

HIGH HOPES FOR OUR HIGH HURDLERS



Jamaica has learnt to count on its hurdlers for medals on the global stage. The expectations are similar as the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics approach, with reigning 110 metre hurdles champion Omar McLeod leading the way. In fact, with McLeod and 2015 World 100 metre hurdles champion Danielle Williams in the mix, gold medals are not out of the question.

MEN

McLeod can chase history as only Americans Lee Calhoun (1956/1960) and Roger Kingdom (1984/1988) have ever retained the 110 metre hurdles title. Injured during the 2019 World final, the Jamaican is a fearsome force. Speedy and technically good, the 26 year-old has 2012 Olympics bronze medallist Hansle Parchment, the last two Commonwealth Champions Andrew Riley and Ronald Levy, 2018 World U 20 gold and silver medallists Damion Thomas and Orlando Bennett, and 2017 World U 18 Champion Dejour Russell as potential Tokyo teammates.

Together, they should build on a platform laid by Maurice “Mr Smooth” Wignall and Keith Gardner. The latter made the 1960 Olympics final. Wignall matched that feat in 2004 and since then, Jamaica has been represented in the final ever since.

To this point, “Mr Smooth” is the only Jamaican to reach the final twice - 2004 and 2008. If McLeod or Parchment succeed in Tokyo, they will join the retired 2006 Commonwealth gold medallist in an exclusive Jamaican club.

McLeod might even dip below his national record of 12.90 seconds.

WOMEN

Dionne Rose and Michelle Freeman put Jamaica in the Olympics 100 metre hurdles final for the first time at the 1996 Games in Atlanta. Since then, three of our hurdlers - Brigitte Foster-Hylton and Delloreen Ennis-London in both 2000 and 2008 and Lacena Golding-Clarke in 2004 - have made their way to the final.

Prolific in the World Championships with medals ranging back to a bronze for Freeman in 1997 and gold for Foster-Hylton and Williams in 2009 and 2015 respectively, Jamaica will seek its first Olympics medal in Tokyo.

Williams, now 28, Janeek Brown and Megan Tapper all reached the 2019 World Championship final, with Williams placing third. That mirrored the achievement of Foster-Hylton, 2002 Commonwealth Games queen Golding-Clarke and Vonette Dixon in the 2003 World Championships, where Brigitte took silver.

Add semi-finalist Yanique Thompson, and World U 20 record holder Brittany Anderson and it is clear that Jamaica will be a force in Tokyo.

Among others to be considered are possibly 2016 World U 20 Championship runner-up Rushelle Burton and Dazsay Freeman. Third when Anderson won the 2017 World U 18 title, Freeman is now at the University of Arkansas where McLeod and Brown blossomed. Also on the radar are World U 18 record holder Ackera Nugent and 2017 and 2018 Carifta winner Amoi Brown. It's a deep, deep squad.

Notably, Williams was the fastest woman in the world in 2019 with her national record of 12.32 seconds.

The welcome gift of hurdles late in December from Japan's Tottori Athletics Association will help Jamaica develop skills that will pay dividends in the future. In 2021, it appears that Jamaica will reap the benefits of decades of work by our athletes and our coaches, at home and abroad, in the sprint hurdles. **Milestone medals await.**

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