Golden, Against What? How Trinidad and Tobago Talks About CARIFTA

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April praise, August silence

In April 2026, Trinidad and Tobago finished second on the CARIFTA Games medal table in St George's, Grenada. The team won 35 medals: 9 gold, 11 silver and 15 bronze. It was the country's best haul since 2010, and the reception at home matched it. The coverage called it "outstanding", and the sport minister, as reported, called it "exceptional", "extraordinary" and "historic". A Guardian report described the athletes as "young national heroes", and officials spoke of "excellence". One Express headline called it a "Superb medal haul".

Four months later, the World Athletics U20 Championships were held in Eugene, Oregon, from 5 to 9 August. Trinidad and Tobago's team came home without a medal. Jamaica won eight. Barbados, Guyana and Dominica won one each. Trinidad and Tobago's best results were a fourth place in the men's 200 m and a fifth place in the men's 4x100 m relay.

These two results do not contradict each other. CARIFTA is a regional championship, and the World U20 Championships are a global one. What deserves attention is the yardstick. When we praise a junior performance, what are we measuring it against?

To answer that, I coded 124 retrievable items from six selected outlets across 2024 to 2026, and separately compared the 2026 medallists with World U20 marks. The pattern is consistent. Praise followed the colour of the CARIFTA medal. It almost never referred to a regional or international performance standard. In the 2026 edition, the athletes who were closest to world junior level received the least praise.

What was read

The material is 124 retrievable articles from six selected local outlets: Newsday, the Trinidad Express, the Trinidad Guardian, CNC3, TTT and TV6. They cover the 2024 Games in Grenada, the 2025 home Games in Port of Spain, and the 2026 Games in Grenada. Each edition was read over the same window, from four weeks before the opening day to one week after the close. Previews, results reports, features, editorials and return-home stories are all included.

The articles contain 768 references to individual athletes or relay teams and their performances. For each one, three questions were recorded:

- **How warmly was the performance described?** The scale runs from plain description to mild praise ("impressive", "sterling"), to superlatives and talent labels ("sensational", "rising star"), to destiny claims ("future Olympian", "great things").
- **What yardstick, if any, was it measured against?** The options are none, the CARIFTA result itself, national history, an area or Commonwealth competition, or a global junior or senior benchmark.
- **Who supplied the praise?** The journalist, a coach, an official or the athlete.

The same questions were asked of what each article said about the team as a whole.

No athlete is named in this piece. Most CARIFTA athletes are minors, and the argument concerns how performances are talked about, not the performers. Performances are identified by event only.

The language of praise

Most reporting on individual athletes was plain: who ran, what place, what time. About one reference in five (145 of 768) added praise to the bare result, and thirty of those used superlatives, talent labels or predictions of future greatness.

Level of praise	Examples from the coverage	Athlete references
Plain description	won, placed, clocked, advanced	623
Mild praise	"impressive", "sterling", "superb"	115
Superlatives and talent labels	"sensational double", "exceptional race", "stunning run", "astonishing fashion", "race of her life", "rising star", "the story of the games"	21
Destiny claims	"great things", "he is the future", "will end up on the Olympic team"	9

Praise followed the colour of the medal. Gold medallists were praised in 38% of their references. Silver medallists were praised in 14%, bronze medallists in 13%, and finalists who missed the podium in 2%. Of the 30 superlatives and destiny claims, half were

attached to an actual result, and 12 of those 15 went to gold medallists. The other half appeared before the athlete concerned had a result: in previews, profiles and team releases, and once in a mid-competition report on a heptathlete leading with one event left.

Praise of the team as a whole was more generous than praise of individuals. Fifty-seven of the 124 articles (46%) praised the team collectively, and 23 did so in superlative or destiny terms. Examples include "young national heroes" (a Guardian reporter's description), "an extraordinary accomplishment" (the sport minister, as reported by TTT), and, from a single TTT morning-show promotional post in 2025, "Trinidad and Tobago's young track and field stars" and "this is where future champions are made". Journalists wrote most of the athlete praise: 108 of the 145 references (74%). Officials, coaches and the athletes themselves supplied the rest.

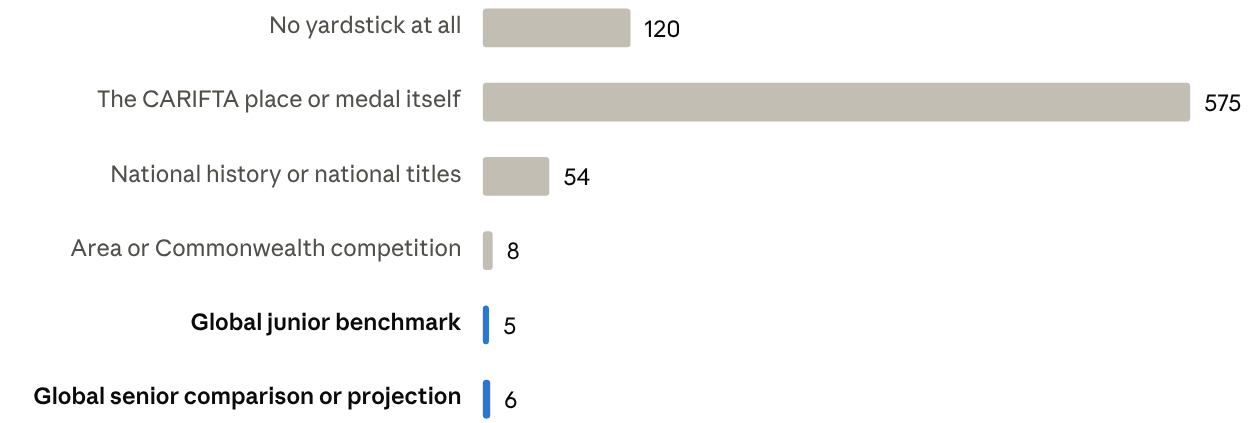
Measured against what?

Almost nothing in the coverage tied a performance to a standard beyond CARIFTA itself. In three of every four references, the only yardstick was the CARIFTA result: the place, the medal, the tally. Global yardsticks appeared in 11 of 768 references (1.4%).

Of 768 athlete references, only 11 used a global yardstick

Highest yardstick used to describe each performance, T&T coverage of CARIFTA 2024 to 2026

Global yardsticks: 11 of 768 references (1.4%)



Each performance counted once, at the highest yardstick used. A reported place or medal = CARIFTA yardstick.

Source: author's coding of 124 articles (Newsday, Express, Guardian, CNC3, TTT, TV6), CARIFTA 2024 to 2026; 768 athlete and relay references

Even those 11 rarely measured performance. Six were not benchmarks at all. Four were a coach's projections that named juniors would make an Olympic team, and two compared athletes with senior stars. Five cited a global junior yardstick: three world U20 list rankings, one reported World U20 qualification and one past World U20 final. None of the five gave enough detail for a reader to check it. Across three years of coverage, the World Athletics U20 entry standard, the published mark a junior must reach to compete at world level, was mentioned once.

The Games themselves were framed very differently. Eight articles described CARIFTA in global terms: "the most important junior competition in the world", the meet that launches Olympic champions. The global frame was applied to the event, but the athletes in it were never measured on a global scale.

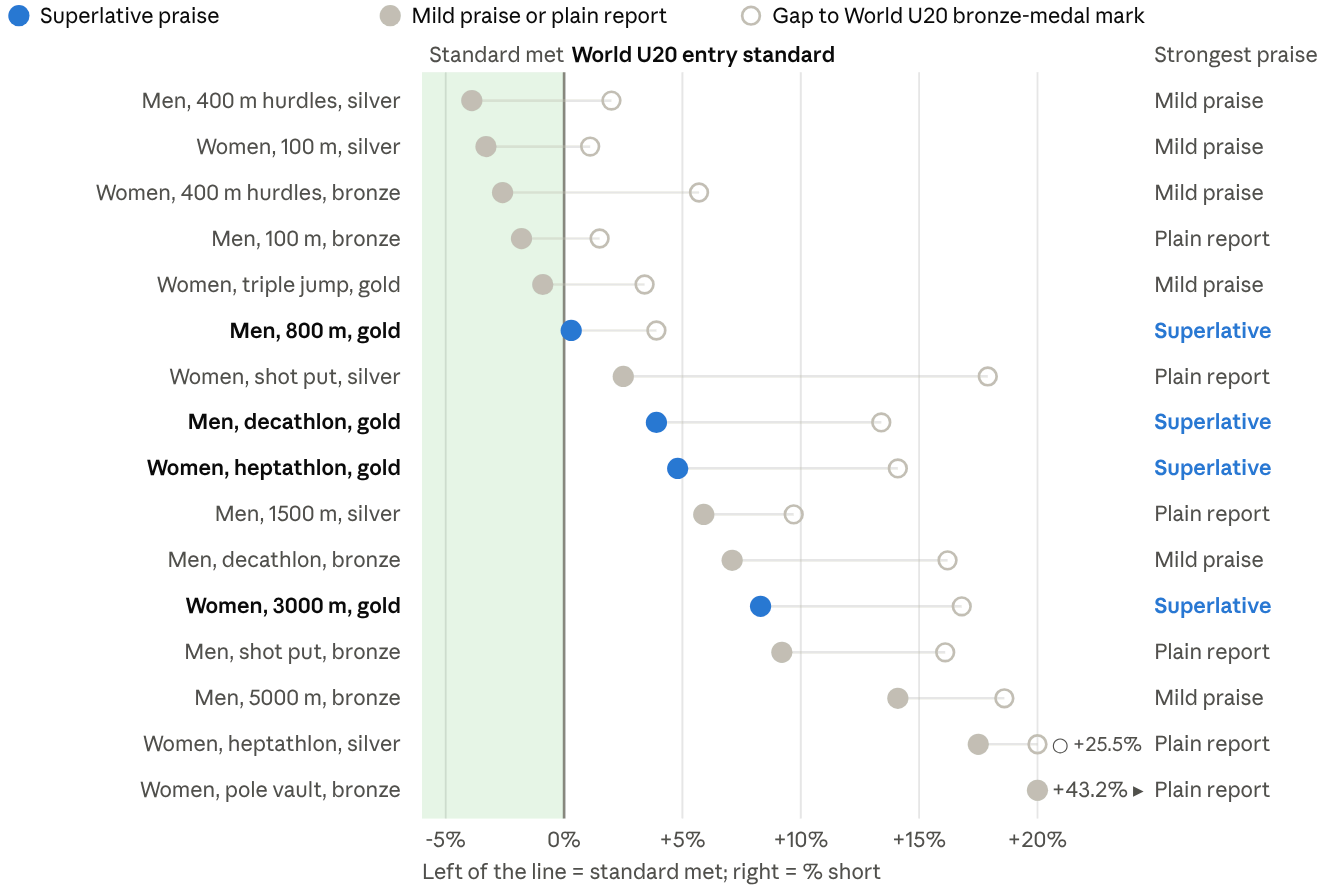
Team coverage followed the same pattern. Fifty-seven articles praised the team as a whole. Twenty-seven of them measured it against the CARIFTA medal table, 18 against the country's own history ("best since 2010", "ten more than last year") and 9 against nothing. Three reached for the senior Olympic stage. None set the team's marks against a world junior standard.

Where the performances actually stood

The coverage did not do this check, so I did. Each Trinidad and Tobago athlete who won an individual medal in a U20 or Open event in 2026 was set against two published World Athletics marks. That is 16 athletes, one performance each: where an athlete medalled twice, the event closest to the standard is shown. The first is the entry standard for the 2026 World U20 Championships, the minimum a junior must reach to be eligible. The second is the mark that won bronze at those championships. The gap is shown as a percentage. A negative number means the standard was met; a positive number shows how far short the performance fell.

In 2026, the medallists who met the world junior standard drew the least praise

T&T individual U20 and Open medallists, CARIFTA 2026, one performance each: % short of World U20 marks, and strongest praise
5 of 16 met the standard and 0 drew a superlative; all 4 superlatives went to athletes short of it.



One row per athlete (event with the smallest gap). Track: (mark - standard) / standard x 100; field: (standard - mark) / standard x 100.

Sources: CARIFTA 2026 results; World Athletics U20 Championships 2026 entry standards and bronze-medal marks; author's coding of 2026 coverage (50 articles)

The result runs against the coverage. Five athletes met the World U20 entry standard. They came from the sprints, the hurdles and the triple jump, and none of them drew a superlative. The men's 100 m bronze medallist went under the standard by almost 2% and appeared in two articles, both of which simply reported the result.

The strongest language went elsewhere. The four athletes who received superlatives all won gold, and all four were short of the entry standard. The two combined-events champions were the most-covered athletes of the Games, with 20 and 15 references. They were 4% and 5% short of the entry standard, and 13% to 14% short of a World U20 medal. Both combined-events champions had also been tipped for "great things" in a Day-1 preview, an expectation resting on their 2025 CARIFTA titles rather than on any world junior mark.

None of this diminishes those athletes. A CARIFTA gold is an achievement, and a combined-events athlete at 17 or 18 is a long way from their peak. The point is that the praise carried no information about where they stood, and readers could not have known. The athletes closest to a World U20 podium, within about 2% in the 100 m, the 400 m hurdles and the women's 100 m, were among the least celebrated.

The relays tell a similar story. The men's 4x100 m gold (39.64) was 1.6% off the World U20 bronze-medal mark. Its praise came in the form of a projection to the senior Olympic relay of 2008 and to Los Angeles 2028, not a comparison with the U20 field it would meet four months later. The women's 4x100 m silver (44.17) was closer still, 0.6% off the World U20 bronze mark, and drew no praise at all.

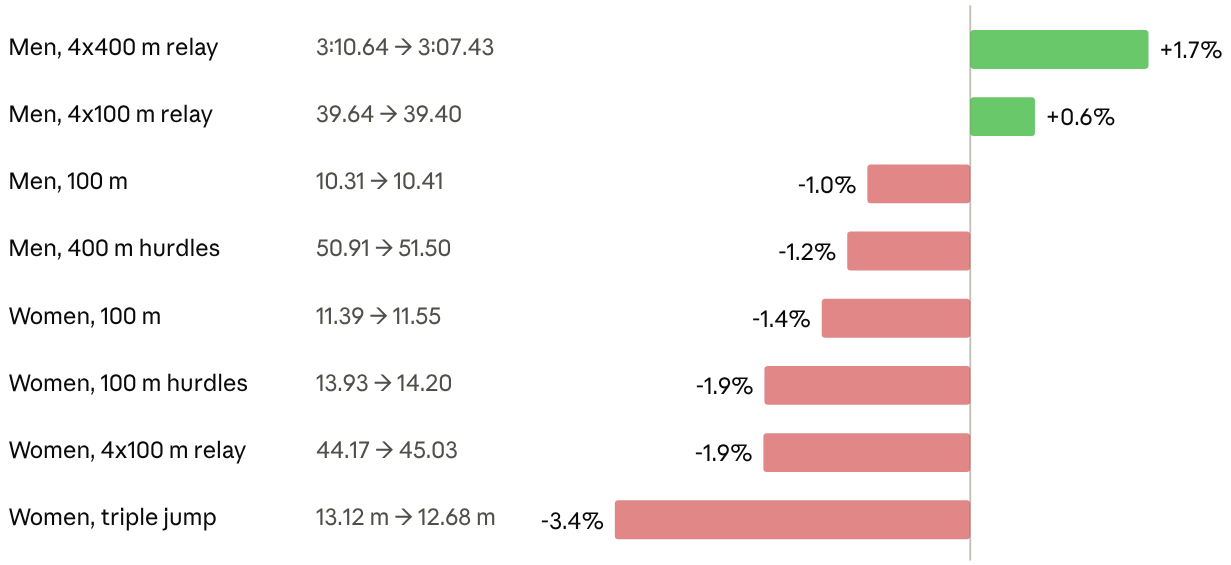
From April to August

The World U20 Championships are the test that CARIFTA praise implies but never names. In 2026 that test came four months after Grenada. Trinidad and Tobago had finished second at CARIFTA with 35 medals, behind Jamaica's 71 and ahead of the Bahamas' 30. In Eugene, the same region's results looked very different: Jamaica 8 medals, Barbados 1, Guyana 1, Dominica 1, Trinidad and Tobago 0.

Eight Trinidad and Tobago medal performances from CARIFTA can be followed directly to the World U20 Championships. Six of them were slower or shorter in August than in April. Two improved: the men's 4x100 m relay, which went on to finish fifth, and the men's 4x400 m relay, which ran 3:07.43 but did not reach the final.

From April to August, most CARIFTA medal performances went backwards

6 of 8 T&T CARIFTA 2026 medal performances were slower or shorter at the World U20 Championships
Change from CARIFTA mark (April) to best World U20 mark (August), %



Green = better in August; red = slower or shorter. Women's 100 m hurdles CARIFTA mark set into a -3.2 m/s headwind. Excludes the men's 200 m (4th at World U20s), which had no CARIFTA individual mark.

Sources: CARIFTA 2026 official results; World Athletics, World U20 Championships Eugene 2026, Trinidad and Tobago results

Other Caribbean athletes moved the other way. A Jamaican triple jumper improved from 15.84 m at CARIFTA to 17.08 m and won the world U20 title. A Dominican javelin thrower went from 63.73 m to 73.89 m, a national U20 record, and won bronze. A Guyanese 400 m runner improved from 52.47 to 51.76 and also won bronze. Dominica and Guyana each left Eugene with a medal that Trinidad and Tobago did not.

One summer proves little. Few juniors peak in both April and August, and a CARIFTA mark is an early-season mark. But that is the case for treating CARIFTA as a checkpoint rather than a destination. The April coverage gave the public no sense of what August would require.

When the record itself is uncertain

A yardstick needs reliable numbers. Initial coding flagged 25 of 124 articles for possible factual discrepancies. Subsequent checks found some cases where published result records conflict or have changed. The figure therefore describes coding flags, not a

verified error rate. Most flags concerned a medal count, a placing or a mark; some concerned the country's own CARIFTA history, such as a past medal total, a previous best finish or the year of the record haul.

One plausible reading, not tested here, is that the flags point less to careless reporting than to a gap in the record. Trinidad and Tobago has no single, easily searched public record of its CARIFTA results, its national CARIFTA bests or the world junior standards its athletes are chasing. Where official records themselves conflict or are later revised, and reporters working to deadline may have to rely on memory and on each other's copy, discrepancies can travel. When the medal table is the only yardstick in use, an uncertain medal table means the public cannot tell progress from decline.

Praise with a yardstick

None of this is an argument against celebrating young athletes. CARIFTA medals are hard won, and the region's best juniors are among the best in the world. The argument is against praise that carries no information. "Sensational" says nothing about whether a performance would make a World U20 final. "Historic" says nothing about whether the haul reflects a system that is closing the gap or one that is standing still.

Uncalibrated praise may also carry costs, although this study did not measure them. It can set public expectations that August cannot meet, so that disappointment follows performances that were never close to a world medal. It may direct attention, and perhaps support, toward medal colour rather than distance from world level. And it gives young athletes, their coaches and their parents little specific information to work with. Feedback helps when it says where a performance stands and how far there is to go; "great things" does neither.

A standard-referenced conversation would not need to be less warm. It would only need one more sentence. Compare these two illustrative versions (not quotations from the coverage):

- *"A brilliant run to take gold in the 800 m."*
- *"Gold in the 800 m in 1:50.38, within 0.4 seconds of the World U20 entry standard and about 4% off the pace that won a world U20 medal this year."*

The second version is no less proud, but it tells the athlete, the coach and the public where things stand.

Four practical steps would make this routine. Quoted phrases in the steps are illustrative wording, except "best since 2010", which comes from the coverage:

1. **The federation publishes a benchmark sheet after each CARIFTA.** Every medal performance would be listed with its gap to the World U20 entry standard and to the World U20 podium. All of these marks are public.
2. **Reporters add one benchmark line to results stories.** "Met the World U20 standard" or "X% short of it" costs one sentence and turns a medal into a measurement.
3. **Officials report progress against standards, not only against past medal tables.** "Five U20 medallists met world junior standards" is a claim about development. "Best since 2010" is a claim about a medal table.
4. **The federation maintains a public results archive.** Medal tables by year, national CARIFTA records and the current World U20 standards, kept in one place that reporters and the public can check.

It also cuts the other way. The athletes who met world junior standards in 2026, mostly in the sprints and hurdles, deserved to hear it. Their achievement was the one closest to world level, and it went largely unremarked.

Note on method and sources

Coverage. The coverage was 124 retrievable articles from six selected outlets: Newsday, the Trinidad Express, the Trinidad Guardian, CNC3, TTT and TV6 on CARIFTA athletics in 2024, 2025 and 2026. Each edition was read over a fixed window from 28 days before the opening day to 7 days after the close. Syndicated copies were counted once, under the first publisher. Broadcast video was not coded; only the web text was. Three in-window articles could not be retrieved in full and are not included.

Coding. Each reference to an athlete or relay team was coded for praise intensity, the highest yardstick used, and the source of the praise. Team-level statements were coded separately. The coding followed a written codebook with fixed rules: for example, a reported place or medal counts as a CARIFTA yardstick, and "rising star" counts as a talent label. The coding was carried out with AI assistance under those rules and has not yet been checked by an independent second coder.

Benchmarks. The 2026 individual medallists in U20 and Open events (16 athletes, one performance each) and the relay teams were compared with the World Athletics entry standards for the 2026 World U20 Championships and with the bronze-medal marks at those championships. Gap = (mark - standard) / standard x 100 for track events, and (standard - mark) / standard x 100 for field and combined events. CARIFTA marks come

from the 2026 official results, and August marks from World Athletics' Trinidad and Tobago results for Eugene 2026. The benchmark comparison covers 2026 only, the edition for which all standards have been verified.

Sources.

- CARIFTA Games 2026, St George's, Grenada: results (World Athletics)
- World Athletics: entry standards, World U20 Championships Eugene 2026
- World Athletics: World U20 Championships Eugene 2026, results
- Newsday, Trinidad Express, Trinidad Guardian, CNC3, TTT and TV6: CARIFTA athletics coverage, 2024 to 2026 (full article list available on request).