First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Debra O'Connor

Badminton

Inducted in 2000

"No excuses, no exceptions, keep on striving to be the best that you can be. No excuses, no exceptions." – Debra O'Connor

A force of nature on the court, O'Connor became a household name and popularized badminton during her competitive career, which saw her play at the highest level and on the grandest stage of them all.

The left-hander played sport from an early age, excelling in table tennis and volleyball, but by secondary school it was clear that badminton was her pet event. A national Singles while still in her teens, she was selected to represent Trinidad and Tobago at the Caribbean Badminton Championships (CAREBACO), returning from the Curaçao hosted event with the Singles title, the best in the region at the age of 16.

O'Connor would defend her title in 1984 when it was held in Suriname, before beginning the balancing act of life as a medical student in Jamaica, with that of being an elite athlete.

It meant that she missed many events in 1985, but when O'Connor did compete it usually ended with her atop the podium. At the 1985 Solo Invitational Tournament she took the triple crown of the Singles, Ladies Doubles with Nadine Julien and the Mixed Doubles with David Lee Kim. She then returned to the CAREBACO in Guyana and defended her Singles title, before her unbeaten run in the Team event helped Trinidad and Tobago to their first ever Team title. Adding to the silverware, O'Connor teamed with Virginia Chariandy to take the Ladies Doubles crown.

Later that same year, O'Connor won Jamaica's Abbey Court International before going to the US Open in Los Angeles, going out in the quarterfinals of the Ladies Doubles. At the end of a hectic season, O'Connor was named Trinidad and Tobago Sportswoman of the Year.

1986 would be a year of repeats. Once again she was the best in the region at the CAREBACO, this time winning the title on home soil as Trinidad was the host. She then added the Ladies Doubles and Mixed Doubles titles to take the triple crown. With such a haul, she was again named the Sportswoman of the Year.

As student priorities took hold, O'Connor dedicated less time to the sport but still retained her regional Singles and Ladies Doubles titles, while also captaining the Trinidad and Tobago team that played at the 5th Pan Am Badminton Championships in Peru. There, she reached the quarterfinals in the Singles.

The following two years saw O'Connor concentrate on school and missing most events, but she returned with a bang in 1990. First, she

reclaimed her CAREBACO Singles, Ladies Doubles and Mixed Doubles titles before going to the Central American & Caribbean (CAC) Games where she would do battle on four fronts. It turned out to be five fronts, as upon arrival in the rarefied Mexican City air, O'Connor was ill, struggling to compete but competing, nonetheless. In the Singles competition she battled to a silver medal behind Mexico's Maria de la Paz Luna. In the Ladies Doubles she teamed with Chariandy to another silver. Still suffering the setback from her illness, O'Connor found the strength to partner with Roland Clark in the Mixed Doubles where the pair earned a bronze. The final battle came in the Team event and O'Connor, Clark, Chariandy and David Lee Kim were able to win the bronze medal. Trinidad and Tobago had earned four medals at the CAC Games badminton competition and O'Connor was involved in each one. She was named the 1990 Sportswoman of the Year.

She won consecutive CAREBACO Singles titles in 1992-1993, again making her the best in the region. She also returned to the Pan Am Badminton Championships in 1993 held in Guatemala and won the Singles title, defeating Peru's Maria Terez. O'Connor was now the best in the hemisphere. She also won silver medals in the Mixed and Ladies Doubles. At the end of 1993, O'Connor was again named Sportswoman of the Year.

In 1994 she attended the Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada, getting to the eighth finals in the Singles competition. A year later she toured Asia, playing at both the Hong Kong and Thailand Open, the US Open, the Bermuda Open (where she finished 2nd), seeking qualification points for the following year's Olympic Games. In that quest she was

successful, while also getting to the quarterfinals of the Pan Am Games held in Argentina. A ninth Singles CAREBACO title topped a busy year.

At the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996, O'Connor went armed with her tenth CAREBACO Singles title. At the Games, she went out in the first round to Canada's Denyse Julien.

Having played at the highest level at the Olympics, O'Connor wound down her competitive career to focus on her profession as a medical doctor. A four-time Sportswoman of the Year award winner, Debra O'Connor is listed amongst the greats of local and regional badminton and was inducted into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in the year 2000.

CAC Games:	**1990 Silver Ladies Singles**
	1990 Silver Ladies Doubles
	1990 Bronze Mixed Doubles
	1990 Bronze Team Event