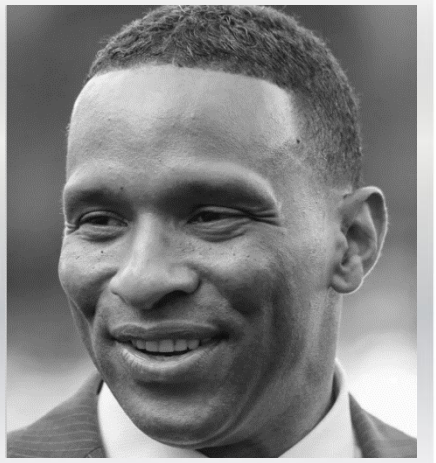
First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Neil Shaka Hislop

Football

Inducted in 2008

A superb custodian between the uprights, Shaka Hislop continued the proud legacy of Trinidad and Tobago goalkeepers, taking it further by playing in one of the world's top football leagues and appearing in the World Cup. He would eventually use these experiences to transcend the world of sport and work towards a better overall society.

Born in London but relocating to Trinidad at a very early age, Hislop had designs on becoming a striker but his height – he would eventually grow to 6 foot 5 inches – meant that he was placed in goal. He performed so well in the position that when Trinidad and Tobago formed its first ever national Under-12 football team, Hislop was included in a squad bursting with talent, including Russell Latapy, Brian Lara and coached by Bertille St Clair (all Hall of Famers).

InterCol football at St. Mary's College, where he won the North Zone competition, was the beginning of his balancing education with his dedication to the game.

Hislop earned a scholarship to the prestigious Howard University in Washington D.C. There, he helped Howard to the NCAA final in his freshman year and graduated with honours with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Hislop began an internship at NASA, but Premier League club, Aston Villa, played a friendly match against Howard and scouts were on hand. Soon, 2nd Division Reading FC came calling, and after much deliberation – NASA or football – Hislop signed a two-year contract.

After an inconsistent beginning, Hislop was soon pulling off outstanding saves for Reading and was a key factor in their promotion to the 1st Division, which Hislop states "changed everything for me". In the summer of 1995, Newcastle United, managed by Kevin Keegan, were putting together a squad to challenge for the English Premier League title, and signed Hislop. It was a huge step up the football ladder, but he started the 1995-96 season strongly, with Newcastle 12 points clear at the top of the league in January. Manchester United were able to peg Newcastle back and Hislop's first season in the topflight would end with second place.

The following season he had less appearances overall, but finished the season with a series of consistent performances, with Newcastle going past Arsenal and Liverpool to claim second in the league once more. Hislop's 1997-1998 season was hampered by an injury in February 1998, and with Newcastle now managed by Kenny Dalglish, and his contract coming to an end, Hislop chose to leave for West Ham on a free transfer.

He was prolific in his first season with the London Club, pulling off remarkable saves as one of the best 'keepers in the league that year. He

was a major part of West Ham finishing 5th in 1999, a great result given the resources at other clubs. At the end of his first year with the team, Hislop was named Hammer of the Year, and deemed the squad's best player.

He continued in the same vein for the 1999-2000 season, until he sustained a broken leg against Bradford City, ending his season and resulting in Hislop missing the 2000 CONCACAF Gold Cup. West Ham brought in England 'keeper David James the following season and he and Hislop vied for the starting spot for the next two years. At the conclusion of his contract, Hislop opted to leave for Division 1 Portsmouth managed by his old West Ham manager, Harry Redknapp.

Again, he was prolific in his first season, ensuring that Portsmouth attained the holy grail of English football, promotion to the Premier League. Hislop was named as the goalkeeper for the First Division Team of the Year. Portsmouth remained in the Premiership during Hislop's time there, but in 2005 he returned to West Ham where he kept 7 clean sheets in 27 appearances that included him playing in every round of that year's FA Cup, as West Ham made it to the 2006 final. There, against Liverpool (Shaka was the second Trinbagonian after Dwight Yorke to appear in the world famous final), the Hammers drew 3-3 after extra time, and though Hislop saved one penalty, West Ham lost the game.

His 2006 season was far from finished though, with the World Cup taking place a few weeks later. During Trinidad and Tobago's qualifying campaign, Hislop was in the squad but not in the starting XI. Trinidad and Tobago were in the enviable position of having three very good 'keepers to choose from, Kelvin Jack and Clayton Ince being the others. Hislop was

not coach Leo Beenhakker's first choice as the team prepared to make history in June 2006 as the smallest ever nation to play on football's greatest stage. In the warmup for the opening match against European powerhouse Sweden, first choice 'keeper Jack was unable to play. With mere minutes notice, Hislop was put into the team – Trinidad and Tobago's biggest ever match in which he did not expect to play.

Hislop was outstanding, keeping out the Swedish strikers, and with Trinidad and Tobago reduced to ten players. His best performance for Trinidad and Tobago came at the best possible time, with the match ending 0-0 – a shock to the sporting world.

By the conclusion of the World Cup, Hislop signed for Dallas FC in Major League Soccer, but a back injury led to him retiring from all competitive football in 2007. Later that year, he was steadfast in his dealings with the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation, leading from the front to ensure that the players from the World Cup were adequately remunerated for their appearances.

He also continued to devote his time to Show Racism the Red Card, a charity that he started in 1996 with his own funds that eventually morphed into the United Kingdom's leading anti-racism educational charity. Hislop recognized that he could harness his status as a Premiership player to pioneer education on the subject matter: "It was my way of giving back."

Always media friendly, Hislop became a pundit for the popular ESPN FC television show in 2009 – a natural fit with his affable character,

forthright views and, slotting into the jovial camaraderie, he remains at the forefront of the programme as at 2022.

His accolades are numerous and well deserved, including induction to Howard University's Hall of Fame, the Professional Footballer's Association (PFA) Special Merit Award 2005, and the Alexander B. Chapman Award 2007. He is one of only two non-British members on the PFA's Roll of Honour, the other being Brazilian legend Pelé. He has been included in Reading FC's ten Players of the Millennium, and was given the Freedom of the City of Newcastle Upon Tyne in 2022. Neil Shaka Hislop, whose overall contribution is treatment to the power of sport and its ideals, was awarded the Chaconia Medal Gold in 2006 and was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 2008.