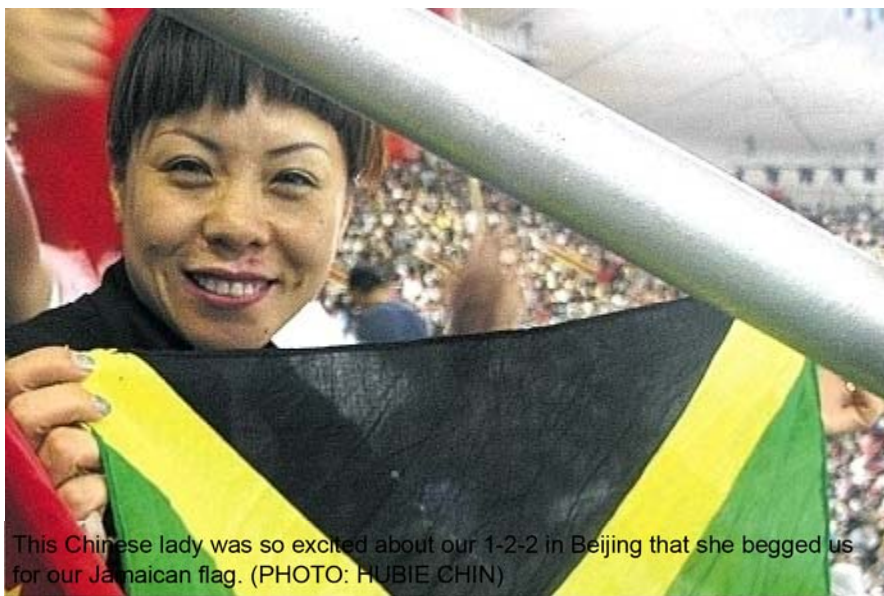


Our buzzing Jamaica

Jean LOWRIE-CHIN
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WHAT a Jamaica we live in! On the international scene, we were the toast of Moscow, cheerleaders for China, and the 'warnees' of WADA, all in a few breathless days. Back home, there were public servants being hustled out of their posts, a leadership issue in the JLP, growing bewilderment at JTA money and leader management, and renewed interest in the medicinal qualities of marijuana.

From Moscow we heard that the Russians showed more interest in Jamaica than in any other country participating in the IAAF World Championships. We are a fascinating bunch -- how can such a tiny country end up with the same number of gold medals as the mighty USA? And just when we thought Warren Weir was our biggest athletic surprise, completing the 1-2-3 in the London Olympics, a shy 18-year-old named Javon Francis astounded the world. Taking Jamaica from 5th place in the 4x400-m relay, Francis flew past his rivals to secure a silver, clocking 44.05 seconds, faster than LaShawn Merritt, who anchored the victorious US team, in a time of 44.77 seconds.



This Chinese lady was so excited about our 1-2-2 in Beijing that she begged us for our Jamaican flag. (PHOTO: HUBIE CHIN)

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As for our triple gold medallists "Big Man" Usain Bolt and "Pocket Rocket" Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, not only are they great athletes, but they are warm and easy Jamaicans who are the best possible representatives of our brand. Warren Weir went one better with a silver in the 200, and we appreciated Nickel Ashmeade's brave run. Kudos to Nesta Carter for his final reward of an individual medal-- the bronze in the 100m event.

The women's and men's 4x100 relays were magnificent. Many of us were understandably nervous after all baton mishaps by other countries in the heats, but our Jamaicans kept their heads and executed well. Carrie Russell, Kerron Stewart, Schillonie Calvert, and the phenomenal Shelly-Ann, all alone at the finish, gave a flawless performance to win in a championship record of 41.29 seconds. Bolt, Nesta Carter, Kemar Bailey-Cole, and Nickel Ashmeade won in a blazing 37.36 seconds.

CHINA — THE OLYMPIC CONNECTION

To understand the power of our performances, let us hark back to the Beijing Olympics in 2008. China had invested billions in preparing their country to host the coveted Games. They had even put in a spanking new subway system, that ran like their

famous silk, just in time for the Games. They were ready to show the world that they were a modern, more open society.

The Jamaicans kept the cameras of the world trained on Beijing with the record-shattering performances of Usain Bolt and the breathtaking gold medals of Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Veronica Campbell Brown and Melanie Walker. My husband and I were happy to have been there to share in the euphoria. When Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Sherone Simpson and Kerron Stewart gave us the gold and two silvers, a Chinese lady sitting next to us in the stands begged us for a Jamaican flag to wave.

As we made our way from the Bird's Nest stadium, we were stopped countless times by admiring Chinese folks who asked us to pose with them holding the Jamaican flag. I was able to get Usain Bolt's autograph for a worker at our hotel, and he held the paper and stared at it like he had discovered gold. The dancing, laughing Jamaicans, the vibrant black-green-gold flag had made a lasting impression on our Far Eastern friends.

It is no wonder then, that our relations with China went on fast-forward after those Beijing Games. And so they came, looked around and realised that, yes, Jamaica has her issues, but we do have a lot going for us. They could feel a certain comfort level as Jamaica still has a significant number of Jamaican-Chinese who continue to observe traditional festivals, and they could see our strategic location -- right across from that promising Panama Canal, now being widened to accommodate even larger vessels.

Which brings us to the Goat Islands controversy based on it being proposed that a logistics hub be built there. We have to hope, dearly hope, that a way will be found that we do not jeopardise this rich sanctuary of marine life. Surely there are other equally convenient locations for such a facility. Driving the length of our south coast recently, we observed miles of undeveloped land.

We welcome our investors from China, and we hope that our Government officials will leave no stone unturned to find them a suitable location for their logistics hub, one that will not endanger our precious natural resources.

MEDICINAL MARIJUANA

One of our natural resources is our world-famous marijuana. It was my company's privilege to have handled the launch of Canasol for Federated Pharmaceuticals in 1987, where Jamaican scientists the late Dr Manley West and Dr Albert Lockhart explained the fantastic benefits of the pharmaceutical breakthrough in the treatment of glaucoma. I remember that an emotional Dr West wiped tears from his eyes as he related the years of research and long hours of experimentation that yielded their product. It is a little known fact that a hard-working young scientist, Dr Henry Lowe, was also a member of that team.

In the wake of new research on the medicinal value of ganja, reported by Dr Sanjay Gupta on CNN, and the legalisation of it in several states and more recently in Uruguay, Dr Lowe says Jamaica could stand to gain tremendously from investing more in research to create high-demand pharmaceutical products derived from ganja.

THE JADCO DEBACLE

We note the warnings of Renée Anne Shirley, former head of the Jamaica Anti-Doping Commission (JADCo) regarding Jamaica's inefficient drug-testing facilities and shortage of personnel. To the authorities on the defensive, we say, so what if the report was carried abroad, or if it is belated, the facts are laid out and we should address them before any more of our athletes become affected by lack of the required personnel and equipment for timely and accurate drug testing.

JTA NEEDS INTROSPECTION

Speaking of due diligence, this fraud of millions at the JTA is raising some uncomfortable questions. Further, we were disappointed at reports of the behaviour of their president-elect at their recent conference after Education Minister Ronnie Thwaites extended the olive branch. The JTA should take a timeout for deep introspection and show the country how serious they are about the profession which is the foundation of every other national endeavour.

IMF TEST PASSED

Congratulations to the hard-working Minister of Finance Dr Peter Phillips and his team for taking us safely through the first IMF test. Even as we saw smiles from IMF representative to Jamaica Jan Kees Martijn at last Thursday's press briefing, we must bear in mind an IMF statement noting a contraction in our economy and our high level of unemployment. The next test may not be as easy, and we beg all those who are handling the precious funds now being loaned to Jamaica, to ensure that we have a track on every cent.

Step up leaders; help those who have run so thrillingly and worked so willingly to remain proud of Jamaica, land we love.

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