

Gold at Last - Jamaica Wins First World Junior 4 x 400 Metres Relay Boys



In 7 trips to the World Junior Championships, Jamaica had compiled a pleasing record in the boy's 4x400 metres relay but there was one thing missing - a gold medal. That changed for the better at the 8th renewal of the Under 20 global championships in 2000, thanks to Sekou Clarke, Aldwyn Sappleton, Pete Coley and Brandon Simpson. Their remarkable

triumph added to Jamaica's famous history in the long relay.

Clarke, Sappleton, Coley and Simpson raced to the top of the podium on October 22 in Santiago, Chile and leadoff runner Clarke, the youngest member of the team, was a little apprehensive. "I definitely was nervous, but I was more anxious to perform big since we were underdogs", recalled the athlete who had starred at Boys and Girls Championships for Jamaica College with a swift class 200/400 metres double.

Clarke ran steadily and delivered the baton to Sappleton who had earlier reached the 800 metres final. As he had done all season for Munro College, Sappleton zoomed forward. His surge kept Jamaica in the race.

His Munro College teammate Coley was ready. "Once I received the baton from Aldwyn there was indeed some traffic in front of me so I had to make an in-race adjustment. I wanted to stay close until the last 100 metres, then I would make a late charge to the finish line", he remembered earlier this month. His late charge put Jamaica in second place, with only Germany ahead.

"Once I gave Brandon the baton in second place I knew we were going to win. I know how talented he is plus earlier in the meet he won the silver medal in the open 400 metres. Like myself, he is very good at chasing and he was looking very comfortable in second place", Coley added.

Clarke was confident as well. "I knew we had a good team and Brandon was in the shape of his life, so that added some layer of confidence", he said earlier this week.

They were both right. Simpson had earlier won the silver medal in the flat 400 metres in a personal best time of 45.73 seconds and never looked stressed in the relay. He tracked Germany's Bastian Swillims, a 400 metres semi-finalist, until they turned into the home stretch. At that point, Simpson sprinted away to a famous victory. Jamaica clocked 3:06.06 seconds with the anchor leg timed in 45.3 seconds. Once a teammate of Sappleton and Coley at Munro and then at Ardenne High School, Simpson said, "I know we all put in the work and it came out great in the end."

Their winning time was the fastest by an under 20 national team in 2000.

Jamaica's great record in the 4x400 metres relay at the meet now known as the World Under 20 Championships has continued since then, with three more medals. However, none of them have managed to repeat the feat of the Santiago quartet. Clarke, who won silver at the 2002 World Juniors in Kingston teamed with Jermaine Myers, Usain Bolt and Jermaine Gonzales, put the unique nature of the achievement in perspective. "It was very surprising knowing the long history of Jamaican junior and senior quarter mile talent. Nonetheless, It was a proud moment and humbling experience to be a part of Jamaican history", he underlined.

The relay run gave Jamaica its third victory of the meet and in the boys 4x400 metres relay, it was gold at last!

HL