First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Lystra D. Lewis

M.B.E, M.O.M

Administrator

Inducted in 1995

Her reach and influence were wide and all-encompassing, not just for local netball, but for the global game and its growth and current standing in the modern world. Lystra Lewis was not restricted to progression of the sport she loved within small circles; quite simply she thought on a global level, leaving a rich legacy in netball.

Born in Woodbrook and attending Tranquility school, Port of Spain, she took part in athletics, table tennis and cricket. But it was netball that she began to focus on before the age of 10, and by the mid-1930s she had joined the Malvern Sport Club. There, the young Lewis displayed an interest in not only playing netball, but also in spreading the joys of the game. At the age of 13 she was recruiting players for Malvern, for a sport that was still relatively new to the Trinidad and Tobago landscape but that was growing at a rapid rate. It was introduced to the nation in 1900 with the added caveat of empowering women though the game, at a time when lawn tennis was the only sport in which women competed at a high level.

Noting the growth, Lewis still played competitively, but by the age of 15 she had become deeply involved in the administrative side of netball, not just at Malvern but also having a direct influence upon the progression of the sport. She was a founding member of the Port of Spain Netball League (POSNL) in 1939, which would become the most keenly contested league in the Caribbean and spawn numerous Trinidad and Tobago legends.

By 1945, now installed as Secretary of the POSNL, Lewis was looking beyond Trinidad and Tobago and had begun to promote the sport across the Caribbean region. She introduced a procedure to train coaches, players and umpires across the English-speaking territories, to improve the standard of play and increase netball's regional popularity. The tireless Lewis travelled to Barbados, Antigua, Guyana, St. Vincent, St. Kitts and Nevis to help with the training, which all came to fruition in 1952 when Trinidad and Tobago played a triangular tournament against Grenada and St. Vincent, and Lewis was the coach of the Trinidad and Tobago squad.

In between, there was little surprise that she was also a founding member when the Trinidad and Tobago Netball Association was formed in 1949. In 1954, her efforts in spreading the game resulted in the formation of the West Indies Netball Board of Control (later to become the Caribbean Netball Association).

With the game's global popularity also growing, Lewis attended the 1960 World Netball Conference held in Sri Lanka. It was a momentous occasion for netball, with Lewis among the decision makers who agreed

upon the formation of an international netball association, an international code of rules, leading to the first Netball World Championships in 1963.

After her trip to the conference, Lewis accepted a scholarship from the British Council to study physical education at Bedford College, and retuned to Trinidad in 1961 having become the first West Indian to be appointed to the All-English Panel of Umpires. Remarkably, Trinidad and Tobago still did not have a dedicated netball facility, something that changed in 1962 when Lewis' efforts resulted in the first official netball court being erected at the Princess Building Grounds, Port of Spain.

When Trinidad and Tobago took part in those first World Championships held in England, Lewis travelled with the team as coach, overseeing their fine 4th place. Her drive and passion saw Lewis attain the post of the first government netball coach, allowing her to introduce the game to primary and secondary schools from the early 1960s to the 1970s. Her elevated status within the International Federation of Netball Associations (IFNA) also helped Trinidad secure the rights to host the 1979 World Championships, in turn leading to the construction of the structure that would become the Jean Pierre Sports Complex. Lewis returned to the national coaching role for the tournament, with the unprecedented preparation of the Calypso Girls from two years beforehand, with tours to England and Australia.

When the world championships began on home soil, Lewis and Trinidad and Tobago were ready. They won every game bar one, to New Zealand, and finished as joint world champions – the first Trinidad and Tobago team to earn the honour of being crowned the world's best. It was the

icing on the cake for Lewis, whose four decades of passion, work, dedication and vision, had resulted in the magnificent victory.

She became an executive member of IFNA, continuing the administrative work for which she was globally renown and served on the West Indian Tobacco Sports Foundation from 1983 to 1990. The accolades that recognized her work were bestowed upon Lewis from relatively early. In 1963 she was made a Member of the British Empire (MBE), while in 1969 she received the Public Service Medal of Merit (Silver). She was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 1995, and in her memory the Lystra D. Lewis Memorial Award has been bestowed upon the most outstanding team in Trinidad and Tobago (for the year in review) at the annual First Citizens Sports Foundation Awards – a fitting tribute for a personality who superseded national boundaries with her passion for team sport.