THE BOLT SUPREMACY

INSIDE JAMAICA'S SPRINT FACTORY

RICHARD MOORE

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Beijing 2008, the 100 metres final: Usain Bolt slows down, beats his chest, metres clear of his nearest rival, his face filled with the euphoria of a young man utterly in thrall to his extraordinary physical talent. It is one of the greatest sporting moments. It is just the beginning.

Of the ten fastest 100-metres times in history, eight belong to Jamaicans. How is it that a small Caribbean island has come to almost totally dominate the men's and women's sprint events?

The Bolt Supremacy opens the doors to a community where sprinting permeates conversations and interactions; where the high school championships are watched by 35,000 screaming fans; where identity, success and status are forged on the track, and where making it is a pass to a world of adoration and lucrative contracts.

In such a society there can be the incentive for some to cheat. There are those who attribute Jamaican success to something beyond talent and hard work. Award-winning writer Richard Moore doesn't shy away from difficult questions as he travels the length of this beguiling country speaking to anti-doping agencies, scientists and sceptics as well as to coaches, gurus, superstar athletes and the young guns desperate to become the next big thing. Peeling back the layers, Moore finally reveals the secrets of Usain Bolt and the Jamaican sprint factory.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Moore is a freelance journalist and author. His first book, *In Search of Robert Millar*, won Best Biography at the 2008 British Sports Book Awards. He is the author of six books, three of which have been long-listed for the William Hill Sports Book of the Year. As a freelance journalist he has contributed to the *Guardian*, *Esquire*, the BBC and *The Scotsman*. He is also a former racing cyclist who represented Scotland at the 1998 Commonwealth Games.

Also by Richard Moore

In Search of Robert Millar
Heroes, Villains and Velodromes
Slaying the Badger
Sky's the Limit
The Dirtiest Race in History
Étape

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

19 Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce with her mother in front of her family home, 2008 (Getty Images)

20 UTech Classic, 2014 (Robin Moore)

21 Zharnel Hughes, 2014 (Robin Moore)

For Virginie

THE BOLT SUPREMACY

Inside Jamaica's Sprint Factory

RICHARD MOORE

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In Jamaica little is done without a touch of embellishment or some panache. Jamaicans walk with style, drive cars with style, and play with style. It is not so much scoring a goal or hitting a boundary that is important, but the way that it is done. People leaving church will admit openly that they did not understand what the preacher said, 'but he sound good'.

Mervyn C. Alleyne, *Roots of Jamaican Culture*

PROLOGUE

Even the simplest assessment of the circumstances surrounding the explosive success of Jamaican sprinting sets off alarms … What are the odds that a tiny island country suddenly dominates global competition … just because?
Dan Bernstein, CBS Chicago

London, 5 August 2012, 9.45 p.m.
The eight men are called to the blocks. Each goes down slowly and methodically. They dig their feet in and delicately place their hands in the corners of the lane. A plastic bottle lands behind them, thrown by a man in the crowd, but it goes unheard. They wait and 80,000 people in London's Olympic stadium hush. An echoey, tense kind of silence.

They are called to 'set'. They hold this position for two seconds. The gun goes and an electric charge runs through the crowd.

I am sitting thirty rows from the front, level with the finish line, experiencing the paradox of the 100 metres: simultaneously the quickest and the longest nine-point-something seconds. Trying not to blink, aware that it will all be over quickly, but concentrating so hard that the seconds seem to stretch. The dots gradually enlarge and emerge as a line of sprinters, one of them, when he is unfurled, a full head taller than the others: Usain Bolt.

Justin Gatlin is quickest out of the blocks, Yohan Blake, Bolt's clubmate and the world champion, a fraction slower, then Tyson Gay in the next lane along. Asafa Powell, the third Jamaican, reacts almost as quickly as Gatlin, and Ryan Bailey is also up. Bolt is sixth, though he is 'still with

the crowd', as he puts it later; still in contact with the five in front.

They are approaching now, growing larger. Bolt draws level with Gatlin at fifty metres. Gay is still marginally ahead; Powell is fading, so is Bailey. Now Bolt and Blake lead, but it's still close. They reach seventy metres, and Bolt surges, as though engaging a new gear. It is an extraordinary spectacle, Bolt in full flight, and it makes the outcome inevitable. Blake dips for second, Gatlin takes bronze.

It is different to Beijing, four years earlier, when the twenty-one-year-old Bolt produced a performance seared into the imagination, one that left an imprint like only a few other moments in sport, when incredible talent combined with soaring ambition and absolute fearlessness. How many compare? Having galloped into an outrageous lead against the fastest men in the world, Bolt was able to look left, look right, thump his chest, spread his arms, then visibly relax and spend the final ten metres coasting and celebrating. It was as decisive and seemingly effortless as Diego Maradona's mazy run against England in 1986, Mike Tyson's ninety-second demolition of Michael Spinks in 1988, or, in the same year, Ben Johnson's 9.79-second destruction of Carl Lewis in the Olympic 100 metres final.

In an event measured by fractions of fractions of seconds, Bolt did something in Beijing that should not have been possible. It looked like he was playing a different game, or that he belonged to a different species. And it was all so graceful. 'He's beautiful to watch,' said Renaldo Nehemiah, the former 110 metres hurdles world record holder. 'His stride, I mean, it's poetry in motion. He's not like a beast running. He's like a gazelle.'

In London four years later there is no showboating, apart from a small gesture by Bolt's standards: a finger to his lips, 'Sssshhhh.' 'I almost did what I did in Beijing, I almost did it,' he chuckles later. 'But I thought, Nah, I'll just run

through the finish.’ He wins in 9.63 seconds, a new Olympic record.

In a low-ceilinged, brightly lit room deep in the bowels of London’s Olympic stadium, somewhere below the main stand, Usain Bolt shuffles into the press conference, this one after the 200 metres, which he has also won. First he requests a drum roll. ‘I’m now a legend,’ he says. ‘I am the greatest athlete to live. To all the people who doubted me, who thought I would lose here, you can stop talking now. I am a living legend.’ Then he explodes with laughter.

Who, now, does he regard as his peers in the sporting world: Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, Pele? Beyond sport, has he superseded Bob Marley as the greatest Jamaican in history?

‘Ali was the greatest in his sport, Jordan the greatest in his, and I am the greatest in mine, so I guess I am at that level,’ Bolt replies. ‘I am in the same category as Michael Johnson too. Bob Marley? I’m just carrying on his duty. We have the same goal, to make Jamaica a country that is loved around the world.’

Twenty minutes later, about to leave, he asks once again for the reporters’ attention. There is a glint in his eye and a smile on his face. ‘I have one more thing to say. I am now a living legend. Bask in my glory. If I don’t see that in the paper and on TV in all your countries I will never give an interview again. Tell everyone to follow me on Twitter.’

It wasn’t just Bolt. It was Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Yohan Blake, Warren Weir. It was Asafa Powell, Veronica Campbell-Brown, Nesta Carter, Sherone Simpson. Seven gold medals from the eight sprint events in London: Jamaica, a tiny island, had come close to complete domination for a second Olympic Games in succession. Twenty of the fastest twenty-five men’s 100 metres in history had now been run by Jamaicans. It was, depending

on where you stood, incredibly impressive, or deeply suspicious.

Like many – such as Carl Lewis, the nine-time Olympic gold medallist, or Dan Bernstein, the CBS columnist, who wrote 'Anyone wasting words extolling the greatness of Usain Bolt should know better' – I was, if not suspicious, then certainly sceptical. Bernstein was right: if we didn't know better than to assume that the Olympic 100 metres champion was clean, then we hadn't learned anything from Ben Johnson, Marion Jones, Justin Gatlin and countless others, nor from the asterisks, denoting drugs cheats, that rain down like confetti on the all-time fastest list.

I had another reason for being preoccupied by this question during the London Games. I had gone there straight from the Tour de France – there were only four days in between. A toxic atmosphere engulfed the Tour. It had been noxious for years as the full extent of institutional doping became apparent, but in 2012 it was especially bad. Bradley Wiggins led for most of the race and was asked daily whether he was cheating. The questions were fuelled by justified, historical suspicion (not necessarily of Wiggins, but of the event) and sustained by the simmering rage of social media. One day Wiggins exploded when asked about his cyber critics: 'I say they're just fucking wankers, I cannot be doing with people like that. It's easy for them to sit under a pseudonym on Twitter and write that sort of shit, rather than get off their arses in their own lives and apply themselves and work hard at something and achieve something.'

The questions were legitimate, but they led us all – journalists, fans, athletes – into an endless downward spiral. This was not journalism: it was journalists responding to and genuflecting before the echo chamber of social media. It made no distinction between facts and conjecture, opinion and evidence.

Going from the Tour de France to the London Olympic Games was like stepping from a sewer into a golden meadow. The sun shone, a sweet scent filled the air, and the tweets emanated from birds rather than trolls. London itself was transformed. People smiled. Conversations were started on the Tube. Policemen posed for pictures mimicking Bolt's victory pose, which some call 'the Lightning Bolt' but Bolt himself calls 'To Di World', inspired by a Jamaican dancehall move.

There was no cynicism, no angst, no hand-wringing. Only innocence and joy. In Bolt's press conference, he was not asked if he was a cheat. He was asked: 'Are you a legend now, Usain?'

It was intoxicating, almost impossible not to be swept along on this tide of goodwill. It was also unsettling: superficial and fake. I loved it, and hated it. Which is also how I feel about the doping question. Conflicted. Because for all that the atmosphere at the Tour was poisonous and corrosive, the question itself fascinates me. It encompasses lying, cheating, subterfuge, deceit, mystery – all the things that make crime fiction so compelling. It goes to the very heart of elite sport: to what lengths will people go? It also goes to the heart of the experience of watching and enjoying sport: should we – can we – believe what we are seeing?

It is *the* question. Yet at the Tour I became weary of it, partly because journalism should be about trying to find things out, not asking the same thing every day; but also because I believed Bradley Wiggins was clean. I had followed him closely for over a decade. I knew the people around him. I was convinced he was no Lance Armstrong, against whom there had been strong evidence from the start, whereas really the only 'evidence' against Wiggins was the fact that he was winning an event with a dubious history.

When I heard the cynical view that Olympic gold medals and Tour de France victories were impossible without drugs, I passionately disagreed. As an objective journalist I shouldn't have cared, but as a human being I felt the treatment of Wiggins – the things asserted by people who I knew had no idea – was unfair. Yet I didn't know, and my only 'evidence' was anecdotal. I couldn't know unless I lived with him. I couldn't know unless I *was* him. And this was what was so unsettling.

With Bolt, I knew less. But because I knew less, I seemed more inclined to agree with the Lewises and the Bernsteins and assume the worst. Ironically, the greater the distance, the easier it seems to be to form a strong opinion. The closer you get, the more aware you become of contradiction and nuance; the more your certainty begins to crumble while ambiguity flourishes. Which seems a good reason not to remain at a distance, with your hazy view and lazy opinions, but to at least try and get up close to find out what you can.

That is what I resolved to do in the days after the London Games. The broader question that inspired this book was not: is Bolt clean? That is too loaded. Rather, I wanted to find out why he is so good. The two questions might be related. But equally, they might not be. In a way, my question was: how can we be certain of our heroes? Can we dare to hope?

In trying to find out, I found myself drawn more to the culture that produced Bolt than to Bolt himself. Because he is not a one-off; far from it.

1

A FORCE FIVE HURRICANE

I ain't doing no interviews.
Glen Mills

Moscow, August 2013

It's the eve of the world athletics championships in Moscow, and the Jamaican team is holding an open training session. They are gathered in clumps on a warm-up track that is semi-hidden amid trees and statues in the grounds of the Luzhniki Stadium, a grey, hulking Communist-era structure about to stage its final international event before it is rebuilt for the 2018 football World Cup – only the outer walls and the Lenin statue will remain.

No doubt this feels a very long way from home for the Jamaicans warming up in front of us, working in little groups, practising starts, stretching in the warm Moscow sunshine or having their muscles kneaded on massage tables.

The post-Olympic year can feel low-key: a bit after-the-Lord-Mayor's-Show. Few athletes are at their best. When he appeared at the Golden Gala in Rome in June – and suffered a rare defeat to Justin Gatlin – Usain Bolt admitted that it is a struggle for the mind and also the body, 'because Olympic year is when most athletes push themselves to the limit'.

But the difficulties faced by the Jamaican athletes in 2013 have gone well beyond the usual post-Games hangover. It's an Olympic hangover all right – a hangover of Olympic

proportions. It began days after the Golden Gala with the news that Veronica Campbell-Brown, the three-times Olympic gold medallist, had tested positive for a diuretic. A month later, the news was even more shocking: five failed drugs tests at the Jamaican national championships, including two more of the country's biggest stars, Asafa Powell and Sherone Simpson.

It appeared to be nothing less than a cull. And confirmation of the doubts that had swirled around the Jamaicans. In response, some prominent Jamaican athletes seemed to adopt a siege mentality. In Monaco, before the Diamond League meeting in late July, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, the double Olympic 100 metres champion, took part in a bizarre press conference.

Fraser-Pryce had travelled there straight from Lignano, the northern Italian town where she had been training with Powell and Simpson, both clubmates. Their hotel had been raided by Italian police and products seized from Powell and Simpson's rooms. It wasn't clear yet whether they contained any banned substances – nor, indeed, whether Powell and Simpson were guilty of a doping offence. But as she sat down beside Carmelita Jeter, the American who had finished second to her at the London Olympics, the usually exuberant Fraser-Pryce displayed the body language of a crime suspect.

'No questions will be answered on the doping cases,' said the translator, opening the conference. 'This was a remark they asked us. Questions only on the competition tomorrow and the world championships.'

The second question came from Simon Hart of the *Telegraph*. 'If we're not allowed to ask about doping, can I ask Shelly-Ann what the atmosphere is like among the athletes at Lignano who haven't tested positive?'

'There will be no answers on that,' the translator cut in. 'They don't want to answer on that. Not today. Sorry.'

‘Why?’ chorused the journalists. Jeter picked up the microphone, said, ‘Thank you,’ and walked out. Fraser-Pryce looked unsure what to do, then followed. The press conference had lasted two minutes thirty-one seconds.

Even stranger was an incident I witnessed weeks later at the Diamond League meeting in Brussels, after Fraser-Pryce won the 100 metres. ‘Shelly-Ann, have you been drug-tested in Brussels?’ asked John Leicester of the Associated Press.

‘No, I haven’t been drug-tested here in Belgium,’ Fraser-Pryce said testily. ‘Do you want to drug-test me?’

‘No, I don’t want to drug-test you,’ said Leicester, ‘that’s not my job. How many times have you been drug-tested this year, do you know?’

‘Well, I’ll count all those pink papers that I have, and I’ll definitely try and send them to you, but many times, more than eighteen times for the year.’

‘More than eighteen, or eight?’ Leicester persisted.

‘More than eighteen, OK?’

‘Well I’ll take you up on your offer,’ said Leicester.

‘Certainly, you can leave your email address and fax number with my manager at the back.’

Afterwards, in the corridor outside the room, Leicester spoke to Fraser-Pryce’s manager, Adrian Laidlaw. ‘The good thing about this conversation is I’ll now make sure that she never makes a statement like that again,’ he told Leicester.

In Moscow three weeks later, I am watching Fraser-Pryce, the five-foot-zero ‘Pocket Rocket’, practise her starts, exploding out of the blocks, sprinting thirty metres, then slowing and walking languidly back to the start, hands on hips, the sun reflecting off the pink streaks in her hair.

Bolt is here too. With his workout finished, his sluggish movement suits the muggy, oppressive heat of Moscow in August. He heads to the massage table, set up between the

track and the small rickety stand, and lies down, propping himself up on his elbows so he can talk (which makes him unusual: most athletes don headphones the second they stop training). Bolt's masseur, serious and stern-faced, tackles his legs with vigour: first calves, then hamstrings, stopping regularly to apply more baby oil to his hands. He rolls up Bolt's knee-length shorts until he is kneading his buttocks. Gradually Bolt surrenders to it, resting his head on the table while the masseur goes on kneading, thumbs probing.

Nearby is Bolt's walrus-like coach, Glen Mills, who achieves the near impossible by showing even less urgency than Bolt. He plays a game with the dozen or so journalists clustered at the front of the small stand, sitting close enough to be able to hear them calling his name, far enough away that he can pretend he doesn't. The Jamaican assistant team manager, Dave Myrie, is dispatched to ask Mills for an interview. He wanders towards him, then returns shaking his head. 'You know Glen by now.'

Muzak wafts across the track from tinny speakers on top of the single-storey pavilion on the back straight: 'She Loves You' and 'My Way' are staples. Now, over the strains of Queen's 'I Want to Break Free', the seated Mills half turns, and says, 'I ain't doing no interviews.'

Bolt eases himself off the massage table and puts on his oversized headphones, then his rucksack, which hangs low and loose on his back. He ambles towards the track centre, stumbling theatrically over a parking cone on the way. Mills, sitting nearby, doesn't flinch. He doesn't seem to notice.

Only when Bolt is gone do you begin to take in the other Jamaican athletes going through their warm-up drills. 'No talent, all guts' reads the slogan on one T-shirt, but the talent here would grace any national team. Yet it is deprived of three of its biggest stars: Powell, Campbell-Brown and Simpson (a fourth, Yohan Blake, is missing

through injury). ‘They will be well missed,’ lamented the veteran coach, Fitz Coleman, when the team gathered in Kingston before flying to Moscow. ‘As far I’m concerned, they are still a part of our team.’

In light of Mills’s reticence, Michael Clarke, the head coach in Moscow, steps forward. Clarke wears a black Puma cap, dark Ray-Bans, a yellow Puma T-shirt, and a thick gold chain around his neck. The interview gets off to an awkward start when a Russian reporter, clutching black-and-white photocopied pictures of Bolt and Fraser-Pryce (to help her identify the athletes, she explains), asks, ‘Who’s that man in blue?’ Clarke turns to look. ‘That’s Coach Mills.’

Clarke says that the team is aiming for more medals than the nine they won last time. ‘Any black horses?’ asks the same Russian reporter. Some of us stare in embarrassment at the ground, but Clarke is unruffled. ‘Well, I think this year’s going to be a change of the guard,’ he says. ‘We have a very young team; I think the average age is around twenty-one, twenty-two. And we should have some young persons vying for some medals. As for specifics, I can’t tell you right now who they are.’

‘Has morale been affected by the recent controversies?’ Clarke is asked.

‘From what I have seen thus far, coming from a cross section of athletes, there doesn’t seem to be any negative impact on the present situation as it concerns the drugs situation,’ says Clarke.

Has he spoken to the squad as a whole? ‘Not on that issue.’

What about the recent claims that the Jamaicans are years behind in drug-testing? ‘I don’t think we are behind. I think we are slowly keeping pace with what’s expected.’

As he’s speaking, Dennis Gordon, the team’s media liaison officer, appears at Clarke’s shoulder and leans in. ‘Answer no questions about doping,’ says Gordon.

‘What?’ says Clarke.

‘Answer no questions about doping.’

‘Ah,’ says Clarke, looking back up, ‘I’ve just been instructed by our media liaison person not to take any questions about doping.’

A change of tack. Bolt – how is he? ‘Usain is one of those unique individuals with a very capable personality – very affable, very genial, very funny. I think everyone gravitates towards his charisma. He’s fine.’

Back to the main point, in a roundabout way. Why are the Jamaicans so fast? Clarke gives it some thought. ‘In recent years, academic research has been done to explain somewhat, or to give some understanding as to why we are as good as we have been. I think part of it is genes and some have postulated about yam and some are saying it’s because of the system we have in place.

‘We have various competitions from the infant level to the primary school to the secondary school to the clubs, tertiary, even community track and field. And most organisations have what you call sports day and primarily the sports day consists of running events – or egg-and-spoon races. That basically comes from our English background. It’s the system that’s in place and it’s highly competitive. The athletes at the 1948 and 1952 Olympics have given us a platform to build on.’

It is Clarke’s first time as head coach to the senior national team, but he feels no pressure. ‘Expectations, yes, but there is no pressure.’ The spirit in the squad, he adds, is ‘very high, very good. And calm. It’s like a volcano waiting to erupt.’

Warren Weir saunters over to speak to some journalists. The baby-faced Olympic bronze medallist, a clubmate of Bolt, says he wants to put a smile back on people’s faces. ‘Yeah, it’s always good to give people good news after the bashing our sport has gotten. People want to see people

running clean, people running fast and clean, and it's always good to let them know there are clean ones out there.'

So when we see so many Jamaicans run so fast, we can believe in them? 'Yes!' Weir splutters. 'Yes, you can still believe that there are good athletes out there: I myself can testify to that. I'm one of the clean ones. So there are actually good ones out there. We can't bash all for some.'

Team morale is unaffected, he says. 'It hasn't shifted us. We are rallying together; whether bad news or good news we always look on the positive side of life. We don't let the bad news hold us down or make us underperform.'

That much appears to be true. In Moscow, the Jamaicans simply pick up where they left off in London. On day two, Bolt reaches the 100 metres final along with three of his countrymen: Nesta Carter, Kemar Bailey-Cole and Nickel Ashmeade. It's a dark Moscow night and the rain is lashing down as the runners are introduced, Bolt with his hands on his hips, his head tilted back as though meditating. When the TV camera pans from Justin Gatlin to him, he begins an elaborate routine of pretending to open and put up an umbrella. The rain falls harder than ever and Bolt stands under his imaginary umbrella wearing a fake-bemused expression.

Gatlin gets away quickly, bull-like, head down, low. 'The rain made it slick under the fingers,' he says later, 'but I got out the blocks. Reacted well. Drove about forty-five metres, then felt Bolt next to me.' As he feels Bolt's presence, Gatlin makes the fatal mistake of reacting. 'You know, I gotta remember in my head that I'm not six-five. I'm only six-one. When you get someone who's six-five, you try to match the stride length; I shoulda just kept attacking the ground.'

Although Gatlin beat Bolt in Rome, the script at a major championship is by now familiar, and when Bolt draws level, there can be only one outcome. He pulls clear, wins in

9.77 seconds, while Gatlin hangs on, dipping too early (‘We call it the phantom finish line – you see the person in front of you dip and you dip as well’) for second. Carter wins what seems like a separate race for bronze. Lightning illuminates the sky as Bolt crosses the line, and Bob Marley’s ‘Three Little Birds’ fills the Moscow air:

Don’t worry ’bout a thing,
’Cause every little thing gonna be alright …

In the mixed zone, inside the stadium, where athletes are shepherded through pens and reporters hang over barriers catching their words on recorders, there is a stir when Bolt finally appears after his lap of honour. There is always a stir when Bolt appears. He shuffles through the pen in his socks, while Ricky Simms, the Irishman who is his agent, follows holding his Puma spikes in one hand.

Bolt starts to speak in his deep baritone. He explains that he would have liked to go faster, closer to his world record of 9.58, but a niggle after the semi-final put paid to that. Still, it looked quite easy. ‘I never look at it as easy,’ he says. ‘I work hard. I push myself through a lot of pain.’

According to some, Bolt came to Moscow to ‘save’ the sport after a year of terrible headlines, most of them about athletes from his country. His face crumples into a smile, and he giggles, as though the question is ridiculous: he is only one man. ‘For me, I think I go out there … I’m just doing my part by running fast, letting the world know you can do it clean.’

Twenty-four hours after the men’s 100 metres, Fraser-Pryce, despite ‘pain in my left butt-cheek’, appears for the women’s final. Apart from the pink ponytail (‘Fuchsia,’ she clarifies later. ‘It makes me pretty … prettier’), she doesn’t go out of her way to attract attention, not like Bolt. She quietly and intensely focuses on what she has to do, oblivious to the crowd and the other runners, narrowing her eyes, squinting down the track.

Her start is explosive – much better than it was in London twelve months earlier – and she surges in the second 50 metres for a convincing win, over two-tenths of a second clear of Murielle Ahouré of the Ivory Coast, with Jeter third. Her time, 10.71 seconds, is just one-hundredth outside the championship record. Afterwards, Fraser-Pryce says that she’ll celebrate ‘with some ice on my gluteus maximus’. She has been working hard all year on her 200 metres, and has her eyes on a first sprint double in a major championship.

She reaches the final of the longer event and starts in lane four, with Allyson Felix of the US, the reigning world and Olympic 200 metres champion, in lane three. There’s the explosive start again, and Felix is straining to stay in contact on the bend – straining too hard – when she pulls

up and collapses to the track clutching her hamstring. It's a second gold for Fraser-Pryce. Twenty-four hours later, Bolt does the same, winning ahead of Weir.

The Jamaican men and women win the 4x100 metres too. And after the men's relay there's an exchange with Bolt inside the stadium that reveals another side of his personality. As he waited for the baton, with Gatlin in the lane inside but moving to the outside of his lane, the two almost collided. In the confusion, the US, slightly ahead on the final bend, messed up the transition. They handed the advantage to Jamaica – to Bolt – for the final leg. Gatlin was furious, claiming afterwards that without the mistake, the US would have won.

'They couldn't have said that,' says Bolt when told what Gatlin said. Shaking his head, affecting a casual pose as he leans against the fence in the mixed zone, he continues: 'They couldn't have said that, they couldn't have said that.' He tries to make a joke of it, but the sparkle is missing from his eyes, which have turned dark. He is angry – affronted. 'They were like two metres in front of me. I've been in a worse position running from my blocks and won. I wasn't worried at all about the US beating us. We had a great team.'

If not two metres, then how much would the Americans have needed to beat the Jamaicans? 'Probably they would have had to have ten metres to win that race,' says Bolt. We laugh. He isn't smiling.

Beijing, Berlin, Daegu, London and Moscow merely continue Jamaica's extraordinary domination of the sprint events at the major championships. Yet the mood in Moscow is very different to London. I can feel it, it's in the air. There's the scepticism of the outside world, the defensiveness of the Jamaicans. It's all very reminiscent of the Tour de France. The Olympics feel a long time ago.

On the day after the world championships comes another bombshell. ‘An inside look at Jamaican track’s drug-testing woes’ reads the headline in *Sports Illustrated*. The article is by Renée Anne Shirley, the former executive director of the Jamaica Anti-Doping Commission (JADCO), and in it she describes the positive tests for Powell, Simpson and Campbell-Brown as equivalent to ‘a force five hurricane crossing directly over the island’. A table accompanying the article shows how little drug-testing JADCO did in the six months before the London Games.

On the eve of my first visit to Jamaica, I met Shirley at an anti-doping conference in London, where she was speaking. Her participation in the conference had been in doubt – she had problems getting a visa, which she believed was connected to her article. She explained that if the positive tests unleashed a ‘force five hurricane’, her revelations unleashed another one. ‘I’ve been called a Judas, a traitor, that I’ve committed treason, that my passport should be taken away,’ she said. Then she described ‘the lonely road of the whistleblower’: ‘I expected a lot of it, I have weathered a lot of it, but it amazes me the things said about me … pressure has been put on my family. I have been blacklisted. I don’t get invitations to anything, I don’t get Christmas cards. The other issue is personal safety. I’ve relocated, I’ve taken precautions. I have to be careful.’

This all sounded ominous. Then Shirley, who lasted eight months at JADCO before leaving, said something else that interested me. ‘As a proud Jamaican, all I wanted to do was be able to defend the Jamaicans as best I could.’ Instead, when people like Carl Lewis asked questions, or when Shirley herself raised her concerns about the effectiveness of anti-doping, they were attacked.

‘Every time something comes up, it’s “This person is against Jamaica,” ’ said Shirley. ‘But to come out and say, “The rest of the world is against us,” it does not answer the question.’

There were lots of questions. And only really one place to try and find the answers.

2

THE WELLSPRING

Jamaican youth continue to excel in track and field because the poorest child from the deepest rural hinterland of Jamaica and the most depressed urban ghetto can get a chance to compete.
Betty Ann Blaine, *Jamaica Observer*

Kingston, March 2014
Outside the stadium it is like a large music festival or major sports event. Stalls and street vendors line Arthur Wint Drive, selling food and drink, flags and memorabilia in team colours.

In the stifling heat, women sit beneath umbrellas and beside large coolboxes filled with drinks, and men materialise alongside me as I walk from the car park to the arena, hustling and hassling – 'higgling', they call it. 'Cold drink, man?' 'Mi have ticket – you want ticket?'

It's Tuesday, day one of Champs, Jamaica's boys' and girls' inter-schools championships. A schools athletics meeting like no other. Security is tight. At the gate, there's a long queue, at the end of which uniformed men and women check tickets and bags and even peel labels off non-sanctioned soft drinks. My bottle of Pepsi is confiscated while a guard pulls at the sticker. 'Why are you doing that?' I ask.

'Advertising,' he says.

'But Pepsi is one of the sponsors.'

'Oh …' His colleague nods confirmation. He hands the bottle back.

Inside the grounds of the National Stadium, more security guards carry walkie-talkies or wear earpieces. The stadium, opened in 1962, the year that Jamaica gained its independence, is a low-slung sand-coloured bowl that sits in a relatively affluent New Kingston neighbourhood. The Blue Mountains are on one side, the rump of the city – the ghettos and slums and garrisons – sprawling and shimmering all the way down to the sea on the other.

It's hard to believe, as I negotiate the throngs of people, and listen to the thrum of anticipation, that this is a schools championship. But Champs is the only show in town. The newspapers are full of it: front, back and letters pages. The radio stations are dominated by discussion of the young athletes – some of them already household names – who will star over the five days. There are public service announcements advising spectators to lock up and register their guns with the police. There is live TV coverage.

The man in charge of it all, the meet director, is none other than Usain Bolt's coach, Glen Mills. He is also one of the first people I spot when I enter the main stand and sit on the bench seat. He wears a pale blue T-shirt, loose-fitting jeans and trainers, and greets people with a shy, toothless smile (he is missing his front two upper teeth), but generally doesn't stop to talk, moving slowly up the stand. Mills doesn't look relaxed, he looks catatonic. Finally he reaches the top of the steps and the last row of seats and sits down heavily. I have been told that he will not be speaking to journalists during Champs (or at any other time).

Picking up a programme, I read the mind-blowing statistic that at the current time, every global male 100 metres champion, in every age group, is Jamaican: Olympic, world, Commonwealth, Youth Olympic, world junior and world youth. But on the very next page is something that jars with the celebratory, self-congratulatory tone. It says that from 2015 it has been