

PRIME MINISTER ROWLEY HOSTS THE 2016 TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO OLYMPICS TEAM

Thank you very much.

Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, M.P. Darryl Smith;

Chairman of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago;

Members of the Government in various capacities;

Our sponsors;

Co-host – my wife Sharon;

And most importantly, the persons for whom this evening's proceedings are meant for, our representatives, our athletes.

Welcome to the La Fantaisie grounds of the residence of the Prime Minister.

I am here this evening, particularly proud to be having this opportunity to host this reception to say, "Thank you for representing our country." Not just in Rio but wherever you do it and every day.

I am a citizen first before I am Prime Minister and I am particularly proud of our country's record in sport in general. As a very small country that we can hardly find on a world map we have a tremendous legacy of which we can all be proud. That legacy goes way back before Rodney Wilkes but of course if you are as young as I am you would remember the excitement.

You would remember the excitement of Mottley and Bernard and Skinner. Where, as a little country before cable television and before live television broadcast, we held a world record in the 4x4 and we had people who were world beaters.

I was just mentioning to somebody a little while ago that what you see Kim Collins is doing now – running into his old age - he’s trying to copy Edwin Roberts who is a Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Athlete who, coming out of the Olympics, ran for a decade after on the world stage.

We must be proud that there are people from our nation who took it upon themselves to express their talent – carrying our flag in today’s world where that means so much.

I am particularly pleased to have in this audience tonight Ato Boldon who represented the best from the very beginning at the Junior Champs, realising his potential on the world stage and is continuing to help us by identifying our talent and staying with them. That’s what we know, in Trinidad and Tobago, that’s what we want.

For those of you who went to the Rio Games, I know that some things have not gone well. I want to apologise for the comments, the untoward comments, made and directed towards you. Those comments that were hurtful are not really aimed at you. It was the environment of problems in the country before which people got involved in and when the team didn’t live up to their very high expectations, that we all have, then there was some out-letting which hurt all of us. We were not in the field with you but we felt that certain comments should not have been made.

The comments that have to be made is that you, with your talent, chose to make the sacrifices to get you on the world stage. And while we are now looking towards the next Olympics, I want to say to you that there are some things that have to be done at the level of sport administration in the country and that is planning for execution.

In the next few weeks somewhere along the way the minister will let you know, those of you who are in administration, that we’re going to sit down in a very dispassionate way, determine a proper structure for providing support for our athletes who are seeking to make it towards the world stage and of course towards the Olympics. And we want to differentiate between support and reward because the lines are beginning to be blurred.

And of course there are some comments being made on a regular basis that the Government is not sufficiently supporting the athletes. The taxpayers who fund the support programme can’t really say that because from where we sit, providing the

financial support, it is not to be sneezed at – especially in these times when money is hard to come by and priorities are health, education and so on and so on.

But we do have and must have monies to allocate towards our young people who are doing what you are doing. So there will be significant support for you but we are going to make sure that the support is directed and received in the way that it is given.

Finally, I want to say to the sponsors, the Government is going to put something in place – including tough love enforcement – that people who are accessing taxpayers' money have to account in a way that taxpayers will feel confident that the monies that they direct towards supporting the athletes are doing just that and nothing else.

So, therefore, all persons who are engaged in sporting organisations would have to comply with providing adequate and readable timely accounts for the resources that you have – if you want to access taxpayers' money that's a given. And once we begin to enforce that in a believable way, I have every confidence that our private sector would be generous in siding with the Government, backing you in very significant ways so that those of you whose talents emerge as worthy of support all the way to the highest level in the world, you will get the support that is required to get you there.

Separate and apart from that is the rewards programme. It mustn't be that every time the athletes go abroad and somebody gets a medal or somebody runs well there's a national debate as to what they're going to get, what the Government is going to give. That is too banal, it's too banana republic. We have to put in place a proper arrangement of reward and you work towards that reward. And if attainments are made, then we all know what the reward is. Those are the things that we want to fix in 2016 going towards 2017 and work against that programme.

There's something else too that we are going to put in place and this is where the Government is going to take the lead. We have fifteen (15) sub-divisions in this country and at the primary school level it is our intention to put proper coaching in there and proper initial competition and be a proper sound nursery which will take that competition into the secondary school programme and again the Government will be involved in providing the direction and the support.

And, through UTT, the whole question of a sport administration would become a more recognisable and accepted career so that we would be able to manage this asset. What happened in the days of Mottley and Skinner and others – sport was not a potential economic growth area, today it is. And we spend some significant sums of money on some pieces of infrastructure in this country and we are now being called upon to use them in a different way, in a better way – to make those investments worthwhile.

Those of you who are at the top of your career, we are hoping that some of you eventually will come back in to the administration of sport in this country and help us realise our fullest potential.

So, welcome to this evening. We are particularly pleased, those of you who are here from the Olympic team, that you are able to be here and hopefully you will enjoy the occasion and mix and mingle with our colleagues. Before you disappear we hope to have a gathering of you here just enjoying yourselves and have a group photo somewhere – they will organise that – and I'll be only too happy to be an athlete in that programme.

Because in case you don't know, I used to be an athlete too. And Mr. Keshorn, my best performance in school, in athletics, was the javelin. My wife doesn't believe me but she said she was a long jumper – I don't know little people jumping long – but I am a javelin fan. It was one of my best sports in school. So I was really really excited when we got that pleasant surprise last year and this year. So special welcome to Keshorn and all our Olympics people who went down there.

The one thing, the one thing we'll ask of you, is always do your best and as long as you do your best we're happy with that. To do your best you have to marry talent with attitude. Attitude without talent is just showing off. Talent without attitude – you're going to waste a lot of resources. But, when you marry a good attitude and talent the good things can happen.

We've got a tremendous foundation in Trinidad and Tobago. Everybody is saying, "Let's try and be like Jamaica." Yes, let's try and be like Jamaica – Jamaica is setting a tremendous example and one of these we are going to catch up with them (Any way we can

catch up to you) and when we catch up with you we will remind you about when we wanted to be like you.

So, welcome again, and thank you very much for being here.