearing up for something special, evidenced by the NCAA title he won in the 100m with 9.92secs in the build-up to the biggest event of his career. Bailey, Frankie Fredricks (Namibia), and defending champion Linford Christie of the UK were all considered the favourites based on their experience, but the Trinidad and Tobago sprinter was seen as the hotshot, bold and fearless. He opened with 10.06secs in the heats, while appearing to be cruising. In the quarter-final he blitzed a 9.95secs, with the second-place finisher coming home in a distant 10.19secs. As the mind games continued amongst the sprinters, Boldon stamped his authority with a semi-final time of 9.93secs, the fastest time of the competition thus far.

The final was a tense affair, with three false starts, first for Christie, then Boldon and then another to Christie who was disqualified but initially refused to leave, raising the tension. When the race finally happened, Boldon got his customary lightning start, leading the race up to 80 metres until Bailey came past him and Fredricks nipped Boldon on the line. He had won the bronze in one of the most exciting finals, with Bailey setting a new world record of 9.84secs and Boldon going faster than ever with 9.90secs.

He was involved in another world record race for the 200m when Michael Johnson ran the immortal 19.32secs, with Frederick 2nd and Boldon 3rd with another personal best of 19.80secs. The Olympic medal drought was over.

At the following year's World Championships in Greece, Boldon was imperious, focusing on the 200m. He was up against Fredericks in the final but from the start he was making up ground, coming out of the bend in the lead and continuing to pull clear, easing across the line in 20.04secs with his arms aloft in victory.

At the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Malaysia, he focused solely on the 100m and ran a blistering 9.88secs, a games record that still stands as of 2022, and Trinidad and Tobago's first win in the event since Mike Agostini in 1954 (when it was the 100 yards). He also won the 200m at that year's Goodwill Games, after taking silver in the 100m.

In 1999, his improvement was continuing when he twice ran 9.86secs for the 100m. Then he suffered a serious hamstring injury. At the World Championships in Spain, he could not compete but lent his effervescent personality to UK broadcasting of the event, becoming an instant hit with viewers with his knowledge, analysis, impartiality, and delivery.

His injury continued into 2000, an Olympic year, and though he made up for lost training time by running the indoor season, his times were slower than usual. He did not dip below 10secs in the early rounds in Sydney, but come the final Boldon was able to summon his experience to post 9.99secs which was good enough for silver behind his training partner Maurice Greene (USA). With concerns about the troublesome hamstring after the race, Boldon considered not running the 200m but then also considered being at the world's greatest sports event and not taking part. He stepped up and ran the early rounds, posting only the 9th fastest time up to the quarter-finals. He qualified 3rd in his semi-final and ran 20.20secs in the final to take a bronze medal that he later stated means

the most to him out all his medals because of the adversity he overcame to win it.

He returned to the World Championship stage in 2001 at Edmonton, Canada, taking the bronze medal in the 100m and running the second leg in the 4x100m Relay as Trinidad and Tobago took the silver medal. In 2002 he was involved in a serious car accident in Trinidad that left him with a hip injury that prevented him from running at his full potential. Nonetheless he once again battled his way back and won a silver medal at the 2003 Pan Am Games in the 4x100m Relay. He then attended his fourth Olympics in Greece in 2004. There, he captained Trinidad and Tobago's relay team to its first Olympic final, lighting the embers for a team that would win gold four years later.

After the games he retired from competition. He had run 28 sub-10secs 100m races, was Trinidad and Tobago's first athletics world champion, and inspired a new generation of Trinbagonian medal winning sprinters with his own multi-medal haul. He remains a sought-after presenter for broadcasters at all major events (even being nominated for an Emmy award for his work at the 2012 Olympics) and is passionate about his coaching.

In 1993, he was awarded the Hummingbird Medal Gold, followed by the Chaconia Medal (Gold) in 1997. The country made him a Sports Ambassador in 2000 and, in 2001, the Ato Boldon Stadium in Couva was opened. In 2008, Ato Boldon, who won medals at every competition available to him, was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame.

CAC Junior Championship:	**1992 Gold 100m**
	1992 Gold 200m
World Junior Championship:	**1992 Gold 100m**
	1992 Gold 200m
World Championship:	**1995 Bronze 100m**
	1997 Gold 200m
	2001 Bronze 100m
	Silver 4x100 Relay
Goodwill Games:	**1998 Silver 100m**
	1998 Gold 200m
Commonwealth Games:	**1998 Gold 100m**
Pan American Games:	**2003 Silver 4x100 Relay**
Olympic Games:	**1996 Bronze 100m**
	1996 Bronze 200m
	2000 Silver 100m
	2000 Bronze 200m
Sportsman of the Year:	**1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000**