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THE GENIUS OF JAMAICA'S ATHLETES

Cricket is to Jamaica as soccer is to the U.K., and star players become national heroes. Among them are:

- George Headley (1930's)
- Alfred Valentine (1950's)
- Lawrence Rowe (1970's)
- Michael Holding (1970's)
- Ambassador Courtney Walsh, currently the world's leading wicket taker; he took the 435th wicket at Sabina Park in Kingston, overtaking Kapil Dev, then the top wicket taker.

Track and field stars from Jamaica have been numerous. Since Jamaica first entered the Olympics arena in 1934, the island nation has competed in 13 sessions. Jimmy Carnegie wrote in *Great Jamaican Olympians*: "No nation other than the United States of America has produced as many male Olympics sprint medalists since Jamaica started competing in the Olympics after the Second World War. On a per capita basis, Jamaica is second to none."

Some Highlights:

- Herb McKenley, Les Laing, Arthur Wint and George Rhoden. The quartet won the 4 x 400 meters relay at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics.
- Donald Quarrie won the 200-meter gold in the 1976 Montreal Olympics.
- Merlene Ottey is the only female track athlete to date to have competed in six Olympic Games.

- Dionne Hemmings is the only Jamaican female athlete to win an Olympic gold medal and the only female Olympic gold medalist in this hemisphere; she won the 400-meter hurdle event in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

More Medalists Include:

- Michael Blackwood, 400-meter gold medalist, 2002 Commonwealth Games.
- Asafa Powell, 100-meter gold medalist, 2003 Pan American Games.
- Bridgette Foster, 100-meter sprint hurdles silver medalist, Women's World Athletics Championship 2003, Paris.
- High jumpers Germaine Mason and Bridgette Foster were crowned Pan American Games champions in 2003, and hold number-two spots in their respective disciplines in the IAAF World Rankings.

Jamaica's National Olympics Committee oversees the island's participation in the Commonwealth Games.

Football (soccer) dates back to 1893, when Jamaica formed its first football club. The sport gained momentum between 1925 and 1962 as Jamaica regularly competed with other islands in the region, often hosting matches at Kingston's Sabina Park, and by 1966 Jamaica entered its first World Cup tournament. In 1998, the Jamaican national team, commonly referred to as **The Reggae Boyz**, became the first English-speaking Caribbean team to make it to the World Cup finals, played that year in France.

Boxing great Michael McCallum became the first Jamaican world boxing champion when he won the WBA junior middleweight title in 1984. He won the WBA middleweight title in 1989, then the WBC light heavyweight title in 1994.

Cycling: Xavier Miranda became the first Jamaican to win a medal in cycling (a silver) at the 1974 Commonwealth Games, following this triumph with a gold at the Central American and Caribbean Games. David Weller won the bronze at the 1978 Commonwealth Games, and another bronze at the Moscow Olympics in 1980.

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