

SPORTS

Sports
Scope

BY FRED STURRUP



DONALD THOMAS

Donald Thomas, 10 years removed from global title

Ten years ago, in Osaka, Japan, a relatively newcomer to the elite high jump class, Donald Thomas, achieved one of the major surprise performances of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) 2007 World Championships.

The Grand Bahamian captured the global high jump title. A decade removed from the accomplishment that stamped him as a Bahamian sports superstar, Thomas is still rolling along within the quality world high jump circle at the age of 33. We chatted some, when he was in Grand Bahama two months ago for the Bahamas Association of Athletic Associations (BAAA) Nationals.

He appeared at peace with himself, safe in the knowledge that despite a sub-par performance (2.25 meters for second), he still is capable of clearing the bar at 2.30 meters plus. In fact, in 2017, he has jumped 2.31 meters and will be the lone high jumper for The Bahamas at the London IAAF World Championships, August 4-14.

Indeed, Thomas is yet again a member of a World Championships team and looks capable of being around for a few more years, inclusive of the 2020 Olympics. In the years that ensued since his triumph in Osaka, Thomas has won every major world gold medal in his specialty other than an elusive Olympic title. Gold medals in the 2010 Commonwealth Games; the 2011 Pan American Games and the 2010 Central American and Caribbean Games, cemented his iconic status.

Thomas is still a marketable sports commodity. Every season, he gets his share of invitations to compete on the circuit in Europe and Asia, particularly. At the major event, he is a regular finalist, as per the last three Worlds and the Rio Olympics of 2016.

However, there are questions that hover over his head.

Is there one more big medal performance in his legs?

Can those legs muster what is necessary to propel him over the bar into medal contention in London?

He would readily accept the fact that the challenge to win a major medal becomes greater the more he ages.

At this time, the high jump rage in the world is a thin 26-year-old from Qatar, Mutaz Essa Barmis. The Qatari athlete owns the second best high jump effort in history 2.43 meters just below the Cuban Javier Sotomayer's 2.45 world record (as of 1993).

This year, Barmis has looked unbeatable, jumping mostly between 2.35 meters and 2.38 meters. His lowest winning jump going into the London Championships was a 2.33 meters effort. There are always the Europeans to contend with as well.

Thomas is expected to be a finalist in London. Whether he can get on the medal podium depends upon Thomas being able to rise to the occasion.

He is no stranger to the 2.30 meters territory and has gone as high as 2.37 meters, just last year. Similar jumps in London could bring him another World Championships medal.

Go Donald!

(To respond to this column, kindly contact Fred Sturup at sturup1504@gmail.com or on WhatsApp at 727-6363).



DREAMING BIG – The Buddy Hield Dream Week Tournament tips off today and eight high school teams look to claim the ultimate prize. On hand for the announcement of the tournament were coaches (seated left to right) Brett Michael, Sam Groomes, Sacramento Kings' Chavanno "Buddy" Hield, Luke Barnwell, Daniel Harper and Trey Slate. Standing left to right, Dream Week coordinator Jalissa Hield; Success and Enemies' Philcher Grant; Tournament Director Jay Philippe and "Coach Allan." (PHOTO: SHAYNE STUBBS)

Dream Week Basketball Tournament set to tip-off today

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At 4:00 p.m. Thursday, August 3 the Inaugural Buddy Hield Dream Week Basketball Tournament is expected to tip off, with the purpose of assisting competing teams in a major way as a result of their participation.

While the camp segment of the Dream Week wrapped yesterday, the high school teams are ready for their portion of this first year's event.

With a venue yet to be solidified, organizers have set the stage for the St. Georges Gym, where spectators will get an early look at eight of the senior boys' high school teams on the island.

Competing in the single elimination tournament will be the Tabernacle Falcons, St.

Georges' Jaguars, Sunland Stingers, Jack Hayward Wildcats, Bishop Michael Eldon Warriors, Mary Star Crusaders, Eight Mile Rock Blue Jays and Pine Forest Academy.

The Stingers will face the Blue Jays in the opening game at 4:00 p.m. followed by the Jaguars taking on the Crusaders at 5:00 p.m. At 6:00 p.m. the Wildcats take on Pine Forest followed by the Falcons taking on the Warriors at 7:00 p.m.

The semi-finals are set to tip-off at 10:00 a.m. on Friday.

The winner of Wildcats/Pine Forest match will take on the winner of the Warriors/Falcons game, in game one of that morning. The winner of the Jaguars/Crusaders clash will then take on the winner of the Stingers/Blue Jays contest.

At 5:00 p.m. the third place game will take place between the losers of the semi-final con-

tests. At 6:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. respectively, a three-point competition and slam-dunk competition will take place and the championship game will be the climax of the night at 7:00 p.m., along with the awards presentation.

As mentioned, the teams are expected to benefit from participating in the tournament. The winning team will receive a \$5,000 reward along with basketball gear and all participating teams will receive \$2,500 as well as some new basketball gear.

"The whole thing is about coming back and giving back to kids, having fun and giving them an experience they never had before, and just having a good time," Hield said at a recently held press conference.

The title sponsor for Dream Week is Success and Enemies, and Hield felt their involvement

showed how kind-hearted they were in "opening up" to the little kids.

Philcher Grant, director of strategic planning for Success and Enemies, noted that the S&E brand's three core qualities were knowing your true self, daring to dream and living your dream with no apologies, "and making sure you leave the world a better place than when you met it."

Those core principles tied into what the Sacramento Kings' shooting guard and Dream Week, which is why the organization jumped at the opportunity.

"He was a small time island boy... he had a dream and he went after that dream, but his dream gave vision to others to understand that despite your geographical difference we can still do what we want to do and we can dream and live those dreams."

YMCA Water Polo Program latest hit among youngsters

(From Pgae 11)

The program is still ongoing since its July 25 inception. She was also impressed with coach Carey and Albury's discipline in the sport.

Albury admitted one of their goals was to possibly get play-

ers from Grand Bahama to join a national team. However, with the increase of interested children he noted the possibility of fielding a team in Grand Bahama. The program started with seven players and grew to 21.

"Within the four weeks that

we practiced so far we got enough kids to actually make a good team and this is the best progress that I've seen from any amount of kids within the short time frame we had."

Albury stood impressed with the way the swimmers grasped the concept of the sport and

noted, "Within the two weeks they grasped what they could have learned in two months. It's a good percentage of accuracy that they have and they're doing well. They have a good chance of actually making a great team way better than how Nassau started out."

Bolt says no chance of loss or comeback in farewell worlds

LONDON (AP) — An encore for Usain Bolt? Unthinkable.

A loss in his going-away party? Impossible.

Track's fastest man and greatest entertainer made both those points clear Tuesday leading to his final world championships this week. It was an engaging hour filled with reminiscences, chats about his plans and thoughts about where his troubled and soon-to-be-starless sport might be headed.

Sporting the goatee he wears during world championships, but not the Olympics, the superstar who went nine for nine at the Summer Games, shattering records while dancing and smiling his way through the journey, dispensed any notion he might come back: "For me, the next championships should be fun because now it's time to watch and see who can hold their nerves," said the 11-time world champion, who turns 31 on Aug. 21.

As for the possibility he'd change his mind should he lose in Saturday night's 100-meter final: "It's not going to happen, so we won't have that problem. Don't worry," he said.

He said he's looking forward to a life of motivational speaking, occasional soccer games with friends and maybe dipping his toe into action movies to keep the adrenaline flowing.

As for the past, one of Bolt's most interesting revelations was that his now-famous "To the World" pose, which he debuted after winning his first Olympic gold medal in Beijing, was completely unplanned.

"It's just something that happened," Bolt said. "I guess it was by the grace of God. It became big. For me, it worked."

Almost every celebration since — the moderator said Bolt has taken 147 victory laps over his career — has been pre-planned, drenched in Jamaican flags and reggae music and every bit worth the wait. Among the few impromptu moments came at the last world championships, two years ago in Beijing, when a photographer riding a Segway accidentally upended him during his victory lap.

That man made a videotaped appearance at the news conference and told Bolt: "You inspired me to become more focused in my work."

"It was shocking," said Bolt, who popped right back up after the spill. "I didn't get hurt, so it was funny."

On a more serious note, he was asked how he has prepared for each season as his career has progressed. Like flipping through the calendar, Bolt ticked off his goals and motivations for each year since he burst onto the scene in 2008, a relative un-

known whose only goal was to become an Olympic champion in his main race, the 200 meters.

Early on, he took umbrage to the slights: for instance, that despite setting four world records, his success in 2008 came because his main challenger, Tyson Gay, was hurt. Or how in 2012, many were favoring teammate Yohan Blake at the Olympics after Bolt lost to him twice earlier in the summer in Jamaica.

As the calendar kept turning and Bolt kept proving himself, his mission became more about trying to secure his place in history. When he swept gold for the third straight Olympics last year in Rio de Janeiro, he reached the legendary status he sought.

"Now that I got to my goal, I'm good with it," he said. "I've proven myself."

He fielded the obligatory questions about doping. Bolt has never been caught. Many in his country, and in the sprint game he dominates, have. The last two years have been filled with sordid stories of doping corruption in Russia that brought track and field to a new low.

"The only place track and field has to go is up," Bolt said. "Hopefully we're going to get it going in the right direction and continue going in the right direction."

His most telling comments — or non-comments — came when

he was asked who might fill his shoes after he leaves.

"I'm not going down that road," Bolt said. "The last guy I said was going to be great disrespected me."

It was almost certainly a reference to Andre De Grasse, the Canadian up-and-comer who brazenly pushed Bolt last year in the Olympic 200 meter semifinals.

If there's going to be drama in Saturday's 100 final, De Grasse is the best bet to provide it.

But Bolt doesn't see that as a problem.

"You guys know if I show up at a championship, you know I'm fully confident and ready to go," he said.

He unveiled the gold-and-purple shoes he'll wear for his final championships. The purple is for his school colors back home at William Knibb Memorial High School. The gold is self-explanatory.

His sponsor, Puma, has been promoting the phrase "Fastest Forever," in the lead-up to the worlds, which will take place in the same London stadium where Bolt won Olympic medals 4, 5 and 6.

But Bolt has a different idea. "Unbeatable," he said. "For me, that would be the biggest headline. Unbeatable. Unstoppable. Hear that guys? Jot it down."