

The late National Politician Dr. Bernard Nottage

# NOTTAGE PASSES

## Leaves Philly Johnson as lone survivor of '68 historic squad



A Sporting stalwart

**D**r. BJ Nottage has passed. I remember a pre-Olympic meet, outside of Mexico City in 1968. Because of his hamstring problems, the decision was made to give Tommy Robinson the least amount of track competition time, leading up to the official start of the Olympic Games that year.

Accordingly, Robinson and I (then a young sports journalist representing the *Nassau Guardian*) were on the infield. The lineup for that pre-meet was Norris Stubbs, Philly Johnson, Bernard Nottage and Kevin Johnson. Yes, Philly Johnson, is often forgotten from that historic sprint group.

That day Philly had his finest moment. His hand-off to BJ was smooth and the future gynecologist/supreme sports administrator/politician powered around to the other Johnson, Kevin. The Bahamas was far in front and headed for a national record. Having the race easily won, Kevin virtually trotted the last 20 meters.

I remember BJ being annoyed. "Kevin you should have run through to the finish," he scolded.

That was the competitive spirit in BJ. He wanted to maximize all opportunities.

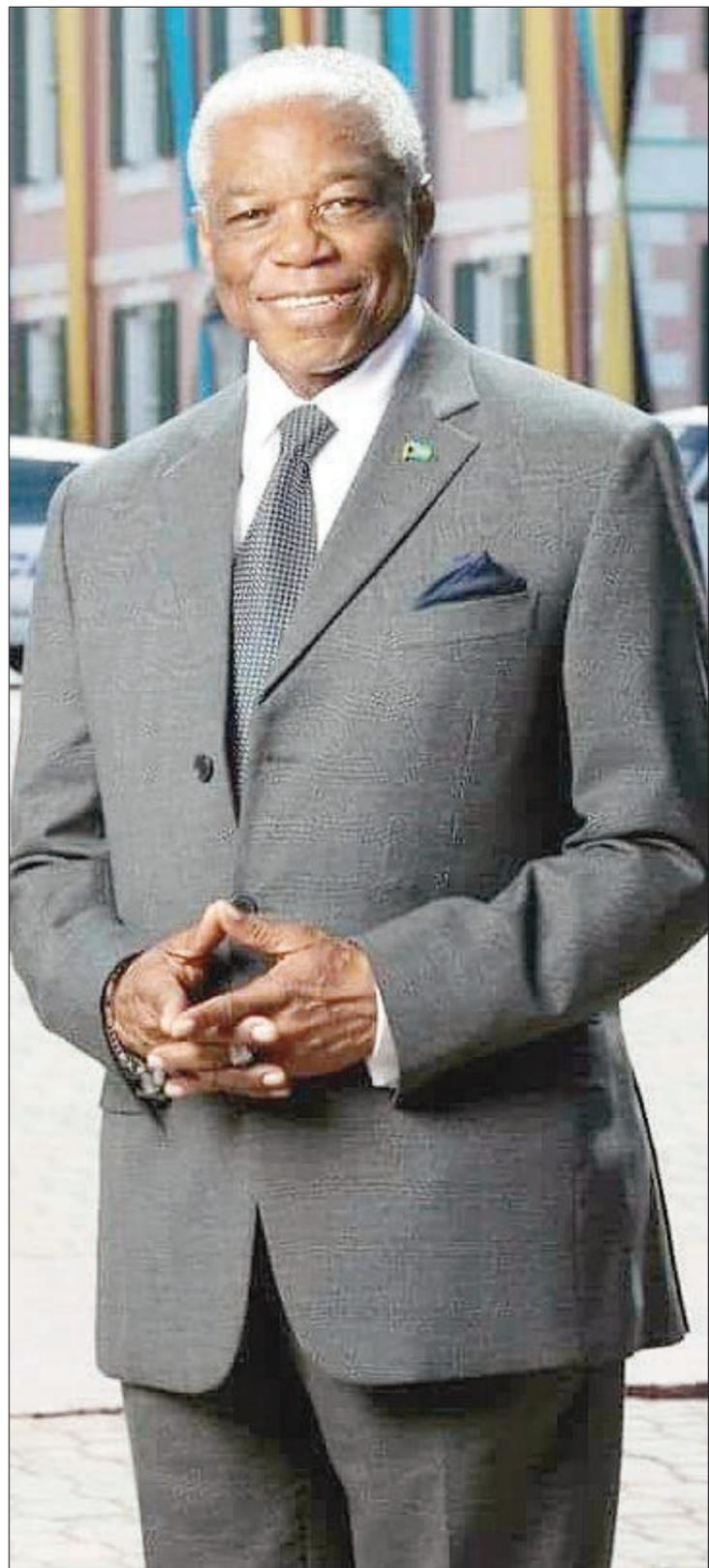
We all knew the national mark would have been smashed for sure. Perhaps the time would have been lower than the 39.4, the team, with Robinson aboard, registered a week later. The record would last for 25 years.

It was an extraordinary moment in time. Philly Johnson faded from the track scene once we came home from the Olympics that year but he now stands as the last piece of that classic sprint squad. Philly and I reminisced a bit on Thursday and his reflection was bittersweet.

"Yes, I recall that meet in Mexico and I remember the race very well. We were so far in front in that race and we could have set a new Bahamian record for sure. But, it didn't happen. BJ is now gone and it's only me," he said.

Yes indeed.

Gerry Wisdom (deceased), who competed also in the long jump, was a sprint alternate along with Philly. On the track



team, as well, were: Les Miller (400 meters), Timmy Barrett (triple jump), and the late Anthony Balfour (high jump).

Tommy and BJ were the elder statesmen of the group.

For BJ, being at the Olympics was much more than about giving his best efforts for the country. I recall his interest in the organization of the games, all of the factors, the accommodations, the cafeteria, and the way the athletes were accommodated. Little did I know that he was preparing for another significant sports role.

When he became president of the then Bahamas Amateur Athletic Association (now Bahamas Association of Athletic Associations), immediately he added a sophisticated dimension to sports administration, never seen before in The Bahamas.

BJ was integral to the emergence of The Bahamas as a CARIFTA Games power. It was he who ushered in the winning tradition for The Bahamas at the CARIFTA Games. Later on, he was a landmark sports administrator in the region. He was well on his way, to much

Champion" for his work in the new Ministry of Consumer Affairs.

He subsequently served in the Bahamian Cabinet as Minister of Education and Minister of National Security. However, as the Consumer czar, he had a magical touch and was getting very popular with the public at large, in the entire country. Without a doubt, BJ was highly successful at every turn he made in life.

In recent times, those who knew him as close-up as he would allow, realized he was challenged health wise. But, he continued on, and the debonair look remained consistent. From time to time, I have thought of the contrasting personas BJ represented in his lifetime.

He could be so soothing, articulate and persuasive. If he had to, BJ could cause the devil to change his mind. He was different as a competitor. There was absolutely no compromise in him. BJ was a bruising, power runner who left it all out on the track every time he ran. He had no time for looking sharp in his competition outfits. His priority was to compete. He was not stylish as a track star and it didn't bother him. BJ just

## Sports Scope

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greater accomplishments as a track and field administrator. I felt he would go all the way to being an executive member of the International Association of Athletic Federations (IAAF) and possibly the president one day.

He had that kind of an effective presence.

Then, politics claimed him. I have always felt that it was a terrible loss for sports, when he opted to heed the call of politics. In that field, also, though, he blazed new trails. It was at a time when I wrote the main editorials for the paper. I hailed him once as the "People's

wanted to get the job done and he did that often enough.

Both sides to the man were incredible.

Now, he's gone.

We have lost a giant of a man. May his soul forever rest in peace!

Condolences are extended to his wife Portia, the children, brothers Kendal and Philip, sister Sandra and the rest of his immediate family.

(To respond to this column, kindly contact Fred Sturup at [sturup1504@gmail.com](mailto:sturup1504@gmail.com)).