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Caribbean 2008 sprinting year in review

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In this the fourth edition of Caribbean Net News track and field year in review, sports correspondent Gary Smith takes a look at the success of the region's sprinters in the just concluded athletics season.

The 2008 track and field season was a busy term for Caribbean athletes on the world scene, but none were more active than the regional sprinters who once again proved to the world that success because of size doesn't always come in concert.



(From L) Jamaica's Asafa Powell, Nesta Carter, Usain Bolt and Michael Frater celebrate winning the men's 4x100m relay final at the "Bird's Nest" National Stadium during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Jamaica broke the men's 4x100m relay world record in the Olympic final timing 37.10seconds.

MEN'S REVIEW

"We likkle but we talawah" has been somewhat of a motto for Jamaicans over the years and the performance of their sprinters, especially that of Usain Bolt at the Beijing Olympics this summer, truly outlined the true meaning of the phrase.

And while it was also a fruitful year for several of the others in the same division, Bolt undoubtedly was the limelight in the sprinting department – not only from a Caribbean aspect, but also from a world outlook.

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The Jamaican sprint marvel, known more for his 200 metres abilities beforehand, turned the sprinting world upside down this term with notably two fantastic performances that had even the greatest of the greats standing in applause.

After succeeding fellow countryman Asafa Powell as the 100m world record holder with a stunning run of 9.72 seconds to improved the 9.74secs previous mark in May, Bolt went on to better the record again with a remarkable, yet laid-back 9.69secs run to become Jamaica's first ever male 100m Olympic champion.

Double completed in style

Bolt then successfully completed the double when he powered home all the way to break Michael Johnson's 12-year-old 200m world record with a darling run of 19.30 -- wresting the once untouchable old mark of 19.32 for forever.

He also provided a helping hand in Jamaica's sprint relay team, anchored by Powell that broke yet another world record. The quartet of Nesta Carter, Michael Frater, Bolt and Powell raced home to 37.10 to shatter the old record of 37.40.

In all, Bolt ran ten sub-10 seconds 100m races this season, in addition to six sub-20 seconds 200m, including the top five fastest times for the year. He registered an almost perfect season, losing only to Powell prior to the Olympics.

The 22-year-old got sweet rewards for his accomplishments when he was presented with the World, CAC and Jamaican Athlete of the Year awards. He was also voted French sports daily L'Equipe's athlete of the year and took the BBC Sports Personality's Overseas Personality award.

Thompson was there too...

Meanwhile, special praises must also go to Trinidad and Tobago's young sprinter Richard Thompson, who transferred his success at the collegiate level onto the world scene.

The NCAA indoor 60m and 100m outdoor champion delivered in the 100m for the Caribbean when he took the silver medal to bring double joy for the region, despite being far off the radar for a medal prior to the Games.

No title but a recognized year

Despite failing to win a major championships individual medal once again, Powell too had a year he could be somewhat satisfied with, if he can look past the Olympic 100m hiccup.

The former world record holder managed to improve his own personal best to 9.72 and was the only man to have beaten the sprint king Bolt all season.

Other notable world class Caribbean male sprinters this season were the Netherlands Antilles' Churandy Martina (9.93), who broke 10-seconds for the first time in his career without the help of the wind when finishing fourth at the Olympics. He was largely disappointed, however, after being stripped of his 200m silver medal for a lane violation.

Elsewhere, Jamaicans Frater and Carter both broke the 10-seconds barrier

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as well, Bahamian Chris Brown just missed winning a medal in the 400m. He won a bronze in at the world indoors behind Canadian Tyler Christopher.

One must not also forget the silver medal St Kitts and Nevis former world champion Kim Collins won at the World Indoor Championships in Valencia in March.

WOMEN'S REVIEW

There were proud moments too on the female side of things, with champion sprinter Veronica Campbell-Brown and teammate Shelly Ann Fraser leading the way.

Campbell-Brown shook off the disappointments of failing to make the Jamaican female 100m squad by sizzling to a personal best of 21.74 to repeat as Olympic champion in Beijing.



Veronica Campbell Brown of Jamaica celebrates after winning the women's 200m final at the National Stadium as part of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. AFP PHOTO

The Caribbean sprint queen was shocked in Kingston by three fantastic performances, but never let the disappointments slow her down. She had three of the five sub 22-seconds for the season and delivered five sub-11 seconds 100m performances.

Campbell-Brown admitted after repeating in Beijing that she had been feeding off the success of her fellow countrywoman, Fraser, who did what no other Jamaican female sprint could do before her – win an Olympic 100m title and the Bolt, who brought the life in the camp.

Never been done before

Even the great Merlene Ottey, the former Jamaican sprint legend, applauded Fraser when she rocketed from the blocks and held on to escort teammates Sherone Simpson and Kerron Stewart, who both shared the silver medal, after being deadlocked at the finish line.

The youngster, relatively unknown before the Jamaican championships, clocked a career best and joint year best of 10.78, produced the second-fastest time in Olympic history to take the gold medal.

Stewart, who won the Jamaican trials with a career best time of 10.80 secs, also sped home for third in the 200m behind Campbell-Brown and American Allyson Felix.

In a surprise result that saw British quarter-miler Christine Ohuruogu winning gold, Jamaica's Shericka Williams also surged by favourite Sanya Richards to win a silver medal in the women's 400m. She said afterwards that after seeing training partner Powell's heartbreaking moments in the 100m, she was inspired to go out and do something special on his behalf.

Elsewhere on the female side, British Virgin Islands' Tahesia Harrigan did herself a world of good when she won a bronze medal in the women's 60m dash at the world indoors in a national record time of 7.09secs.

JUNIORS...

In the junior category, Jamaica's Dexter Lee, blasted home to win the men's 100m title at the World Junior Championships in Bydgoszcz. He clocked 10.40secs in a very close race.

After taking a bronze in the 100m Bahamian Sheniqua Ferguson led home a 1-2-3 finish for the Caribbean in the women's 200m dash. Meritzer Williams (SKN) was second, with Janelle Redhead (GRN) finishing third.

Meanwhile, Janelle Redhead (GRN) set a national junior record of 45.70 to take silver in the men's 400m, while Jamaica's Nickel Ashmeade was second in the men's 200m.

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