

50 years of Great performances in sports

When one celebrates a birthday there are many things to remember. When the celebration covers as many as 50 years, however, there are many, many more things to remember - to roll out and to dust off, to polish, to try and recover the sheen, the lustre, and to parade them for old times sake.

A Golden Jubilee is filled with a myriad things to remember, and particularly for Jamaica, especially in sport, many things which make countries, including those which are bigger and richer, red with envy every time the deeds of Jamaica are read out loud for all to hear. If, for a moment, you spare a glance back, you will see the great and glorious achievements of Jamaican champions like George Headley, Alfred Valentine, Allan Rae, and Franz Alexander in cricket, Herb McKenley, Arthur Wint, George Rhoden, Les Laing in track and field and Lindy Delapenha in football. You will also see athletes like Cynthia Thompson, Hyacinth Walters, Kathleen Russell, and Carmen Phipps, women who, though not as great as Headley, McKenley and company, were the forerunners to the champions, the queens, of today. While their numbers were small in those days, from August 6, 1962, from the day of reckoning, from the day the Black, Green, and Gold replaced the Union Jack, and Eternal Father Land We Love took over from God Save The Queen, the numbers have grown and the greatness has swelled beyond belief. In fact, from August 5, 1962, from the day preceding Independence Day, from the night Bunny Grant defeated England's Dave Charnley on points for the British Empire lightweight boxing title, Jamaica has been ticking off success after success, has been notching greatness after greatness until it has now reached a stage where what others take for greatness, Jamaicans consider as nothing but run-of-the mill exercises. Grant's dazzling fists against Charnley on that memorable night in 1962 were followed by great, great performances at the Olympic Games, Test matches, tennis tournaments, World Cup football tournament, world netball championships, boxing matches, and at many other events all over the world as Jamaica and Jamaicans left their mark indelibly printed on the map of sport. Great performances One of the best of them, or arguably one of the most memorable of them, and one of the most mouth-watering of them all was the brilliance of Richard Russell and Lance Lumsden on October 9, 1966, when they surprised and defeated Arthur Ashe and Charlie Pasarell of the United States of America 6-4, 7-9, 14-12, 4-6, 6-4 in the American Zone of the Davis Cup at St Andrew Club in Kingston. It was not a Jamaica team, it was a Caribbean team, but it was a pair of Jamaicans playing the doubles match after the team had lost the opening singles, and no one, not their fathers nor their mothers, expected a victory. After that the great performances came roaring on like a gushing stream. Lawrence Rowe's record entry of 214 and 100 not out in Test cricket against New Zealand in 1972 and his Jamaican Test-best of 302 against England at Kensington Oval in 1974; Don Quarrie's 200 metres gold at the Montreal Olympics in 1976; Michael Holding's 14 wickets for 149 runs in the fifth Test at The Oval in 1976; and Merlene Ottey's gold medal runs in the 200 metres at the World Championships in Stuttgart and in Gothenburg in 1993 and in 1995 were some of them. There was also, not to be forgotten, Ottey's grand and controversial photo-finish with America's Gail Devers in the 100 metres in 1993, the 10.82 clocking which, so the officials said, placed her second. In 1996, it was Deon Hemmings's golden run in the women's 400 metres hurdles at the Atlanta Olympics, in 2004, it was Veronica Campbell's gold in the women's 200 metres, and it was also the time when Campbell led home Tanya Lawrence, Sherone Simpson, and Aleem Bailey to win the 4 x 100 relay gold. Jamaica had won their first women's relay gold in Sydney in 2000 when Sandie Richards, Hemmings, Lorraine Graham, and Catherine Scott stormed to victory in the 4 x 400 relay. In the square jungle, Michael McCallum, the 'Body Snatcher', cannot be forgotten for his exploits on the night of October 19, 1984, in New York's Madison Square Gardens when he defeated Ireland's Sean Mannion to win the WBA Super Welterweight boxing crown to become the first Jamaican to win a world boxing title. He went on to win many more and to score some unforgettable victories, including a stunning knockout of American Donald Curry, once a brash, former world welterweight champion. It was a leaping left, a glorious hook which knocked Curry cold before he hit the canvass. Another great memory came at the Leila Robinson Courts in 2003 when Jamaica beat England 46-40 for third place at the World Netball Championships, but even that paled in comparison to the 53-52 victory over England in New Zealand in 2007 as Jamaica hung on to third place. One of the greatest sports, as far as Jamaica is concerned, is cricket, and therefore one of the most touching moments was at Sabina Park on March 27, 2000, the fourth day of the second Test versus Zimbabwe when Wavell Hinds dived at forward short-leg to catch last-man Henry Olonga and handed Courtney Walsh his 435th wicket. That was the then world record for the number of Test wickets by a bowler, and he finished his career as the record holder with 519. Before that, in 1998, Jamaica played in their only World Cup football tournament, and what a joy it was to see, to experience. Jamaica, little Jamaica, lost to Croatia 1-2 with Robert Earle scoring Jamaica's first World Cup finals goal, lost to powerful Argentina 0-5, but then defeated Japan 2-1 with both goals from Theodore Whitmore after a truly creditable first performance. A victory in the first World Cup finals tournament was something to cheer. The best was yet come, however. At the Olympic Games in Beijing, China, Usain Bolt won the 100 and 200 metres in world record times; Shelly-Ann Fraser won the 100 metres gold with Sherone Simpson and Kerron Stewart tying for second; Veronica Campbell won the 200 metres gold with Stewart taking the bronze; and Nesta Carter, Michael Frater, Bolt, and Asafa Powell won the 4 x 100 relay gold in world record time as Jamaica dominated the sprint events, male and female. Majestic style With Jamaica dropping the baton in the 4 x 100 women's relay when tipped to win going away, Melaine Walker won the 400 metres hurdles gold in Olympic record time. And then, one year later, at the World Athletic Championships in Berlin, came the visions of Bolt winning, in majestic style. the 100 metres and the 200 metres in unbelievable world record times of 9.58 and 19.19; Fraser winning the women's 100; Brigitte Foster-Hylton winning the

gold medal for the women's 100 hurdles; and Melaine Walker pocketing the 400 metres hurdles gold again. With Yohan Blake feasting on Bolt's false start at the World Championships in 2011 to win the 100 metres, and Bolt dashing to victory in the 200 metres, there was yet another reminder of Jamaica's greatness in sport. There are many other memories that tell of Jamaica's greatness in sport, memories such as Fuarnado Roberts beating ex-world champion Richard Bergman in a one-off, one-set exhibition table tennis game in 1958; Orville Haslam defeating USA's John Tannahill during the Lovebird Table Tennis Tournament in the 1970s; Joy Foster going into the Guinness record book as the world's youngest champion at age eight, and, coming from a land of year-long sunshine, the bobsledders' famous entry into the Winter Olympics. Source: Jamaica Gleaner