

Jamaica on top of the world

THE moment is there somewhere, everywhere, captured, frozen in time. Usain Bolt's brash, unapologetic and triumphant march into sporting history like a million volts of fiery lightning finally breaking free.

His 9.69-second flash across the finish line on Saturday was, in Jamaica and to Jamaicans, more than just a race. It was more than an in-your-face cry to get the attention that "we are somebody". It was much more than that. Bolt's boiling hot trot into every city, town and village across the planet was his way, our way of saying that we Jamaicans have always known that we were more than we are, only this time around, "Ambassador" Usain Bolt, on our behalf, has led the charge to affirm it with pride, defiance and justified arrogance.

No sooner had the Bolt of lightning struck, in the wake of the thunder ball came our women, Shelly-Ann Fraser, Sherone Simpson and Kerron Stewart. If Bolt's win had sent us to Heaven, the surge of the three young women across the finish line in one-two-two fashion threatened to give us a presence with God.

On Saturday and Sunday morning, our "regular crew" in addition to two politicians were gathered at Shim's Hideout on Mannings Hill Road to watch the events on TV. The breakfast fare was some of the same stuff that Bolt and other Jamaican athletes have been feeding on since birth. Boiled yam and bananas, callaloo, ackee and saltfish, liver and onions, corned pork, Blue Mountain Coffee and mint tea.

One had to be dead in soul not to have felt the pride and the vicarious thrill of seeing our athletes on top of the world stage. Tables came close to overturning as we watched Usain Bolt rip into the field, engage his turbo-charged twitch muscles and leave the rest of the field in his dust. In the process we saw a young man fully aware of his moment and revelling in it like a youngster with an etoy. Even as some of the jealous American sports commentators began their shameful commentary on Bolt's prowess ("freak of nature", etc), they missed the true essence of the lightning win.

Bolt was truly enjoying his triumph and not being consumed by it as we have witnessed in the past with American athletes, too many of whom have allowed un-allowed substances into their system. Granted, we know that with endorsements, star athletes like Bolt will become frighteningly rich over the next five years, but for now the 22-year-old Jamaican is showing the rest of the world that it is OK to dance, to jig in enjoyment.

Even as we were amazed at the winners, many of us were stunned at the no-show of our friend Asafa Powell. Well, I am not worried as I expect much better things from him in the sprint relays where he will run the leg of his life. And how can we forget the smiling, jackrabbit-jumping Shelly Ann Fraser? I swear, every Jamaican at home was beside her, hurling her in the air, catching her and tossing her up again. And how can we forget Kerron Stewart's mad dash from the back of the pack to tie for second after being put off by US athlete Tori Edward's fake "false start"?

Sherika Williams' brave, calculating and resolute sprinting in the last 30 metres to take silver in the 400 metres was too much to take later on in the week. Many of us had written her off until we saw her taking back the runners, fifth, fourth, third... my God, is she going to do it? Second!

What a run that was!

If Jamaica's brand name was worth \$50 billion before the Olympics, it is easily at \$200 billion now. While I expect the prime minister to name a public holiday in support of our triumphant athletes, probably on the date of their arrival in Jamaica, what plans do our

political leaders and our super marketeers have for re-branding Jamaica and cashing in on the windfall?

People like Captain Burrell and Harry Smith need to be consulted and embraced by the government, because time will not wait for us. When my son Maurice was here for the trials in June he presented me with a pair of Puma jogging shoes. It is decked out in the black, green and gold of Jamaica and there is a Jamaican flag woven (not printed) on the heels. Of course, like everything else, it is made in China.

Even now the Japanese are probably cashing in on brand-name Jamaica. What about us?

On the downside, we were hoping that our gunmen would have been so taken up with our Olympic triumph that they would have had a cessation of "activities". No such luck. We murdered 14 of our own in the same weekend when our women athletes created history and Bolt blasted his way into the record books.

Even as some, prior to the Olympics, were quick to put down those who were the product of "certain" families, we heard the cries from one parent of an athlete to our gunmen and saw the same people embracing the move. That told me that we still have some work to do in organising in our minds our class hangovers. It also told me that no amount of reasoning will work with the murderers in our midst.

For now we know that we will have more to celebrate come today and after. But in it we need to use our athletic prowess in Beijing as a springboard to better things. Very definitely, our coaches will be in demand and the country that easily comes to mind is China. It is established that we have what the Chinese want, and I do not want to be wrong in assuming that our political leaders and entrepreneurs have already approached them.

This country is a work in progress and we have many hurdles to leap over. How we do it is key. We can either choose to stumble our way over them or be put off by the array in front of us. Or, ideally we can sail our way smoothly over them to a new greatness. There is no doubt. We have it in us.

We need only to take it to the next level. I congratulate our athletes and expect more from them. Congrats also to my son, Maurice, in whom I am well pleased.

Congrats to his friend and compatriot, Richard Phillips, for being only the third Jamaican to appear in a 110 hurdles finals at the Olympics. There was the first, Keith Gardener, in 1960, then Maurice Wignall in 2004 and 2008. My heart is full, as they say.

BIG CONGRATS to Usain Bolt whose lightning strike brought thunder again in a world-record run in the 200m yesterday. What an awesome Jamaican! And just when we thought there would be a break, Melaine Walker comes into view, cool and collected, to win big in the 400m hurdles. Jamaica, we are alive!

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WALKER... cool and collected



MARK WIGNALL