

## NW EXPRESS TRACK AND FIELD CLASSIC

# Young Jamaicans on track to greatness

BY BILL VAN SMITH

Special to the Miami Herald

Jamaican track athletes can make fast work of you, as in being a blur as they race past you on the track.

The small island of Jamaica has a history of producing the world's best sprinters and dominating that category at the Olympics. Some familiar names would include Usain Bolt, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Yohan Blake, Asafa Powell, Merlene Otty and Veronica Campbell-Brown.

On a soggy Friday at the Ansin Sports Complex in Miramar, the future of Jamaican sprinting was on display during the first day of the three-day Northwest Express Track and Field Classic. And you better believe the young sprinters from Sts. Peter & Paul Preparatory running in the meet are all aware of the Jamaican heritage they are expected to live up to.

So much so, all of them can nicely imitate Bolt's iconic lightning bolt pose.

"He's the greatest sprinter ever to exist," said Jayd'n Johnson, an 11-year-old fifth-grader. "I actually got to meet Bolt, and he was very nice."

Another 11-year-old, Selah Stiebel, picked Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce as her favorite sprinter.

"Usain Bolt is the most famous, but I like Shelly," she said. "Of course, Bolt would beat her in a race,

but I like her more because she is inspiring me to be a better athlete."

Another 11-year-old female runner, Raechel Williams, also picked Fraser-Pryce as the sprinter she would most like to emulate.

"Yes, probably because she's a girl, but I met her and she was very kind. I think that's another good reason.

"To me, she's an inspiration," added Williams, who is in her first year of running.

The final young person picking his favorite Jamaican sprinter was Probean Champagnie, 10.

Champagnie, like Johnson, is not lacking for confidence. He said he will allow you to pronounce — or even spell — his last name as "Champion." Then he was asked how fast he is. "Really fast," he quickly responded.

Champagnie's favorite sprinter is Yohan Blake. Hey, what about Bolt?

"Bolt is fast," Champagnie said, using all the wisdom he has gathered in his 10 years, "but I saw him on TV and he's really not a people person."

Hmm, how did Bolt offend you, Mr. Champagnie?

"Oh, I've never met him, but he just walks past people."

● Preliminaries were the main portion of Friday's competition, and Saturday's second day of the meet starts at 8 a.m.

## NORTHWEST EXPRESS TRACK AND FIELD MEET

# Holt embraces longtime role as mentor, teacher

BY BILL VAN SMITH  
*Special to the Miami Herald*

Jesse Holt's life has been anything but mundane.

As a young man and a world-class athlete, he competed against two people — Bob Hayes and Jimmy Hines, both of whom held the title of "World's Fastest Human." He saw and met Muhammad Ali and Jackie Robinson. He played for the Oakland Raiders in the NFL.

All of that was both impressive and intriguing to Holt during his younger years.

However, that's the glitter, and there comes a time to put things in perspective: Holt, now 73, has done just that.

These days, and many, many days before this, he has been coaching kids of all ages in a sport — track and field — that he immensely loves.

Holt assesses his work with kids by saying, "I've taken a step up in life."

The results of his all-important work will be on display Friday through Sunday this week as the 41st Northwest Express Track and Field Meet — all 41 of them put on by Holt — will be off and running at the Ansin Sports Complex in Miramar.

The meet, with some 2,000 contestants, is annually the largest track event in South Florida. There are some 17 states represented, along with various foreign countries, including huge contingents from Jamaica and the Bahamas.



## THE NORTHWEST EXPRESS TRACK AND FIELD MEET ATTRACTS ABOUT 2,000 ATHLETES

The meet is an everybody-come-have-fun athletic festival, with contestants ranging in age from 5 to 80.

However, it's the kids' portion of it that is special to Holt, who has morphed from a world-class athlete into a world-class mentor of children.

Which part of his life — athlete or teacher of kids — means the most to Holt?

"I would have to say the best part would have to be what I have done with the kids," he said. "I know what kids need.

"I was taught to compete at a very early age," Holt said, looking far, far back in his memory.

"Adults would be lining up in the streets of Overtown, and I would run over and line up next to them and try to run with them. Sometimes they would let me run and other times they would shoosh me away."

Then, with a laugh, he added, "Of course, when we did run we had to dodge cars."

Then Holt summed up his long-running track meet and the latter part of his life.

"I've been very fortunate to be a part of so many young lives," he said. "It's a time when you can give them some direction and emphasize education. We've always tried to help kids develop their talents and skills, and that includes academics. It has been a lot of fun."

## NW EXPRESS TRACK AND FIELD MEET

**Where:** Ansin Sports Complex, 10801 Miramar Road, Miramar.

**Competitors:** 2,000 track and field athletes from 17 states and around the world. Age range from 5 to 80 years old.

**Schedule:** **Friday** — 5 p.m. start for both track and field events; **Saturday** — 8 a.m. start for javelin, followed by other events; track events begin at 10 a.m.; **Sunday** — Events begin at 10 a.m.

## NORTHWEST EXPRESS TRACK AND FIELD CLASSIC

# Track meet helps kids bridge gaps

BY BILL VAN SMITH  
Special to the Miami Herald

On the second day of the Northwest Express Track and Field Classic on Saturday, there were some 2,000 kids running, jumping and throwing at the Ansin Sports Complex in Miramar.

More importantly, the kids were meeting and talking to each other, in most cases for the first time. That's a seemingly natural thing about kids — they can make a friend in a matter of minutes. And they don't even have to speak the same language.

That's what is happening at this massive melding of track and field and kids.

LaQueta O'Neil, 31, coach of the Runners Express Track Club out of Miami Gardens, has seen it up close and personal.

"This meet is great exposure for the kids," she said

with a smile. "They are meeting kids from all across the world, kids in countries that they might never get to visit. They learn what the other countries are about and what the kids there do.

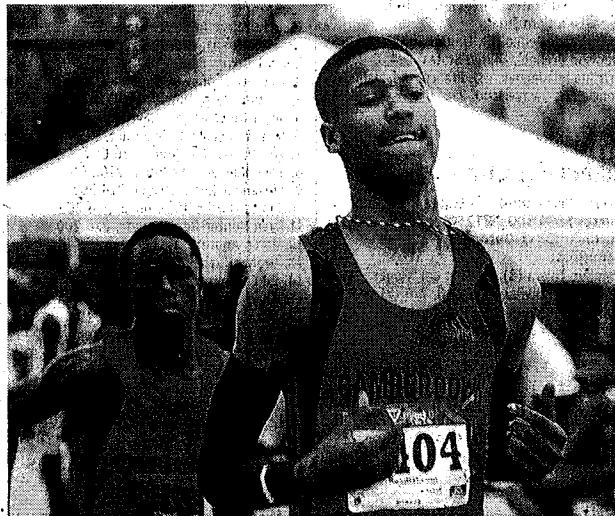
"They learn about other about other cultures."

O'Neil calls such trading of ideas and knowledge a "great thing" — probably more so than watching one of her pint-sized athletes win a race or a field event.

"All these kids, from different places, get along great," she said. "No problem."

The finish line, so to speak, according to O'Neil, is: "They have a great time together."

• The Northwest Express meet goes into its third and final day on Sunday with the first runners on the starting line at 10 a.m. A large portion of the age-group finals for the meet take place Sunday.



BILL VAN SMITH: For the Miami Herald

Tahj-Rae Allen of Jamaica's Camperdown team wins a preliminary in the 100 meters during Saturday's action.

## NORTHWEST EXPRESS TRACK AND FIELD CLASSIC

# Young athletes inspired by old gold medal

BY BILL VAN SMITH

Special to the Miami Herald

Richard Stebbins, some 52 years ago, won a gold medal as a member of the United States' 400-meter relay team in the Olympics.

That medal is one of the most important possessions in his life, thus he keeps it in a locked box in his home.

He doesn't take it out often, but as usual in life, there are exceptions.

When there are kids around, Stebbins, now 71, just can't resist. He takes

the medal out of the lock-box and puts it in his pocket and makes sure the young people get to hold it, touch it, feel it. In other words, savor it.

By doing that, he feels as though he can do something good for the youth of America.

The gold medal is a means for Stebbins to put the idea of hard work and achievement in young heads.

He is able to show them what determination can accomplish.

In other words, the medal might be "real gold," but

for Stebbins what he can accomplish with that gold is the real goal.

During the Northwest Express Track and Field Classic that concluded its three-day run Sunday at Ansin Sports Complex in Miramar, Stebbins was allowing kids to see the results of hard work — in his case, that Olympic medal.

The reactions varied, but always there was a whole bunch of awe involved by anybody of any age.

• Teoana Banton, 11, who is the defending national champion in the

100, 200 and 400 at the Junior Olympics: "Touching the gold medal made me feel like I want to be in the Olympics. It makes me feel like I can take on any challenge."

• Christin Facey, 10, who runs the 100, 200 and 800: "I'd like to have a gold medal some day. I'm sure I'll make it to the Olympics. I'm really fast. Fastest in the whole fourth grade." She's not just bragging.

Christin was a national Junior Olympics champion in the 1,500 meters when she was 8.

• Shomari Pettigrew, 11, who also competed in the Junior Olympics: "I really like track and I got to go to Detroit and Canada because of track."

All three of the mini-athletes run for the Alpha Elite Track Club out of Pembroke Pines, and even their coaches were impressed by the gold medal.

Christopher Facey, 45 and the head coach, said, "Seeing it was breathtaking ... just to have the opportunity to feel the medal and meet Mr. Stebbins. It lets you learn what it takes to get to that level."

His assistant coach, Elvis Morris, 49, who ran for Miami Carol City in high school, said that seeing the medal also inspired him.

"I feel like I should run a 400-meter right now," he said after holding the medal. "I feel a burst of energy going through my body."

Stebbins, after showing the medal to people, particularly kids, always feels a sense of pride. Almost as much pride as when he won it long ago in the Tokyo Olympics. Ever since, the medal has served a most-important purpose to him.

"A picture is worth a thousand words," Stebbins said, "and the gold medal is the picture. And when the kids see that picture it comes with words."