

## Bombings Ignite 'Valid Worry' For Penns

A top official for an organisation which provides vital support to hundreds of Jamaicans participating in the annual Penn Relay Carnival in the United States has expressed concerns leading into the 119th running of the event next week, in the wake of Monday's terrorist attacks at an international sporting event in the US.

According to Irwine Clare, head of operations and founder of US-based Team Jamaica Bickle (TJB), although his organisation is scheduled to set up operations for Penns April 25-27 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the bombings at the Boston Marathon in Massachusetts had raised worrying signals. "Clearly from our side it's a cause for concern," Clare said early yesterday afternoon from New York. He explained that a TJB liaison officer had been assigned to contact organisers of the prestigious event, which has attracted Jamaican athletes for decades. Up to early yesterday afternoon, Clare said, TJB had received no definitive word. "We are awaiting to hear what Penn Relays has to say," he said. Efforts to contact relays organisers were unsuccessful as telephone calls made to the event's media information officer were not returned up to late yesterday afternoon. Clare anticipates this year's Penns will feature dramatically ramped-up security as a result of Monday's tragedy, which, up to press time, had claimed the lives of at least three people and injured more than 170. "We are expecting tighter security arrangements," he said. "It makes sense." Since 1994, TJB has provided support to Jamaican teams participating at Penns. The organisation offers meals and arranges for transportation, medical services and discounted accommodations. During Penns, most TJB activities are centred at a tent set up adjacent Franklin Field, the stadium where the relays are run at the University of Pennsylvania. ADJUST SECURITY METHODS According to Clare, TJB will now be "looking at how we handle our security operations at the tent and adjust accordingly". A TJB awards reception and fund-raiser was scheduled for last night in New York. Clare said the matter would be discussed there. Last year, TJB hosted in the "range of 600 athletes and officials" from Jamaican schools and clubs, Clare said. He is expecting roughly the same attendance in 2013. "We are equipped to handle similar numbers this year," he said. However, Clare explained, he understood if parents of Jamaican athletes were sceptical about sending their children to Pennsylvania which, like Massachusetts, is located in the US Northeast. "It's a valid worry," he said. Clare said TJB will also be seeking to provide those parents with a level of comfort. TJB confronted a somewhat similar situation following the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001, although that happened several months before the 2002 Penn Relays. While the experience and fallout from 9/11, which claimed close to 3,000 lives, may have softened the impact of heightened security at Penns in recent years, Monday's incident in Boston is expected to ignite another round of increased caution. It has also offered another reminder that athletic events are not immune to violent and tragic occurrences, Clare explained. "We felt the brunt of increased security the following April at Penns," he said of 9/11. "We would have gotten used to that now, but the incident in Boston reminds us of the realities of how life is these days." [jamaica-glaener.com](http://jamaica-glaener.com)