

### 3 Minute Barrier Broken; Jamaica 4 x 400 m History Made



On August 13, 1995, Jamaica broke through the barrier that divides 4x400 teams and began a new era. Michael McDonald, Davian Clarke, Dennis Blake and Danny McFarlane clocked a national record 2:58.29 in the

heats at the World Championships in Goteborg, Sweden with an effort that remains a landmark.

Now a coach at the University of Texas El Paso, Clarke recalled on August 10, "we knew we could run sub 3. That was never a doubt, and when we knew that once we put Gregory (Haughton) in the final, we thought we could win the gold." McDonald, World Junior Champion the year before, led off in 45.2 seconds with the 19 year-old Clarke, Blake and McFarlane following with legs timed in 43.7, 44.80 and 44.60. Jamaica was leading near the end until McFarlane eased off to save energy for the final.

The old mark - 3:00.01 - had been decimated.

The line-up set a template for Jamaica for years to come. "I think McDonald did a great job running that first leg. He was confident, he was aggressive which is what we always put him on first leg because he was the most aggressive of us all over the first 300 so we thought he would make a good starter", Davian outlined. His own outstanding leg came after some concern. Clarke was a rookie in his first senior international and Jamaica had suffered a DQ at the 1992 Olympics on the second leg. "But then the team rallied round and said, coach, don't worry, this guy has been running 4x4s in the US and I ran for KC and Jamaica for years. I said, it's not my first time running second leg. I'll be fine", he assured.

"Blake did an excellent run and Danny was jogging. We could have run 2.57. Danny slowed down and started looking back at the US guy and was playing around so we were very confident we could have run faster", he stated.

With individual 400 metre bronze medallist Haughton resting for the final, the prospects were bright. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't bright for the final. Nevertheless, Jamaica took the silver and again broke three minutes. Clarke felt the difference on his leg. "I thought I did the same run or faster and I ran slower, 44.1 in the final because of that headwind in the straightaway", the 1996 and 2004 Olympic 400 metre finalist reflected.

The 2.58.29 is still the sixth fastest time ever by a Jamaican team.

With the 1995 group often in the thick of things, a deep squadron of Jamaican 400 metre men collected medals at the next 4 World Championships and the 1996 and 2000 Olympics. The squadron included 2003 World runner-up Michael Blackwood, Olympic and World finalist Brandon Simpson, 1999 Pan-Am Junior champion Sanjay Ayre, Linval Laird, Garth Robinson, Michael Campbell, Paston Coke, 400 metre hurdlers Omar Brown and Mario Watts and 2001 World 200 metre silver medallist Chris Williams.

The record didn't last. McDonald, Haughton, McFarlane and Clarke took it down to 2 minutes 56.75 seconds at the 1997 World Championships.

In addition, McDonald, 1996 Olympic finalist Roxbert Martin, Haughton and Clarke set records at the 1998 Commonwealth Games - 2.59.03 - and at the 1999 Pan-Am Games with a time of 2.57.97 by McDonald, Haughton, McFarlane and Clarke.

The tradition has been maintained with medals at the 2011, 2013 and 2019 World Championships and the 2016 Olympics but a new era began on August 13, 1995 when Jamaica broke 3 minutes for the first time.