

## Black, Green and GOLD: Jamaica's true colors show in London

After 4 world records, 11 medals and the birth of a sprinting legend in Beijing, you'd figure that Jamaica's chances of improving on their last Olympic performance were as small as a red rose.

But like England's national flower, Team Jamaica oozed the sweetest smell, of success that is, as they managed to do one better during the summer games in London. In the land where the Royal Family reigns supreme, Jamaica's greatest track product solidified his place on the sport's throne as Usain Bolt achieved unprecedented success by successfully retaining his 100m and 200m titles. Despite criticisms from fans and pundits following an uncharacteristically lethargic performance at the Jamaican National Trials last month, Bolt has never been one to let down his guard on the biggest of stages. Given that Yohan Blake teased many of us with his blistering run of form in the last year, it was logical to think that some fans (including myself) would roll with the hot hand. Unfortunately, Bolt ensured that we got burned badly for making that switch as his mystique and uncanny ability to accelerate at ease during the second half of any sprint proved that he not only hails as a master of sprinting but at deception as well. For all the times that people have doubted Bolt, it always seems as if Bolt intentionally tries to toy with us at every turn just for the purpose of entertainment and intrigue as he's by far track and field's most attractive draw. It's as if Bolt's National Trials performance was put out just give him extra motivation in order to accomplish such as difficult feat, causing staunch naysayers to earn their money's worth while falling into Bolt's tempting trap. In the Olympics itself, it appeared that his 100m defense was just a warm-up act for his usually appealing show as he turned up the heat in the 200m and 4 by 100m relay; forever assuming his place as one of the greatest Olympians of all time, if not, the greatest given the ease that he's managed to defend his titles. Bolt should also be credited for bringing the best out of his Jamaican teammates as Yohan Blake captured a pair of silver medals and a 4 by 100m gold by running his best races to date in just his first summer games. In addition to his actions, Bolt's words appeared to have a resounding effect on Calabar High School alumnus and fellow Trelawny native, Warren Weir as he was caught passing on words of advice to the diminutive runner prior to the 200m final. Whatever Weir lacked in size, he surely made up for in heart and grit; reaching for that extra bit of fuel to ensure that Jamaica swept the podium for the second straight Olympics, matching what Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Sherone Simpson and Keiron Stewart did in 200m. Like her name, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce added a title to her resume; four years removed from her stunning 100m triumph in Beijing. Retaining her 100m title and copping silver in her first 200m final proved Fraser-Pryce's worth as an all-rounded athlete and the flag-bearer for female athletes in Jamaica going forward. However, despite Fraser-Pryce's vast accomplishments and the successes earned by both the 4 by 100m (silver) and 4 by 400m (bronze) relay teams, there is some concern regarding who the next 'big thing' amongst female track athletes are, given that Veronica-Campbell Brown just completed her fourth Olympics and nears the end of her athletic prime; signaling that a transition amongst our female competitors may already be beginning. Nevertheless, there were many bright young stars who gave strong accounts of themselves for their country's cause; making their medal-winning achievements more newsworthy events than those of their more accomplished compatriots. Hansle Parchment and Warren Weir deserve lots of praise for exceeding even their own expectations while Kaliese Spencer came close to nabbing her own bronze medal in the 400m hurdles. Alongside Yohan Blake, these athletes consolidated the fact that Jamaica's Olympic future could possibly become brighter as they've already proven that they're worthy successors to the kings and queens of their respective events. Perhaps this fountain of youth also came at the right time as some of our cagy veterans fell short in heartbreaking fashion as Brigitte Foster-Hylton called time on her prestigious career after her long and treacherous quest for an Olympic medal came to a sad and abrupt end while Melaine Walker, Jermaine Gonzales and the much maligned ex world-record 100m holder, Asafa Powell also fell short of huge expectations that accompanied them. With regards to Walker and Powell's efforts in particular a much bigger issue arose in relation to the level of criticism they both received, albeit in completely different circumstances. Though our athletes do deserve criticism at times for their performances, their efforts can never be questioned. Playing down the hard work under pressure being displayed by these athletes blurs the very fine line between fair criticism and tongue-lashings; thus triggering a very dangerous trend, one that must be defined in a way where we can support our athletes without having to discourage, but better yet, encourage them with a mixture of support and honesty. Perhaps the most encouraging aspect, however, of Jamaica's Olympic trail wasn't the new trend set by our track stars, as we kind of expected that to happen. What wasn't foreseen was the success of our athletes in other sports, from Alia Atkinson and her brave performance in swimming to Dorian Scott and his top ten placements in the shotput to even brilliance in martial arts from Kenneth Edwards. With Jamaica's place in track and field cemented, London 2012 opened the eyes of many observers who otherwise scoffed at these events in the past. Hopefully, the eyes opened widest by these achievements are that of local sponsors and government officials who could offer the necessary publicity these athletes and their respective events need in order to groom athletes culpable of mimicking similar triumphs to their track compatriots. London 2012 not only offered Jamaicans a familiar blast from the past, but a look at the island's future as its sports infrastructure surely has loads of potential on offer. With Jamaica's evolution as a sporting nation becoming evident in 50 years as an independent nation, who's to say the next 50 won't see new barriers being broken in different areas. Thus, Jamaica's already decorated Olympic history could become that much more storied. Congratulations to Team Jamaica for their efforts during London 2012. You've truly done our island proud.