First Citizens Sports Foundation

HALL OF FAME



Althea Thomas – Luces H.B.M

Netball

Inducted in 1995

'Build from the back'. This is a common technique favoured in team sport: to have a resolute defence and, even better, have a standout goalkeeper. It's a requirement if a team wants to win at the highest level. With an extraordinary 'keeper like Althea Thomas-Luces, Trinidad and Tobago did just that.

For many players like Thomas-Luces in that legendary World Championship winning team of 1979, it was the culmination of almost two decades worth of perseverance, toil, passion, and belief.

Possessing the required height for the game, Thomas-Luces had another attribute for her position: fight. World Championship winning teammate Peggy Castanada-Phillip said of Thomas-Luces, "With Althea it was a fight. Regardless of who you were, you had to pass through Althea. You had no choice. She was rugged. I used to admire her when she was playing for Trinidad and Tobago, but not playing against me. I had some very bad experiences playing with Althea. She was tough and she had a fighting spirit."



Thomas-Luces played for one of the truly great netball teams, the Carib Senators, who she joined in 1961. She would play a major part in their numerous victories throughout the 1960s and 1970s to create an incomparable legacy in domestic netball. With Thomas-Luces in the Senators, they won the POSNL (Port of Spain Netball League) in memorable batches, from 1965-67, 1969-72 and 1976-78. This included one of her best defence displays on court, evidenced by the score, when the Senators defeated Gaylords 108-0 in 1971.

She was selected for the national team as a teenager and remained there until retirement. It was fitting that as such a great 'keeper, recognized by the global game, she attended the very first Netball World Championships in 1963 in England. Trinidad and Tobago began with a 58-22 drubbing of Wales, a close 33-28 victory over South Africa, and a 59-11 demolition of Northern Ireland. They also won against Ceylon, Jamaica, and Scotland, but losses against England, Australia and New Zealand meant that they finished just outside the medals in 4th spot.

Thomas-Luces' next World Championship was in 1971, in Jamaica, where her solid defence helped the team to a repeat 4th place, having beaten all nations in the round robin format except the big three of England, Australia and New Zealand.

It was to New Zealand that she travelled four years later for the 1975 World's and another frustrating 4th place. There was consolation that the gap was closing, evidenced by a 39-37 loss to England and 45-37 loss to Australia, coupled with wins such as 82-17 versus Papua New Guinea and 53-50 against Jamaica. Thomas-Luces was now recognized as one of the pillars of a team that would get ready to host the tournament in 1979.

Before that, she was selected to take part in a Queen's Jubilee match against England at Wembley Stadium, with Trinidad and Tobago winning and Thomas-Luces named Most Outstanding Player. Two years later, in 1978, Trinidad and Tobago toured Australia and, with their goalkeeper keeping the Aussies scoring opportunities to a minimum, they took the series 3-1.

When the 1979 World Championships began in Trinidad the team was at their tactical best. The 'Calypso Girls' defeated Australia and England, lost to New Zealand – their only loss – and became World Champions. Thomas-Luces, in her fourth and final World Championship, had finally banished all the 4th places and achieved the unthinkable.

Thomas-Luces retired from competitive play, becoming a coach for the Ministry of Sport, to pass on the lessons of combining discipline, sacrifice, teamwork and natural talent – all of which she possessed in abundance. The World Championship winning team was awarded the Chaconia Gold Medal in 1979, and was inducted as a team into the Trinidad and Tobago Sports Hall of Fame in 2004, echoing Althea Thomas-Luces induction as an individual player in 1995.

Netball World Championships: 1979 1st