

Boldon defiant

Says he'll not apologise for criticising Bolt, but highlights respect he has for Jamaican sprinter

ATO Boldon, who has been receiving heavy flak for criticising Usain Bolt's victory celebration in the Olympic 100m final last Saturday, says he will not apologise for stating his opinion, and insists that critics have blown out of proportion what he said.

At the same time, Boldon, a Trinidadian former sprinter who has been providing Olympic commentary for the American network television station, NBC, reiterated his respect for Bolt and congratulated the Jamaican sprinter on breaking the 200m world record yesterday.

Following is the full text of Boldon's letter e-mailed to the Observer.

"No one on the planet has used more superlatives to praise Bolt since May when I called his 100m world record in New York. A month ago, I said he would win three gold medals in Beijing, and during both NBC broadcasts, I correctly predicted his world records.

"No one who saw the NBC broadcasts I have done on Bolt could possibly ever say I have begrudged the man his wins or his success, or even his exuberance, because quite to the contrary, as I walk to the stadium every day with my Jamaican mother, I am excited and thrilled for the Jamaican team's success this year — as I am for all those who are excelling in Beijing.

"Prior to the start of the Games, I said in an article that it would only be fitting that Jamaica have their first men's and women's 100m champion ever, since Jamaica is the mecca of track and field. That has since happened. In my several visits to Jamaica this year, Jamaicans, in many ways, embraced me as a fellow Caribbean brother in a way no other island has, which was a great feeling. To imply that I am anti-Jamaica or anti-Bolt simply flies in the face of the facts.

"So, despite the numerous articles in which I have been complimentary to Bolt and my calls of his races on NBC, some have chosen to single out my opinion that he should have celebrated after the line as a 'sour grapes' rain on his parade, or disrespect for Usain Bolt's achievements.

"Nothing could be further from the truth.

"It has further descended into a 'USA vs Jamaica' issue, which is lunacy, since when watching the replays of the 100 I said aloud offair "that was great television, but I think it was poor sportsmanship".

That assessment was discussed on NBC during Bolt's early rounds and another commentator said it was just youthful exuberance — and it was left at that.

"Since that time, and since my Bob Costas interview, Jamaicans, as well as people from other Caribbean countries and the USA, have written to me to say either one of the following two things — that I was stupid for allowing Costas to 'bait' me into a derogatory statement about Bolt, which is false, since I thought it myself on the night in question, or, that I should 'stand my ground' because they, too, thought the pre-finish line celebration a bit excessive. People clearly feel differently about the race.

"It is perfectly OK to disagree with my opinions, and many Jamaicans here in Beijing have sought me out in the stadium to say that I would have to know the man Bolt more to understand that he would never disrespect his competitors. I can certainly entertain or accept that possibility, but I will not apologise for an opinion, especially since it seems that the 999 favourable ones I have had of Bolt have been ignored to focus on this one, which has been blown totally out of proportion.

"I have no interest in a needless controversy which seeks only to overshadow the unprecedented performances of this Jamaican Olympic team, and I wish to state categorically that I respect opinions contrary to my

assessment of Bolt's celebration, while maintaining my own opinion.

"My stance as a track purist is that an athlete should celebrate as much as possible before and after, not during a race — simple as that. I celebrated as much as was possible during my own career and I find Bolt's antics here truly entertaining. I was unaware that he had this much personality, in all honesty. NBC has devoted much airtime to showing the fun Bolt is having in Beijing, but that does not mean I can't state an opinion that I wanted to see him celebrate after the finish line was crossed. By celebrating 'post-finish-line' tonight, Bolt broke a 200m WR I thought would never fall. I congratulate him wholeheartedly.

I will remind those who seek to falsely make this out to be an issue of one man or one country being singled out that it was NBC that was most harsh when the victorious USA men's 4x100 Olympic team celebrated in a most unbecoming manner in 2000, a sentiment quickly echoed by the US media, leading to an apology by said team.

Anyone who might question my praise and admiration for Bolt need only look at my broadcasts of his races dating back to May of this year, or any of the countless articles in which I have spoken in glowing terms about him."



BOLDON... in Beijing says, I have no interest in a needless controversy

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