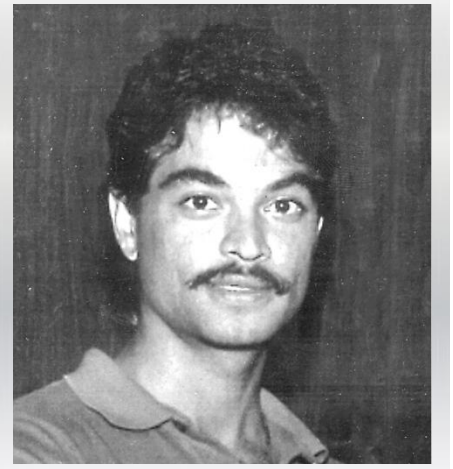
First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Gene Samuel C.M.T

Cycling

Inducted in 2000

'The fastest man on two wheels in the Western Hemisphere' is quite a moniker and for most of his career this elegant cyclist lived up to it. With sport in the 1980s and early 1990s – and especially track cycling – reflecting the arms race of the Cold War, the name Gene 'Geronimo' Samuel did battle with the world's best, registering remarkable results with limited resources against rivals with ten times the backup infrastructure that is so crucial in elite cycling. If the sport enjoyed a boom in the 1980s and the series of meetings around the Easter period were packed with eager fans, then Samuel was a major factor.

Growing up in Glencoe, west Trinidad, gave the young Samuel the opportunity to ride in 'the Base' in nearby Chaguaramas.

His initial interest in cycling was piqued after using a bike to deliver newspapers as a boy, then he began to ride with friends; before he knew it, he was competing for the Huggins Barbican Club on the banked track at the Arima Velodrome.

At 15-years old, while still at Tranquillity Secondary School, he was named Most Outstanding Rider at one day track meet, by 16 he was racing for the national team against visiting riders. He had shown enough class to be invited to train in Italy in 1976, before returning to represent T&T at the 1977 Pan American Junior Championships in Mexico. There, he missed riding what would later become his pet event, the Kilometre Time Trial, as his plane was delayed for over 14 hours, but he was able to take part in the Sprint and came away with the bronze medal, the first of many international medals to be added to his trophy cabinet.

He returned to find himself at odds with the TTCF (T&T Cycling Federation) over a choice of coaches and decided to quit cycling. Between 1978 and 1981, Samuel stayed away from the sport, but the call of competition proved too strong, and he returned in 1982 to win the national championship for his new Club Elmer's Warriors in the Kilometre with 1:12.20. Later that year he went to Barbados to compete and met Desmond Dickie, the Trinidad-born Canadian National Cycling Coach, who invited Samuel to train in Canada. Samuel's new training regime was an eye-opener but also made him realize what was possible "In Trinidad I used to train once a day, when I went to Canada, I realized that to be a world class athlete I needed to train twice a day."

Samuel benefitted from the scientific approach, attending his first games, the Pan Am, in Caracas, Venezuela in 1983. He rode the Sprint, as Maxwell Chessman won the Kilometre at the national championships, earning the right to ride the event at the Games. There, in the man versus man format, he made it to the quarterfinals before losing to eventual gold medallist Nelson Vails of the USA.

The following year, at the Southern Games and Easter Grand Prix, Samuel was holding his own against the visiting international cyclists made up of many World and Olympic medallists, delighting local crowds. He ensured his place in the Kilometre for the Los Angeles Olympics later in 1984, by winning the national championship. It was the dawn of new technology for cycling, disc wheels, sloping frames, aerodynamic tubing, teardrop helmets, all designed to shave seconds off in the quest to go faster, for events decided by thousandths of seconds. Samuel took to the start line on the biggest stage of all, mounting his normal track bike with normal wheels and regular helmet. He roared to the fastest opening lap of 23.82secs, faster than the leading rider Fabrice Colas and his high-tech disc-wheeled machine. Samuel was still faster on the second lap with 44.03secs but faded on the last lap to finish with 1:06.69, four hundredths of second slower than Colas, who would eventually win the bronze medal. Samuel later stated, “I didn’t sleep for a week!” thinking about the margin.

In 1985, Samuel continued his winning ways locally, then attended the World Championships in Italy, finishing 5th in the Kilometre. He was now established as one of the best in the world. Into 1986, Samuel again had thousands on their feet at the Trintoc Games and Easter Grand Prix, before departing for Santo Domingo for the Central American & Caribbean Games (CAC). He was unbeatable at the CAC, winning the Kilometre in 1:08.071, before defeating countryman Leslie Rawlins in the Sprint, to repeat the double that Roger Gibbon achieved twenty years previously.

He then travelled to Edinburgh, Scotland for his first Commonwealth Games, only to find out that T&T joined the boycott of the event in protest at Britain's refusal to issue meaningful sanctions against the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Unable to compete in the Games proper, Samuel took part in club events that were support races at the same velodrome. It was erroneously reported that he took part in the Games, leading to some controversy until the matter was resolved.

A month later the 1986 World Championships were held at high altitude in Colorado Springs, the thin air helping Samuel to his personal best of 1:04.346 which placed him 7th. He rolled into 1987 on scintillating form, winning Most Outstanding International at four meets in Trinidad, winning five titles at the national championships. He attended his second Pan Am Games in Indianapolis and came away with the silver medal in 1:06.204 behind his friend and training partner Curt Harnett of Canada. At the end of the year, he was invited to ride for the Rest of the World Team in Australia for its Bicentennial celebrations. His winning ways over 1986 and 1987 earned him the Sportsman of the Year.

1988 was Olympic year but all the preparations, training and planning were for naught, as Samuel contracted a virus three days before the Kilometre event. Weakened, on the day he rode 1:06.560 for 12th place. He bounced back by beginning to compete at the Valley Preferred Cycling Centre in Pennsylvania, a mecca for track cyclists from all parts of the globe. With his penchant for bunch racing that is so popular in T&T, he was an instant hit, winning regularly as he would for the next eight years at the venue. He placed 8th at the 1989 World Championships in France

with 1:06.897 then suffered his first serious injury – a pulled hamstring – at the 1990 Goodwill Games.

During his enforced layoff he linked up with Briton Shaun Wallace in Pennsylvania and the two worked together on new training methods. It reaped the results with 1991 being Samuel's best year. At the Pan Am Games in Cuba, he was the last to start on a slow track, with USA's Erin Hartwell time of 1:06.04 on the board as the time to beat. The partisan crowd were rooting for the T&T rider to beat the American and as Gene left the starting gate, they roared him on. He set fastest time on each lap and finally crossed the line, having executed what he described as his 'perfect ride' to claim gold with 1:05.40. Almost a full second faster than the silver medallist, Gene stood proudly on the top of the podium but then rushed to the airport to head for Stuttgart, Germany, and the World Championships.

Kilo riders rarely ride two competitive Kilometre races in a month, Samuel had to ride two within a week. There was a mix-up with his entry at the Worlds, so he was told to ride first out of all the competitors. Undeterred, he set a time of 1:04.797 which was only eventually beaten by two riders; just as Roger Gibbon achieved in 1967, the World's bronze was Samuel's.

Now installed as a favourite for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, he was disappointed to ride 1:05.485 for 8th place. With 9th and 11th places at the 1993 and 1994 World's, it appeared that his speed was fading but he still raced to a bronze at the 1995 Pan Am Games in Argentina, earning a Pan Am medal of every colour over his career. He also qualified for his fourth and final Olympics in 1996, riding 1:05.553 for 10th place.

At 35 years old, Samuel retired from international competition but continued to put his wheel on the line for club racing. He opened a bike shop 'Geronimo's' and formed a racing team to mentor young cyclists. His shop's logo echoes the image of Samuel as he is best remembered: signature ponytail flowing from under his helmet as he sped forward. In 1991 Gene Samuel was awarded the Chaconia Medal Silver for services to sport, while in the year 2000 he was inducted into the T&T Sports Hall of Fame.

CAC Games:	**1986 Gold**	**1 Kilometer Time Trial**
	1986 Gold	**Sprint**
Pan American Games:	**1987 Silver**	**1 Kilometer Time Trial**
	1991 Gold	**1 Kilometer Time Trial**
	1995 Bronze	**1 Kilometer Time Trial**
World Championships:	**1991 Bronze**	**1 Kilometer Time Trial**
PB:	**Kilometer TT 1 min 4.004 secs**	
Sportsman of the Year:	**1986, 1987, 1991**	