

Bronze Medal Jumper Proud To Be Jamaican



With sprinter Briana Williams leading the way, a time may be coming when Jamaican track and field teams have more athletes from the Diaspora. Retired long jumper Chelsea Hammond walked that road all the way to an Olympic bronze medal. Overjoyed to have represented her country, Hammond says competing in black-green-and-gold brought her an immense sense of pride.

Born in New York into a Jamaican family, Hammond left the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China with a fourth place finish despite a personal best of 6.79 metres. More than a decade later, a retroactive doping disqualification for the runner-up Tatyana Lebedeva of Russia gave Hammond the first medal ever won by Jamaica in the women's long jump.

"I have to tell you it's one of my proudest moments to know, of all the great athletes that, and especially jumpers, all the great jumpers that come out of Jamaica that I was the only one to actually medal in Jamaica's history", she said last week.

"Honestly, I'm humbled to know that I'm able to put the country on that kind of pedestal", Hammond stated.

Nevertheless, there is a lingering disappointment. "I was consistently jumping 6.80s in practice so for me to jump that at the meet, it wasn't a surprise and then it was hurtful because I know for a fact I scratched a 7 metres jump and I only fouled by just maybe the tip of your finger, the tip of your finger", added Hammond.

That foul came in the fourth round. After the disqualification, only the winner Maureen Maggi of Brazil exceeded 7 metres.

Like 2018 World Under 20 champions Williams and Damion Thomas, Hammond rose through the US high school system. "In New York, and especially where we were, there were so many people from other countries, from the islands, from Europe, from Asia, everywhere, right? So it was rare to find someone who had parents who were actually from America. That was, like, unheard of, so growing up, when someone asked you what are you, you said, 'I'm Jamaican' ", she related.

"I've always been a jumper", the Elmont Memorial High graduate said of her early days. "I've done all sports. I played basketball, played volleyball. When I was younger, I had a good bit of speed and I've been doing the long jump from when I first started track when I was seven", she reviewed.

Hammond reached the University of South Carolina as a long jumper and heptathlete. "I was a sprinter, the 100/200 and I would jump if they had it at the track meet. I think I realized I was a little better in the long jump when I won State in New York and then when I got to South Carolina, I was making progress quickly and it's all because it's something I love to do. I absolutely love to long jump, absolutely love it", she remembered.

She therefore knows what drives the next generation of athletes from the Diaspora. "There is a certain pride that comes with knowing, one, that you are able to continue a legacy with your family. You're still representing your culture because even if you're not born there, it's still your culture. You can't run from it", she explained.

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