

Let's Join Hands

When the curtains are raised on the 20th Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy the black, green and gold flying high above the white snows of the Italian Alps, leading the Jamaican Delegation will be noticeably absent. Alas, for the first time since we shocked the world and qualified for the 1988 Calgary Games, the Jamaica Bobsleigh Team will not be competing in the Winter Olympic Games.

We have come a long way over the past sixteen years. From crashing so spectacularly in Calgary, we now speed down the icy chute with the ease and dexterity of men guiding a bamboo raft down the lazy Rio Grande. We have beaten veritable bobsled powers in major competitions including the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics. We have led a horde of warm weather nations competing in the Winter Olympic Games - Mexico, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago and the USVI have all followed suite in the bobsled events. A whole host of African nations have also entered athletes.

From the beginning we have been as explosive at the start line as our summer athletes that have surged forward to win Olympic glory. That continues. What has also sadly continued is our inexplicable ability to raise the funds necessary for us to continue to compete at the Olympic level. It seems we have a lot more work to do in that area. Our lone driver, Winston Watt, was a force majeure on the America's Cup circuit in the United States and Canada, but with very limited ice time, he was only able to manage a fourth place finish in Koenigsee, Germany and thus did not qualify for the Olympics.

However, all is not totally lost. Although Jamaica will not be represented as a nation, when the bobsled event gets underway, a Jamaican will be there. Lascelles Brown, who with Winston Watt recorded the fastest start in the two man event in the Salt Lake City Games, now represents Canada.

His career highlights include

- 2005-06 – Canadian Championships (two-man): First place
- 2005-06 – Canadian Championships (four-man): First place
- 2004-05 – World Championships, Calgary (two-man): First place
- 2004-05 – World Championships, Calgary (four-man): Third place
- 2004 – Canadian Championships (two-man): First place
- 2004 – Canadian Championships (four-man): First place
- 2002 – Olympic Winter Games (two-man) World record - 4.78 secs

The 31 year old former butcher from Clarendon, joined the Jamaica Bobsleigh Team in 1999. He is revered for his speed and power and is now, along with Switzerland's Beat Hefti and Kevin Kuske of Germany, considered one of the top three brakemen in the world. If all goes well, we will have the first Jamaican stepping on the podium at the Winter Olympics. I tell you, that almost sounds as crazy as when we first entered the arena calling ourselves the Jamaica Bobsleigh Team! What is certainly not crazy though, is the idea that there are any more Lascelle Browns and Winston Watts scattered throughout our beautiful island. I believe we have many Merlene Otteys waiting to don a bobsled helmet and turn on the speed.

Let us join hands to find them. A Jamaican will likely end up on the medal podium in Torino, Italy. Of that we can be proud. Still, with proper funding and support, a team competing under our flag could also stand proud while our national anthem is played and medals are

hung from their necks. There is no telling what a Jamaican team of Winston Watt and Lascelles Brown could have done. Let us join hands to give future teams the opportunity to make it happen so that we can all share in the joy and pride of their achievements.

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