

(H. B. 1761)

(No. 56-2010)

(Approved June 7, 2010)

## **AN ACT**

To name the seat of the Sports and Recreation Department after Teófilo “Teo” Cruz-Downs.

### **STATEMENT OF MOTIVES**

Illustrious Olympian Teófilo “Teo” Cruz-Downs has been a legend and a beloved and well-respected sports celebrity.

Teo Cruz was born in Santurce on January 8, 1942, to the home of *Don* Gregorio Cruz and *Doña* Juana Downs de Cruz, and his siblings, Victoria, Carlos, Aníbal, Ángel, María, Magdalena, and María de los Ángeles.

In 1957, at the early age of fifteen (15), Teo was signed by Cangrejeros de Santurce’s manager, David Pastor, Esq., after having recently completed his studies at Labra School in Santurce.

In his opening season, Teo only played three games and scored eleven (11) points. His brilliant career in basketball began to take shape from that moment forth. In the 1959 Pan-American Games held in Chicago, Illinois, he was a member of Puerto Rico’s team. That same year, he won the track and field championship in the Central High School.

This young athlete was admitted to New York University, where he received professional offers from the New York Knickerbockers, the Los Angeles Lakers, and the Kentucky Colonels. By 1965, he was playing for the Picadero Team of Spain and the Racing Bell of Belgium. He was also the captain of the Santurce team, and later replaced Pachín Vicéns as the captain of the Puerto Rico National Basketball Team.

Standing at 6'8" tall, Teo Cruz played for twenty-five (25) seasons in the Puerto Rico Superior Basketball League, from 1957 to 1982. He was a member of the teams of Santurce (1957-1976); Canóvanas (1977-1978); Guaynabo (1979); Río Piedras (1980); and Mayagüez (1981-1982). He was distinguished as most valuable player (1962, 1967, 1970, and 1971); scoring leader (1960, 1962); and defensive player of the year (1964, 1966, 1969, 1970, 1971, and 1972).

This glorious Olympian was a rebound leader in 1966 and participated four times in the Pan-American Games: Chicago (1959), Canada (1967), Colombia (1971), and Mexico (1975). He participated in the Central American and Caribbean Games held in Jamaica (1962), Puerto Rico (1966), and the Dominican Republic (1974). He also played at World Championship (Mundo Basket) in Puerto Rico (1974) and Centrobasket Championship in Venezuela (1971), Puerto Rico (1973), and the Dominican Republic (1975). He played 603 games, during which he scored 9,809 points and totaled 6,104 rebounds. In 1962, he won the Superior Basketball League National Championship sporting the number thirteen (13) with the Santurce team, on which occasion he received the scoring leader and most valuable player awards.

As noted by a sportswriter, Teo Cruz was awarded the Olympic Committee's medal for his feats. He excelled in all basketball venues. "In Puerto Rico, this momentous giant is a legend, a beloved and well respected sports celebrity. This glorious Olympian has participated in five (5) Olympic Games—Rome, 1960; Tokyo, 1964; Mexico, 1968; Munich, 1972; and Montreal, 1976—as the peak of his extraordinary and brilliant career." [Translation supplied] Rubio-Navarro, "Teo Cruz: Todo un gigante de ayer y de hoy" [lit.: "Teo Cruz—A Giant Yesterday and Today"], *El Vocero, Revista Deportiva*, October 11, 1997, page 3.

From that point forward, Teo Cruz devoted his time to teaching children and young people the fundamentals of basketball with the Sports and Recreation Department in the Municipality of San Juan. One journalist remembers his statements about this endeavor: "My goal is to continue helping children in the field of sports, since they will be tomorrow's athletes. They must receive a formation so that they can have greater achievements than those we have been able to attain along our careers. They are the ones on the rise and the ones who are thriving. Although, I must say, young people are developing faster than before, and this is why we must start them on their way now. The talent is there—all we need to do is tap into it." [Translation supplied] (Hiram Martínez, "Teo," *Triunfo, El Vocero*, September 3, 2005, page 2).

Another sportswriter, Hermes Ayala, who wrote for the same paper, stated: "In truth, Cruz's business was not to shape basketball players, but to shape individuals." [Translation supplied]

According to journalist Rubio-Navarro, in his 1997 article, “Teo Cruz keeps on shaping the course of our Puerto Rico by developing future stars out of our most valuable asset—our children. Teo, on behalf of the People of Puerto Rico, thank you. God bless you!” [Translation supplied]

On the other hand, Neftalí Fuster-González, Esq., gave testimony of this great Olympian’s devotion to children: “My friend Teo, as if a new Pied Piper of Hamelin, was a magnet for children. It would only suffice the presence of children at any of our meetings, and Teo would get involved with them, making up games and riddles and giving them good advice.” [Translation supplied] (*Semanario El Expresso*, September 8-14, 2005).

This glorious Olympian died on August 30, 2005, and was paid tribute by the great sports celebrities and leaders, mostly of basketball.

Two years later, in 2007, Teo Cruz was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Federación Internacional de Baloncesto (FIBA), seated in Madrid, Spain.

In his article quoted below, journalist Hiram Martínez made a well-deserved observation:

He played for almost 25 years, maybe for too long. He retired when people started heckling in the opposing team’s courts. There were no tributes, no jersey retirement ceremony, no streets named after him. If memory serves, his farewell from the basketball courts did not cause much of a commotion.

After that, he was sort of forgotten. He was not seen at games or invited to do honor shots. It was as if he were hiding, and people just forgot. This is a vice of ours—remembers Ángel “Caco” Cancel, his fellow team player in the National Team for three out of the five Olympic Games in which he participated.

It was not until 1996, when I went to my first Olympic Games, that I realized how invaluable his feats were. While I was covering the game between Brazil and Puerto Rico, the first one in the basketball tournament, the screen at the Georgia Dome announced that Oscar Schmidt had become the second player in

Olympic basketball history to play in five Olympic Games, tying with Teo Cruz of Puerto Rico. Many athletes don't make it to the Olympics, and Teo went five times! Words fall short of describing the magnitude of this accomplishment... I only hope that this five-time Olympics athlete, four-time most valuable player, and Superior basketball player for 25 years does not fade into oblivion. Since this was not the way it was, we must make it right this time around. [Translation supplied]

At the news of Teo Cruz's demise, then Secretary of the Sports and Recreation Department (SRD), David Bernier, said that he would consider naming the new complex that would house the facilities of the SRD, which include a passive recreation park, after Teo Cruz, to perpetuate his memory.

The new seat of the Sports and Recreation Department is contiguous to the Luis Muñoz Rivera Expressway branch to Calle Los Ángeles, in Santurce.

At that time, Secretary Bernier stated:

His teammates requested it, and even though I didn't know him personally, I did know Teo's track record and great accomplishments. He made Puerto Rico rise in cheer with his glorious achievements, and he also worked with children, which was his passion. This idea that his friends have brought to my attention will be well pondered and, without a doubt, it would be wonderful to perpetuate his name and feats in this manner. We will be making a favorable recommendation. [Translation supplied] (Rey Colón, "Honores olímpicos por todo lo alto," [lit.: "All Out with Olympic Honors"] *El Vocero*, September 3, 2005, page 63.)

Around those days, the following statements were disclosed by a communications medium (*El Vocero*, September 1, 2005):

The new Sports and Recreation Department facilities, located in Santurce, could well bear the name of the now late basketball player Teófilo "Teo" Cruz-Downs.

The President of the Basketball Player Association, José "Cheo" Otero, made the announcement yesterday, after the idea was well received by SRD

Secretary David Bernier, who was present yesterday at Funeraria Buxeda for the wake of Cruz-Downs.

On his end, the then President of Superior Basketball and now Secretary of Sports and Recreation, the Hon. Henry Neumann, said that “it would be good for the Government of Puerto Rico to pay tribute by naming a sports facility after him. There is none at this time, which is unfortunate, since, in my opinion, he was the greatest exponent of our discipline. No one is more deserving of this honor than Teo Cruz.”

This honor is conferred by the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico by approving this Act, whereby the seat of the Sports and Recreation Department is named after Teófilo “Teo” Cruz-Downs.

***BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PUERTO RICO:***

Section 1.—The seat of the Sports and Recreation Department, located in the branch to Calle Los Ángeles, Santurce, in the municipality of San Juan, is hereby named after Teófilo “Teo” Cruz-Downs.

Section 2.—The Sports and Recreation Department shall take the necessary measures for the adequate implementation of the provisions of this Act, without being subject to the provisions of Act No. 99 of June 22, 1961, as amended.

Section 3.—This Act shall take effect immediately after its approval.

## CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify to the Secretary of State that the following **Act No. 56-2010 (H. B. 1761)** of the **3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the 16<sup>th</sup> Legislature** of Puerto Rico:

**AN ACT** to name the seat of the Sports and Recreation Department after Teófilo “Teo” Cruz-Downs.

has been translated from Spanish to English and that the English version is correct.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2012.

María del Mar Ortiz Rivera