

SPORTS



<http://freeport.nassauguardian.net>

High schools' athletes set the stage for senior action at World Relays weekend

SHAYNE STUBBS
FN Sports Reporter
 shayne@nasguard.com

While everyone awaited the start of the International Association of Athletic Federations (IAAF)/BTC World Relays to begin this past Saturday (April 22) and Sunday (April 23), the World Relays Junior Program got early attendees at the Thomas A. Robinson Stadium primed for what was to come.

On Saturday All-Star Teams were formed as junior athletes competed in the One Island/One Lane Relays, which featured teams Grand Bahama, New Providence, Abaco, Exuma, Eleuthera, North Andros and MICAL – a combination of athletes from Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island Acklins, and Long Cay.

This past Sunday, high schools from across the country were featured and a number of Grand Bahama's teams walked away with top place finishes.

The Bishop Michael Eldon Warriors were heavy favorites headed into Women's 4x400 meters. The ladies lived up to the hype and cruised to a gold medal win in the time of 3:57.51. Queen's College strolled across the finish line to win the silver in 4:04.17 and C. V. Bethel won the bronze with a time of 4:18.81.

Also in that race out of Grand Bahama were the Sister Mary Patricia Russell Panthers. They placed fifth in the time of 4:33.17.

CARIFTA Silver medalist Quanita Marshall led the team off on the first leg and the first exchange went to Latavia Adderley. Destiny Huyler received the second exchange before she passed the baton off to anchor leg and CARIFTA silver medalist D'Ajonae Jayawardana.

Marshall voiced that she went into the race "hungry" and felt the team showed the same attitude toward the race.

"It was a good race. I'm glad my teammates came out there and did what they could do and they did their best as I could see.



SILVER MEDAL – The 4x100m squad of Shaquille Higgs, Holland Martin, Johnathan Smith and Javan Martin secured the silver for the Falcons, with a time of 41.78 seconds. (PHOTO: JENNEVA RUSSELL)

I just want to congratulate them. They're all the best."

Despite some "adversities" according to Adderley, she was excited that the team pulled through.

"We'd just like to thank God for giving us the strength to come out on top and we appreciate (winning) another gold medal."

Huyler, who had previously run in the women's 4x100m aired that she was just grateful that she made it through the race healthy.

"I feel good. I thank God for allowing us to win and especially to come from the 4x100m to come run again, I'd like to thank Him that I'm still here and not injured."

Jayawardana said, this was something the team was working toward for a few years.

She added that going up against

the talent that Nassau presents is always a challenge, which is why she was gratified that the team came out on top.

"Always having to go up against the 'big dogs' when we come to Nassau but I had a lot of confidence in my team. I never put doubt on the ability of the other team but when Destiny brought it (baton) to me I felt comfortable and just wanted to bring it home strong."

Grand Bahama also picked up two silvers and a bronze on the afternoon – all won by the Tabernacle Falcons. The first silver won in the women's 4x100m. The team of Genique Bassett, Kaylin Hewitt, Damasvia Dames and Daneisha Curry clocked a time of 48.71 seconds, behind gold medalists – St. Augustine's College (SAC).

Bassett voiced that she felt the

team got off to a solid start on her way to hand off to Hewitt, after which she commended Hewitt on her performance.

"I popped off good. We have the first exchange when I came out. And Kaylin got out very nice and she got the baton she just carried it off to Damasvia."

Hewitt added, "As I carried the baton to Damasvia, I just cheered her on and told her to go on so the race wouldn't be as close. She got it off to Daniesha, they had an awkward exchange but she got it and carried it home in second place."

The 4x100m squad of Shaquille Higgs, Holland Martin, Johnathan Smith and Javan Martin secured the silver for the Falcons, with a time of 41.78 seconds. The team finished closely behind SAC, who clocked 41.40 seconds to secure

the gold.

Higgs expressed it was another solid run with his teammates. The Penn Relays are set to begin this Thursday and the Falcons are expected to be present once again.

Martin said, this performance was a good way to get them ready for what is ahead.

"The experience is great. Our team wasn't fully ready this year – a lot of injuries to some of our athletes. This was one of the times we had a full team but we still have a few guys injured. But we're still training, still working hard. We haven't had much practices together but we're still getting the baton around."

BMES were also participants in that race, they finished seventh with a time of 45.56 seconds.

After the St. Georges' Jaguars, who finished second and were

later disqualified, the Falcons picked up the bronze medal. The team of Corey Sherrod, Devonte Smith, Tyler Leary and Karon Bain, originally, finished fourth and clocked a time of 3:22.04.

North Andros High won the gold in 3:21.61.

Moore's Island, who originally finished third, moved up to be named the silver medal winners.

BMES also competed in that race but finished seventh in the time of 3:30.57.

BMES and Sunland Baptist Academy also competed in the men's sprint medley. The Stingers finished fourth in the time of 3:39.78, while the Warriors finished fifth in the time of 3:42.99.

The teams that participated were selected from the Bahamas' High School Relays test event back in March.

Michael Mathieu better suited to lead men's 400 meters corps

Suddenly, in historical fashion, Grand Bahama's Michael Mathieu has emerged as the appropriate leadership model for the nation's men quarter milers.

Although, I know of no official statement by Chris Brown that he is retired or retiring soon, there is a general understanding that the end is near for the greatest 400 meters sprinter (longevity-wise) in world history.

It makes sense for a new leader of the country's male one-lap specialists to surface. By his commanding anchor leg and the poise demonstrated on the night of history for The Bahamas, Sunday, in the final event of the 2017 International Association of Athletic Federations (IAAF) Third World Relays at the Thomas A. Robinson National Stadium, Mathieu is the clear choice.

Mathieu, while owning the national mark for the 200 meters at 21.06, has never gone under 45 seconds for the longer sprint. His personal best is 45.06.

The young, sensational Steven Gardiner is the national record holder for the event at 44.26 and also the world's leader thus far this season; Brown, Latoy Williams, Ramon Miller and Demetrius Pinder have all gone under 45 seconds.

However, Williams, Miller and Pinder have had careers of highs and lows.

Mathieu, on the other hand, has been extraordinarily reliable, capable of producing a 44 seconds split as he did during The Bahamas' epic gold medal run in the 1600 meters relay at the London Olympics in 2012. Other than Brown, Mathieu has been the most consistent Bahamian 400 meters elite

since 2007.

That year, he was a part of the Bahamian IAAF World Championships 1600 meters relay silver medal team. The next year, Mathieu was a silver medalist at the Beijing Olympics and of course there was the ultimate performance in 2012, followed by a relay bronze medal effort last year at the Rio Olympics.

As an individual competitor, Mathieu was the 2011 Central American and Caribbean Games Championships 200 meters gold medalist. Unassumingly and very quietly, he sits presently as the finest 200 meters sprinter in Bahamian history. His ability over the half-lap sprint has gone virtually unnoticed, however.

In fact, much of what he has meant to the Bahamian track and field landscape has been upstaged.

Indeed, despite his brilliant résumé, on Sunday past, for the first time in seven years of valiant performances in national, regional and international events, Mathieu moved out of the shadows of Brown and the others who have showed flashes of brilliance over 400 meters.

He was modest, but profound in speaking of his incredible anchor run on Sunday.

"The goal was just for us to keep it close so that I could have a chance on the final leg," said Mathieu. That's the kind of workman-like attitude he has. He just did what he had to do to get the job done. This time, though the spotlight was the brightest it has ever been for him.

He was loose during the post-race press conference and even joked about going after the female runner for the United

States, Claudia Francis, and taking her down, because it was the task at hand.

The mixed relay is quite innovative and from the great reception it got on Sunday, could shape up as one of the popular events on the IAAF entire schedule. The event enabled The Bahamas to conclude the third edition of the World Relays on an extremely high note.

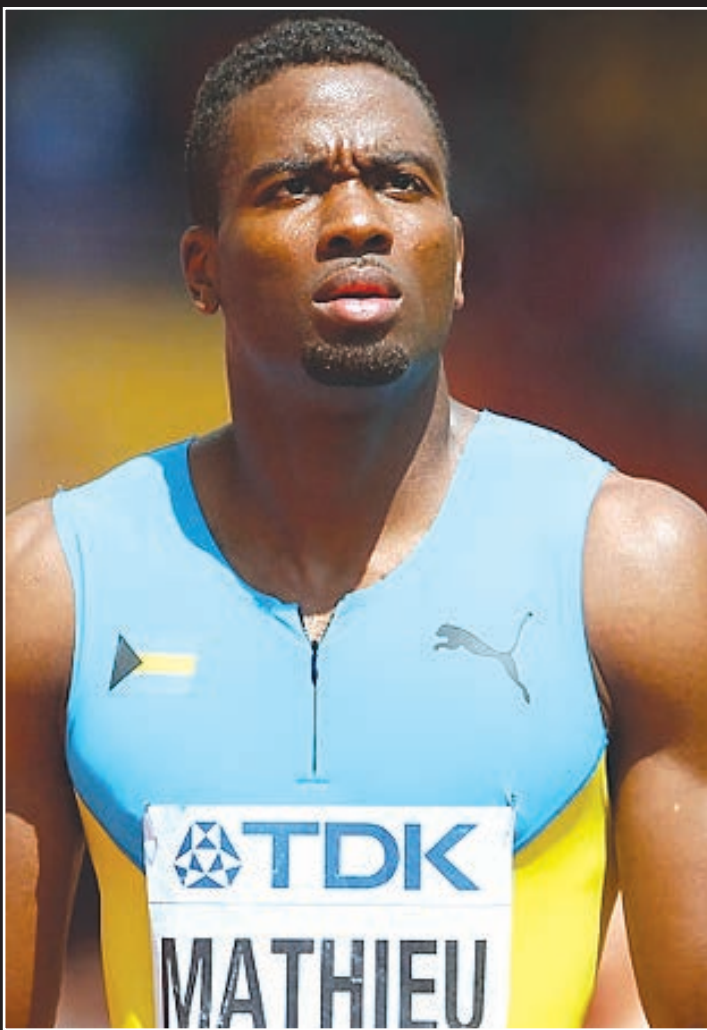
All of our mixed relay participants, Steven Gardiner, Shaunae Miller-Uibo, Anthonique Strachan and Mathieu were fantastic. Strachan was up against Philip Dedewo. The United States' lineup was structured in hopes that Dedewo would quickly overtake Strachan and then give Francis a lead that Mathieu could not overcome.

Strachan spoiled the party by holding off Dedewo longer than they expected and then after he passed her, she doggedly held on and got the baton to Mathieu easily in sufficient time for him to engage in a comfortable pace to catch, pass and emphatically close out the gold medal run for his country.

Gardiner was true to form on his opening leg and Miller-Uibo electrified the stadium as her strides simply ate up ground and left opponents in her wake. It was Mathieu though who punctuated the moment in time for the host nation.

He is no longer just another of the Bahamian men's 1600 meters runners. The world now knows him in a much more prominent way.

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



MICHAEL MATHIEU

Sports Scope



By Fred Sturup