

Jamaica continues track tradition

BY BILL VAN SMITH
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As usual, when it comes to running — particularly sprinting — the island of Jamaica and its track athletes are pretty much a blur to the rest of the world.

If producing great sprinters was an actual race unto itself, say the 100-meter dash, then Jamaica would win by about 25 meters. Sprinters from Jamaica are just that dominant.

You want names? Here is a sampling of a few of the Jamaican sprint greats:

Ever hear of Usain Bolt? Sure you have.

Others that can be added to the list of world champions and Olympic gold medal winners are Merlene Ottey, Veronica Campbell-Powell and

Campbell-Powell and Asafa Powell. And many more could be added as Jamaica's history of stand-out sprinters started in the 1800s.

On Sunday, two Jamaican coaches with teams in the Northwest Express Track and Field Classic being held at the Ansin Sports Complex in Miramar were looking forward rather than back to the 1800s.

Those two coaches are striving to develop the next great generation of Jamaican sprinters and track athletes.

Ransford Spaulding, 51, coaches kids age 8 to 16 on his John Mills Junior High team.

Spaulding explains Jamaica's track success: "When you have a passion and love for something, it is important, and that is what Jamaica has for track and field. We have a big



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Despite the inclement weather, the young track athletes were all smiles on Sunday as they participated in the Northwest Express Track and Field Classic in Miramar.

stage for our track athletes. We go from kindergarten to all the way up. Also, we have the biggest high school meet in the world."

Spaulding's John Mills team has won championships 23 times, 19 of them consecutive.

"Yes, we have an extremely big trophy case at the school," Spaulding said with a laugh.

In fact, Spaulding actually met and worked with Bolt when they were both in the Bahamas for a meet.

For Spaulding, participating in the Northwest Express event brings back fond memories as he recalled meet founder Jesse Holt, who died in 2016.

"Jesse lived and cared for people, especially the kids," Spaulding said. "There are so many good adjectives for Jesse —

peaceful, faithful, generous. People should mimic him."

Another Jamaican coach, Owen Henry, participating in the Northwest Express meet for the 21st year, totally agrees with Spaulding's sentiment.

Henry, 45, is the coach of the Jamaican Windward Road Primary team with kids 6- to 12-year-olds.

"This meet is for every athlete," Henry said.

Yes, it absolutely is. There are participants entered ranging in age from 4 to 80, and Henry knows that aspect is Holt's vision living on.

Henry wants his athletes to feel and grasp the passion that pervades over track in Jamaica.

"A house cannot be built without a strong foundation," he said. "These kids are the foundation.

"They are also my foundation."

Sunday's final day of the meet, because of day-long rains that drenched South Florida, proved a huge challenge to get the final day off the starting line.

However, as meet director Alan Holt would say, "Play on and challenge accepted."

"It's raining, but we're holding a track meet," Holt said. "Nothing stops us."

"When people come from all over the world to compete," Holt said of the 2,000-plus participants in the event, "you have to keep going. Heck, the kids are having fun."

Yes, they were.

The track was wet. The athletes were wet. The fans were wet.

And a good time was had by all.