

South African High School Athletes to Visit Jamaica

South Africa's Willowridge High School plans to send 35 students to Jamaica early next year for a 10-day visit, during which they hope to compete with top Jamaican high school athletes engaged in the annual Boys and Girls Champs.

The tour was initiated by the school's head coach, 2006 Commonwealth silver medallist, Geraldine Pillay, and confirmed by Jamaica's Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Hon. Olivia "Babsy" Grange, on her return Sunday (September 27) from a visit to South Africa. Pillay lived in Jamaica in 2007, when she trained with Stephen Francis and the Maximising Velocity Power (MVP) Track and Field Club at the University of Technology (UTech). This allowed her to train with Jamaican tracks stars Sherone Simpson, Brigitte Foster-Hylton and Asafa Powell, among others. Miss Grange says that, through the agreement for the tour, her Ministry was opening up another window of opportunity created by the superb performances of Jamaican athletes at Beijing in 2008 and in Berlin last month. "You will be totally blown away when you visit Jamaica and witness the atmosphere surrounding Champs," she told the gathering. She also took the opportunity to expose the students to aspects of Jamaica's culture and heritage. Pillay said that she was excited that that her team will be able to share her experience in Jamaica, which helped her to develop as an international athlete. Miss Grange said Monday (Sept 28) that, while the Willowridge students would not be able to compete at Boys and Girls Champs at the National Stadium next year, she was sure that there would be ample opportunity for them to compete against top Jamaican high school athletes during the period. She expressed the hope that this would be the start of a new era, in which foreign high school athletes would visit Jamaica, to experience the coaching environment in which the country's top athletes develop their skills.